

International Conference for Abolition of Depleted Uranium Weapons Opens

By Hiroki Takigawa

Discussion of health effects, etc.

An international conference calling for the abolition of depleted uranium (DU) weapons opened on the 3rd at the International Conference Center Hiroshima, Naka-ku, Hiroshima City. Approximately 40 scientists, doctors, and activists from 12 countries will discuss the health effects and environmental contamination by DU weapons until the 6th.

The conference is sponsored by the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons (ICBUW, headquartered in England). Approximately 250 people participated the first day.

The keynote speech was delivered by Dr. Rosalie Bertell (biometrics) of the United States. She explained the mechanism by which a DU penetrator strikes a tank or other target, burns at an extremely high temperature, aerosolizing the DU, which can then be incorporated into the body. She pointed out that the aerosolized particles are 1000 times smaller than the dust particles in a uranium

mine. Thus, they can actually enter the cells and can cause various health problems.

Dr. Jawad Al-Ali from Iraq, where DU weapons have been used in the Gulf War and again in the Iraq War, has studied the incidence of disease in the southern city of Basra over the past ten years. He reported a dramatic rise in cancer. Other participants from Iraq called for a comprehensive study by an international body and for the US to publicly declare where it has used DU munitions.

Herbert Reed, a former American soldier claims his health has been damaged by DU and is demanding compensation from the US government. He described his experience of being found positive for DU when tested in Germany, then having the US military declare that his problems are psychological. He criticized the military saying, "The military knows DU is dangerous, but they told us (soldiers on the frontlines) nothing about it."

Beginning on the 4th, the discussion will turn to the scientific controversy surrounding DU health effects.

(Caption)The international conference that has drawn many participants from overseas to demand the abolition of depleted uranium weapons