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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement* submitted by International
Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial
Discrimination (EAFORD), Association Ma'onah for Human
Rights and Immigration, International-Lawyers.Org, Union
of Arab Jurists, United Towns Agency for North-South
Cooperation, non-governmental organizations in special
consultative status, International Educational Development,
Inc., World Peace Council, non-governmental organizations
on the roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.


[02 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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War-created and conflict-mediated environmental pollution in Iraq

This statement focuses on the devastation of the environment in Iraq as a result of 2003 Iraq War that began with the invasion of Iraq by a United States of America-led coalition in which a combined force of troops from the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Australia, and Poland invaded Iraq.

Introduction

In the illegal invasion of Iraq referred to as the 2003 Iraq War, weapons of mass destruction were used on a large scale across the country. The killings, atrocities, and grave human rights abuses against innocent civilians have been widely reported. However, the impact it has had on the environment has often been overlooked. Contamination, pollution, tons of war debris and toxic waste has resulted in an environmental disaster leaving high levels of radiation, extensive PCB and sulphur contamination and several toxic stockpiles amongst others. To date, the polluters have yet to be held accountable and humanitarian responses and clean-up efforts are insufficient.

Furthermore, the explosions of bombs, release of ammunition, firing of bullets, and other such lethal activity during the war has polluted the environment and exposed millions of innocent and vulnerable civilians to neurotoxins and other such hazardous substances. This devastation continues to have serious environmental and subsequently public health crises.

Situation in Iraq

Examples of conflict-mediated environmental pollution in Iraq

Depleted Uranium in Iraq

In the 2003 invasion of Iraq (also known as Iraq War), the United States of America, under President George W. Bush, together with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the other coalition countries (altogether known as the “*Coalition*”) fired 116,000 kg of depleted uranium (DU) in a widespread fashion across Iraq. Even though the use of DU was meant for specific targets away from heavy populated areas it has been confirmed that more than 1,000 Iraqi cities were contaminated.¹

It is widely known that DU from war munitions contaminate substances and pollute the air quality by way of a dust that comprises toxic nanoparticles. It can carry across hundreds of kilometres affecting thousands of civilians including children, who may not be a target. This “dust” not only pollutes the air and environment but also contaminates water sources and in this way damages the food chain.² Uranium laced-weapons were used extensively across Iraq, for instance, in the two battles of Fallujah, and as a result, millions of civilians are unknowingly poisoned and are unable to enjoy the most basic of human rights that being the right to life. Moreover, war-created environmental pollution deprives Iraqi civilians of the prospect of attaining the highest standard of health, including mental health, which is a “fundamental right of every human being”.

A rise in birth defects and cancers

In 2011, six years after the Iraqi city of Fallujah was annihilated by the United States military, new research shows that birth defects had soared to epic proportions. The release of and subsequent exposure to toxic substances and wastes in the US invasion of Iraq War have

¹ Wim Zwijnenburg (PAX) and Doug Weir (ICBUW), *Targets of Opportunity: Analysis of the use of depleted uranium by A-10s in the 2003 Iraq War*, September 2016.

² *Environmental Contaminants from War Remnants in Iraq*, NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), June 2011.

contaminated the environment and has put the health and lives of civilians at great risk. In addition, the erection of numerous US military bases is partly responsible for environmental pollution due to their activities, which release highly toxic environmental contaminants.³ These military activities have exposed the public to dangerously high levels of contamination and have seriously harmed countless of innocent Iraqi civilians including children who have greatly suffered and died from the polluted environmental agents including hazardous substances and toxic wastes.

Furthermore, the Iraqi population has been widely exposed to hazardous metals such as mercury and lead, which are both neurotoxic metals that have contributed to the rise in birth defects and cancers. These neurotoxins in addition to other heavy metals are fundamental components of ammunitions, bombs, and other such military weapons.

Post-conflict clean-up efforts - Workers exposed to toxic and hazardous substances during and after war and conflict situations

Military activities are directly linked with the use of toxic chemicals and hazardous waste where workers bear the risk of being exposed to munitions; for example, explosives such as TNT, RDX, PBX; heavy metals such as mercury and depleted uranium and including materials such as rocket propellants, special paints, perchlorate and nitro-glycerine. Moreover, workers involved in post-war clean-up efforts in Iraq who are non-professionals are especially at risk due to lack of knowledge, lack of protective gear, and unawareness of the risks and dangers of exposure to toxic and hazardous substances.

Conclusion

The illegal invasion of Iraq and the 2003 Iraq War have both lead to environmental destruction and devastation. The war-created environmental pollution as a result has contributed to the loss of countless lives of women and children, contributed to the increase in cancers, and given rise to birth defects in children. A contaminated environment in Iraq has reduced air quality and has infected water sources and food-chains; and in-turn has also decimated the public health in numerous cities across the country and deprived its population of basic human rights such as the right to life and the highest attainable standard to health (including mental health) as well as the right to clean water, right to food, and much more.

We are also especially concerned with the multiple clean-up efforts, mainly carried out by volunteers, who are unaware of the risks and dangers of being exposed to hazardous substances and toxic wastes.

We call upon the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment and the UN Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes to launch deeper investigations into war-created and conflict-mediated environmental pollution in accordance with their mandates and to report on the findings and conclusions. In addition, we implore such an investigation to be carried out in relation to the illegal invasion of Iraq and the illegal 2003 Iraq War. Such an investigation will greatly improve in humanitarian response efforts and reduce health-risks during clean-up efforts for workers as well as the overall population including innocent children across Iraq.

Recommendations

We recommend the following:

- The Human Rights Council endorses an international independent investigation into war-created and conflict-mediated environmental pollution as a result of the 2003 US-

³ Sayabieasfahani, M et al., *Prenatal metal exposure in the Middle East: imprint of war in deciduous teeth of children*, ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING ASSESSMENT (August 05 2016), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10661-016-5491-0>

led Iraq War, and apply the ‘polluter pays principle’ in accordance with international law and environmental law.

- Iraq extends an invitation for a country-visit to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment and the UN Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes.
- The Human Rights Council appoints a Special Rapporteur to the situation in Iraq to address all human rights violations.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), The Arab Lawyers Association-UK, Just Atonement Inc., Human Rights Defenders (HRD), The Brussels Tribunal, The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), Organisation for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), The Iraqi Centre for Human Rights, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.