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International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons
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UN First Committee Passes First Ever Depleted Uranium Resolution in Landslide Vote

Late last night the UN First Committee passed, by an overwhelming majority, a resolution highlighting concerns over the military use of uranium.

The resolution entitled *'Effects of the use of armaments and ammunitions containing depleted uranium'*[1] was passed by 122 votes to six at the UN First Committee in New York; with 35 abstentions. The resolution urges UN member states to re-examine the health hazards posed by the use of uranium weapons.

The resolution was drafted by the Movement of Non Aligned States and submitted by Indonesia. It requests that states and international bodies submit a report on DU to the UN General Assembly during next year's session; depleted uranium weapons will also feature on the Assembly's agenda. A second vote confirming the resolution will take place early next year.

“This is a good result for our campaign,” said ICBUW Coordinator Doug Weir. “States around the world are no longer content to accept the claims by the users of these weapon systems that exposure to uranium dust is not linked to ill health. The last few years have seen great advances in our understanding of the health hazards posed by depleted uranium and it's high time that the international standards caught up with this research.”

The vote comes after a year of intense campaigning by ICBUW and its member organisations, and follows calls by the European Parliament for a ban.[2] In March this year, Belgium became the first country in the world to introduce a domestic ban on the use of uranium in all conventional weapon systems.[3] The decision by Brussels to take this step sent a clear message to all NATO members and users of uranium weapons that the continued use of chemically toxic and radioactive weapon systems is incompatible with international humanitarian legal standards.

How the voting went:
For: 122 countries (including Japan)
Against: 6 countries (US, UK, France, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Israel)
Abstentions: 35 countries
Full text (select your language of choice):
http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/C.1/62/L.18/rev.1

Ends

Notes for editors

1. 'Effects of the use of armaments and ammunitions containing depleted uranium' A/C.1/62/L.18/Rev.1
2. European Parliament Makes Fourth Call for DU Ban: http://www.bandepleteduranium.org/en/a/89.html
3. Belgium bans depleted uranium weapons and armour: http://www.bandepleteduranium.org/en/a/118.html

Contacts
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ICBUW
The International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons is a global coalition of 91 members in 25 countries. It campaigns for a ban on the use, transport, manufacture, sale and export of all conventional weapon systems containing uranium. It also seeks compensation for communities affected by the use of uranium weapons and the environmental remediation of such sites. For more information on the campaign, please visit: www.bandepleteduranium.org

What is depleted uranium and how is it used in weapons?
Depleted Uranium (DU) is nuclear waste. Uranium naturally occurs as three different isotopes U234, U235 and U238. Isotopes are atoms of the same element that have different numbers of neutrons but the same number of protons. This means that they behave in the same way chemically, but different isotopes release different amounts and types of radiation.

The radioactive properties of DU, which is chiefly uranium 238, differ from those of uranium 235. Unlike U238, U235 is fissionable. This means that it is so unstable that firing neutrons at it can produce a self-sustaining series of nuclear reactions, releasing huge amounts of energy. This is the basis of nuclear weapons and nuclear power. However, before U235 is used, it needs to be concentrated as it only makes up a small proportion of naturally occurring uranium, around 0.7%. U238 makes up more than 99% of natural uranium and is less radioactive. After natural uranium has had most of the U235 removed from it, it is called 'depleted uranium' i.e. uranium depleted in the isotope U235. Each kilo of reactor ready enriched uranium produced leaves you with 7kg of DU.

Depleted Uranium itself is a chemically toxic and radioactive compound, which is used in armour piercing munitions because of its very high density. It is 1.7 times denser than lead, giving DU weapons increased range and penetrative power. They belong to a class of weapons called kinetic energy penetrators. The part of the weapon that is made of DU is called a penetrator: this is a long dart weighing more than four kilograms in the largest examples: it is neither a tip nor a coating. The penetrator is usually an alloy of DU and a small amount of another metal such as titanium and molybdenum. These give it extra strength and resistance to corrosion.

Who owns DU weapons and who has used them?
At least 18 countries are thought to have weapon systems with DU in their arsenals. These include: UK, US, France, Russia, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Jordan, Pakistan, Oman, Thailand, China, India and Taiwan. Many of them were sold DU ammunition by the US while others, including France, Russia, Pakistan and India are thought to have developed it independently.

Governments have often initially denied using DU because of public health concerns. Estimates of DU munitions expended run to 280 tonnes in the Gulf War of 1991 by US and UK forces; and 14 tonnes in the Balkans in the latter half of the 1990s by NATO. There was further large-scale use in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 but there is little data on this.

It is suspected that the US also used DU in Afghanistan in 2001, although both the US and UK governments have denied using it there. Leaked US transport documents suggest that US forces in Afghanistan had DU weapons, and the continued use of A10 'Tankbuster' aircraft in the country indicates that DU continues to be used.

Health Hazards of Uranium Weapons
There are three chief hazards associated with DU: its chemical toxicity, radioactivity and the effects of fine metal particles, or fumes, on the body. Both of these hazardous properties are exacerbated by the fact that DU is pyrophoric. A pyrophoric material is one that oxidizes rapidly and can burst into flame at low temperatures in the proximity of oxygen. As the projectile hits a hard target, the DU burns at temperatures of between 3000°C and 6000°C. As it oxidizes, it turns into a fine dust, which can be blown for long distances from the place of the impact; this dust can then be inhaled by soldiers and civilians alike.

We do not as yet understand the full impact that fine particles of DU oxide may have on the human body. We do not have an accurate internal dose assessment; we have little information on the precise distribution and dynamics of internalised particles, and we are still lacking a complete understanding of the mechanisms by

which damage to cells and organs occurs. Despite this, there is mounting scientific evidence from both animal, and in vitro studies that suggest deleterious effects on human health from inhaled DU particles.

Animal and cellular studies have shown clear evidence of the carcinogenic (transforming healthy cells into cancerous ones), neurotoxic and immuno-toxic effects of DU (the immune system defends the body from Infections and even some types of cancerous cells); as well as its ability to damage the reproductive system and foetus (which may cause birth defects). Some data also suggests that uranium can directly damage the DNA and enzyme proteins in living cells. Many scientific and medical papers on the chemical and radiological toxicities of uranium have been published.

Assessing the precise mechanisms by which DU may damage the human body Is made more difficult because both Its chemical toxicity and radioactivity can cause similar effects, such as the generation of free radicals within the body.