

Report on Conference

The Third International Conference of the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons took place in Hiroshima, Japan August 3-6, 2006. The conference was attended by over 300 people with 40 people from 12 different countries as well as representatives of many Japanese anti-DU, anti-nuclear and other groups. Scientists, journalists, DU victims and legal specialists from many countries participated. In all, there were over 50 presentations on different aspects of the DU issue. NO DU Hiroshima Project was the chief organizing group. More than 600 individuals and 70 groups gave financial support to the conference.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Rosalie Bertell, biometrician and founder of the International Institute of Concern for Public Health-IICPH. Her presentation on "DU and Gulf War Syndrome" discussed the health risks due to DU aerosols produced when a DU shell hits a tank. She stated that the inhalation of a DU aerosol leads to DU particles reaching tissues and organs where it may damage DNA and cellular proteins. This in turn may result in some of the health problems in Gulf War Syndrome.

Some of the highlights of the conference included: Khajak Vartanian, an environmental radiation measurement specialist from Basrah, Iraq showed maps demonstrating the location of sites contaminated by DU in relation to near-by urban areas. A talk by Dr. Jawad Al-Ali, Head of the Department of Medicine at Al-Sadr Teaching Hospital and Director of its Cancer Treatment Center indicated that the results of epidemiological research showed a 1.4 times increase in the solid cancer rate over 13 years. The researchers conjectured that this was due to environmental damage from war, including that caused by depleted uranium.

Veterans from the United States and the U.K. spoke eloquently about their health problems that manifested during and after their return from deployment in Iraq and the 1991 Gulf War. An Italian veteran and an Italian journalist noted an increase in cancers in Italian veterans who had served in the Balkans.

In Italy, due to the assistance of independent military and veterans' associations like Osservatorio Militare, two veterans have won compensation awards following illnesses thought to be due to DU exposure while in the Balkans.

In the Regional Campaign Reports section, the European Parliament had voted in November 2005, for a moratorium leading to a ban on depleted uranium weapons. This was the third vote on DU but the first time that a moratorium was called for. The European Parliament represents more than 400 million people. In Belgium, the Belgian Coalition Stop Uranium Weapons, an ICBUW member lobbied on behalf of legislation to be proposed in the Chamber of Representatives and in the Senate in fall 2006.

PeaceLink in Italy has engaged in legal battles and has supported compensation claims for veterans.

Members of the Science Panel used results of their research to show that DU is chemically toxic as well as radioactive. Furthermore, internal exposure to DU particles is hazardous to health while DU aerosols are hazardous to the environment. They were in agreement that all the answers are not in and that more research is called for. Additional needed research in the area of size, distribution of DU particles and distance traveled. The panel also agreed that governments should recognize the precautionary principle in regard to the DU issue.

At the closing session, Dr. Nabuo Kazashi of NO DU Hiroshima Project and Director of the Hiroshima Organizing Committee, presented some of the 200,000 signatories ICBUW's International Petition to Ban Uranium Weapons to the Director of the Hiroshima Office for Asia and Pacific of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in a moving ceremony.