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JOHNSON CITY, TN: Depleted Uranium--the gift that keeps on giving

by Murray Lumley

"Congenital Deformities: the Gift That Keeps on Giving," is the title of a chapter in Dr. Mohammed Daud Miraki's book, Afghanistan: After Democracy, the Untold Story Through Photographic Images.

Dr. Miraki was one of the presenters at the "Stop-DU" conference, Saturday, 19 May 2007, attended by the Christian Peacemaker Team Depleted Uranium (DU) delegation at East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee. Dr. Miraki left Afghanistan with his family in 1982 during the Soviet occupation.

He gave a scathing condemnation of the U.S. bombing of innocent civilians in Afghanistan soon after the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. He told us that most Afghans live in abject poverty after experiencing nearly thirty years of war. "Afghan civilians are still dying from thousands of mines left by the Soviet army," he said. Dr. Miraki has revisited Afghanistan several times in a personal quest for the truth behind the U.S.'s stated goal of bringing democracy to Afghanistan.

Various reports indicate that some of the U.S. ordnance used in attempts to destroy the Taliban and Al Qaeda consisted of DU munitions. Tons of DU, from bunker buster bombs used on the caves in the eastern mountains and from rapid fire machine guns of A-10 Warthogs or Apache helicopters, have left the beautiful Afghan landscape littered with the graves of whole and extended families plus a radioactive nightmare for those left alive. The DU burns when fired from a weapon or exploded, leaving fine, radioactive waste everywhere the wind blows, and causing increased rates of cancers, childhood leukemia and other illnesses for the people who breathe it in.

Dr. Miraki showed slides demonstrating the dramatically increased rates of birth defects - nauseating photos of Afghan newborns with swollen heads, red tumours where lips and eyes should be; frog-like babies with no brain; abdominal and head organs left outside the body; babies with one eye in the middle of the forehead; club hands and feet and more.

Dr. Miraki told us, "Tiny radioactive particles, inhaled by Afghan men and women of child bearing age, have altered the DNA of their sperms and eggs." Since DNA damage is inheritable, the increased incidence of birth defects will pass on to future generations. He also said, "Since the radioactive dust from DU has a half life of 4.5 billion years (the age of the Earth) this means that Afghans (and others people living where DU has been used - Iraq and the former Yugoslavia) will be suffering for an unforeseeable time."

U.S. and NATO veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who may have been exposed to DU dust also return home with fear of having babies with birth defects. Truly, the use of DU munitions is the gift of death - that keeps on giving. As part of a civilization that would use such weapons on other people and the Earth, I had an urge to put on sackcloth and ashes.

[Lumley, of Toronto, Ontario, was part of Christian Peacemaker Teams' 18-27 May delegation focusing on DU munitions. Other delegates are Russell Attoe and Judy Leurquin (Madison, Wisconsin), Bill and Genie Durland (Colorado Springs, Colorado), Ron Forthofer (Longmont, Colorado), Ron Friesen

(Loveland, Colorado), Anne Herman (El Paso, Texas), Kirsten Romaine Jones (Toronto, Ontario), Cliff Kindy (N, North Manchester, Indiana), Jane MacKay Wright (Providence Bay, Ontario), Wes Rehberg (Chattanooga, Tennessee), Michael Smith (Gibson City, Illinois) and Dick and Gretchen Williams (Boulder, Colorado).]