

An International Appeal to Ban the Use of Depleted Uranium Weapons

Drafted by Ramsey Clark

Depleted-uranium weapons are an unacceptable threat to life, a violation of international law and an assault on human dignity. To safeguard the future of humanity, we call for an unconditional international ban forbidding research, manufacture, testing, transportation, possession and use of DU for military purposes. In addition, we call for the immediate isolation and containment of all DU weapons and waste, the reclassification of DU as a radioactive and hazardous substance, the cleanup of existing DU-contaminated areas, comprehensive efforts to prevent human exposure and medical care for those who have been exposed.

During the Gulf War, munitions and armor made with depleted uranium were used for the first time in a military action. Iraq and northern Kuwait were a virtual testing range for depleted-uranium weapons. Over 940,000 30-millimeter uranium tipped bullets and "more than 14,000 large caliber DU rounds were consumed during Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield." (*U.S. Army Environmental Policy Institute*)

These weapons were used throughout Iraq with no concern for the health and environmental consequences of their use. Between 300 and 800 tons of DU particles and dust have been scattered over the ground and the water in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people, both civilians and soldiers, have suffered the effects of exposure to these radioactive weapons.

Of the 697,000 U.S. troops who served in the Gulf, over 90,000 have reported medical problems. Symptoms include respiratory, liver and kidney dysfunction, memory loss, headaches, fever, low blood pressure. There are birth defects among their newborn children. DU is a leading suspect for a portion of these ailments. The effects on the population living in Iraq are far greater. Under pressure, the Pentagon has been forced to acknowledge Gulf War Syndrome, but they are still stonewalling any connection to DU.

Communities near DU weapons plants, testing facilities, bases and arsenals have also been exposed to this radioactive material which has a half-life of 4.4 billion years. DU-weapons are deployed with U.S. troops in Bosnia. The spreading toxicity of depleted uranium threatens life everywhere.

DU weapons are not conventional weapons. They are highly toxic, radioactive weapons. All international law on warfare has attempted to limit violence to combatants and to prevent the use of cruel and unfocused weapons. International agreements and conventions have tried to protect civilians and non-combatants from the scourge of war and to outlaw the destruction of the environment and the food supply in order to safeguard life on earth.

Consequently, DU weapons violate international law because of their inherent cruelty and unconfined death-dealing effect. They threaten civilian populations now and for generations to come. These are precisely the weapons and uses prohibited by international law for more than a century including the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional of 1977.

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International Action Center

39 West 14th Street, Room 206

New York, NY 10011

email: <mailto:iacenter@action-mail.org>

En Espanol: iac-cai@action-mail.org

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