Dear friends of peace,

At the beginning I would like to thank you very much for your invitation. Speaking to you on behalf of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) I am working now for more than 30 years as director of the Peace and Ecology Bureau of the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate in south-west Germany. As long as conscription was in force we supported conscientious objectors to military service. At present we accompany volunteers in social and ecological activities and we focus on peace education in school because it is particularly important that the next generation of citizens and politicians will be open-minded about non-violence and non-military resolution of conflicts. It is an honour for me to share with you my story which deals with the contradiction between the original peace orientation of the German constitution and its relativisation by the representatives of governmental politics. Bearing in mind that the peace responsibility of my country appears to be less developed than it should be I am full of respect for Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and I am convinced that its peace heritage is an indispensable orientation and inspiration for a humanity that is again and again tempted by violence and war.

My personal motivation to be committed in these questions relates to different contexts: As I am the son of a father who returned heavily disabled from World War II, the permanent experience of my childhood was that war destroys the life even of those who survive it. As a Christian I rely on the promise and obligation of a peaceable world that is in accordance with the will of God. As member of a religious community which is part of our civil society it seems obvious to me to take part in the life of society and to advocate for the religious as well as humanistic values of non-violence and international understanding.

Let me share with you some experiences from Germany and reflect on the development of a constitutional promotion of peace that has been weakened in the practice of politics. So mainly I shall refer to the German constitution and its evolution. Furthermore I shall mention the commitment of churches and draw some conclusions.

1. “Animated by the resolve to serve world peace” – so it is written in the preamble - the “Basic Law” for the Federal Republic of Germany was adopted in 1949. Article 1 underlines that peace is based on the respect of human rights. It reads: “Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority. The German people therefore acknowledge inviolable and inalienable human rights as the basis of every community, of peace and of justice in the world.” For the mothers and fathers of our Constitution the absolute obligation to respect human dignity was an essential conclusion to be drawn from German history after 1933.

Under the Nazi rule more than 30.000 death sentences had been pronounced against persons accused to undermine the military morale. This fact induced the
authors of the Basic Law to incorporate the right of conscientious objection into the German Constitution – at a time when neither rearmament nor conscription was in sight. Article 4 defines conscientious objection to military service as inherent to the freedom of faith and conscience. In its third paragraph it reads: “No person shall be compelled against his conscience to render military service involving the use of arms.” In the discussions of the first Parliamentary Assembly the hope was expressed that this paragraph would have a pedagogical effect for the future German democracy.

As to the task to promote peace Article 26 of the German Constitution says: “Acts tending to and undertaken with intent to disturb the peaceful relations between nations, especially to prepare for a war of aggression, shall be unconstitutional. They shall be made a criminal offence.” All these legal provisions seem to be clear without ambiguity.

After World War II the coalition of states who fought against Germany planned the demilitarization of Germany and most people in Germany shared the conviction “No more war! Never!” This specific situation had an important impact on the new constitution.

In the course of the Cold War, however, conservative governments in West Germany together with US military representatives worked towards the remilitarization of Germany. In 1955 the Federal Republic of Germany joined NATO and re-introduced armed forces. In 1956 the Basic Law was amended accordingly. The new Article 87a determined now: “The Federation shall establish Armed Forces for purposes of defence.” The same development was to be observed in East Germany with the support of the Soviet Union. Later on even nuclear weapons were installed in both German states. All these measures of remilitarization have encountered numerous, widely spread and enduring protests of the German peace movement.

In 1990 the end of the Cold War and the success of the Peaceful Revolution in East Germany enabled the reunification of Germany. In the same year the Treaty on the Establishment of German Unity was signed and confirmed by the consent of the victorious allies of World War II. Article 2 of the so called Two plus Four Treaty underlines: “The governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic reaffirm their declarations that only peace will emanate from German soil.”

Unfortunately the political commitment that only peace will emanate from German soil has never been consequently implemented – till today. At present about 3500 German soldiers take part in 14 out of area missions. US airbases in Germany support military interventions and drone missile strikes worldwide. Last but not least Germany is one of the world’s largest arms exporters. How was it possible to prepare the ground for this problematic situation?
In 1994 the German Constitutional Court dealt with Article 24 (2) of the 1949 Basic Law which reads: “With a view to maintaining peace, the Federation may enter into a system of mutual collective security; in doing so it shall consent to such limitations upon its sovereign powers as will bring about and secure a lasting peace in Europe and among the nations of the world.” Originally this regulation was not aimed at incorporating Germany into a military alliance, instead it tended to integrate Germany into a concept of collective security including also potential enemies in the framework of an international legal system. Today we would speak of cooperative, common or human security. Nevertheless the Constitutional Court decided that Article 24 covers also military actions of collective assistance within a military alliance – provided that a majority of the Parliament consents. This decision cleared the way for out of area missions of the German army in the following decades.

Till this day a majority of German people do not agree with the mentioned paradigm change. In order to improve the acceptance of military out of area missions euphemistic notions like “humanitarian intervention” have been propagated. Moreover the notion of military defence underwent an almost unlimited extension – from territorial defence over the defence of a military alliance all over the world to the point of defending political or economic national interests like the unhindered access to natural resources. Finally military defence is seen as prevention of unpredictable risks. This type of definition may be used as blank cheque for any type of military action. All these assertions can be found in different documents or statements of the German Ministry of Defence.

It seems important to me to observe closely this process of a stealthy militarization of politics and to raise awareness for the priority of nonviolent policy-making.

2. Let me shortly add some remarks on the role of the Evangelical Church in this development. After World War II the Evangelical Church of Germany agreed to the consensus of the first assembly of the World Council of Churches (1948): “War is contrary to the will of God.” Its representatives refused clearly the rearmament in West as well as in East Germany. And from the beginning they supported conscientious objectors and underlined the right of conscientious objection to military service as a fundamental human right that has priority over even democratically sanctioned military measures. During the Cold War the Evangelical Church always stressed the need of communication, of cooperation and reconciliation instead of suspiciousness and deterrence. Since 1997 an annual report on German arms trade is published by an ecumenical group of experts who make transparent facts that are regularly concealed or played down by the government. Though the attitude of their members towards the use of violence as last resort differs Churches stand for the preference of non-violent conflict resolution and for a peace education that immunizes against indifference and the reduction of politics to military measures.

Unlike some of their political representatives most Germans share the conviction that a culture of military reticency is an achievement and not a deficit.
Churches have contributed to this collective comprehension that slows down efforts of political militarization.

3. I am grateful that this conference widens the perspectives of promoting peace and putting a break on militarism. I am convinced that as inter-religious partners concerned about peace we can locally and globally raise the awareness of developments that put peace at risk, as these are e.g. heedless nationalism, the militarization of politics and societies, an arms trade based solely on profit regardless of its consequences. My hope is that our meeting may foster a network of information, of advocacy and political support in the problems we deal with.

May this conference strengthen us each other in our commitment for non-violence and peace.

Reverend Friedhelm Schneider