

## ***World Depleted/ Uranium Weapons Conference***

We are preparing a World Uranium Weapons Conference to do work on a new and in some ways more prevalent and immediate nuclear threat: the issue of organizing an international campaign seeking the official ban of uranium weapons and their classification as weapons of mass destruction.

For some years activists have faced the problem that the U.S. and British government are producing and upgrading their weapon systems containing uranium. With these also-radioactive weapons the boundaries between conventional and nuclear weapons becomes completely obscured. Ramsey Clark, former Attorney General of the United States writes,

*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 unfocused weapons...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.*

Under pressure from activist groups the military itself was reluctantly forced to admit that huge amounts of uranium weapons (320 t DU) got used for the first time in southern Iraq in 1991, 3 t in Bosnia and 10 t in Serbia and Kosovo. Credible independent researchers believe that some 1000 t uranium was used in the bombing in Afghanistan, and at least that the same amount is expected in the recent war in Iraq. Experts from all allied NATO countries are observing an increase of the so-called Gulf and Balkan War Syndrome amongst veterans, which some link to the use of uranium ammunitions. Leading international independent researchers believe that exposure to DU during the 1991 Gulf War are responsible for the majority of the current, ongoing medical problems reported by over 260,000 returning veterans (one-third of all the troops participating in that war!), a rate with dire implications for future wars and conflicts where these weapons were recently and further intended to be used.

The uranium isotope used in DU has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. DU and other uranium weapons are weapons with indiscriminate effects, causing genetic damage and by this endangering over generations the human race as a whole. Articles 35 and 56 of the Geneva Convention clearly prohibit weapons which are this indiscriminate and catastrophic in their effects on civilian populations, suggesting that their use could legally constitute war crimes.

The governments using DU ammunition deny the link of these weapons with the illnesses and are lobbying hard to make a large, scientifically credible inquiry in Iraq impossible. They even try to hide the information of which kinds of weapons contain uranium today.

Cancer rates in Iraq have increased dramatically over the rates noted before the Gulf War of 1991. A planned study supposed to be done by the UN was turned down in December 2001 under the pressure of the U.S. government. Also scientific magazines infrequently publish the results of smaller independent studies. This whole situation brought quite some irritation inside the scientific circle and inside the peace activist movement. For example the results of two recent studies<sup>1</sup> which have *already* calculated the cumulative dose effects to both Iraqi civilians and Allied and Iraqi troops during the Gulf War if 1991 are not well known among the larger international medical, health and scientific communities; while at the same time, reports by government bodies who use DU ammunitions are well publicised, distributed and give the impression that no or little effect exists.

We believe a World Uranium Weapons Conference is needed to bring together the scientific experts with their independent studies and the peace, veterans, and anti-nuclear movements to get updated and have

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Souad N. Al-Azzawi, Environmental Damages Resulting from Using Depleted Uranium Weaponry against Iraq During 1991 Aggression by USA and its Allies; also, Prof. Asaf Durakovic, M.D., Urinary Excretion of Uranium Isotopes in the Gulf War Veterans After Inhalation Exposure to Depleted Uranium, Eleventh International Congress of Radiation Research, Dublin, Ireland, July 18-23, 1999; Urinary Excretion of Uranium Isotopes in British, Canadian and United States Gulf War Veterans, European Association of Nuclear Medicine, Paris, September 2-6, 2000. <http://www.URMC.net>

the results of their studies and their work combined. The Conference will also include extra time for the conference members to combine existing information, and to discuss the need for creating, conducting and funding their own additional independent, peer-reviewed, international study on the health hazards caused by the use of uranium weapons worldwide. Specifically, attention must be given to Iraq before the data is lost or corrupted by the occupation. Because many governments have the stated agenda of perpetuating uranium weapons, their conclusions about uranium weapons effects are not reliable or acceptable. Therefore, the independent international non-governmental movements will have to be responsible for the huge costs of this kind of study, which cannot be done by a single country or organisation.

Ideally such a study should be conducted or co-ordinated by WHO's operations are potentially compromised by its constitutional obligations to the IAEA with its strong obligations to the nuclear lobby. The WHO is not allowed to publish results without the consensus of the IAEA. The results of any study done by WHO on DU or other uranium weapons issues therefore should be highly suspect in its credibility. It therefore becomes the additional responsibility of our movements to constantly review and publicly critique all governmental claims on these issues.

Full-scale independent peer review of existing data, continued independent study, and a unified plan of action will lead to the evidence needed to get uranium weapons officially banned by the international community.

Thank you for your consideration of this project. We welcome your future interest and involvement.

For peace,

Marion Kuepker  
Co-Coordinator, GAAA

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**[The Gewaltfreie Aktion Atomwaffen Abschaffen -- GAAA -- is a German non-governmental organisation dedicated to the total abolition of nuclear weapons. GAAA observes and pressures the nuclear weapon states to fulfil their obligation under international law and treaties to start to abolish their nuclear weapons. The U.S. government has deployed B-61 nuclear bombs in seven different European countries and has also stationed Thunderbolt warplanes with depleted uranium ammunition in Germany, Italy and elsewhere. We organise actions on civil disobedience at these military bases in Germany, and conduct public hearings to inform the German population. Besides this we do lobby work and network with affiliated groups in Europe and throughout the world. ]**