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COMMISSION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
Cinquante-sixième session
Points 9 et 17 d) de l'ordre du jour provisoire

QUESTION DE LA VIOLATION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET DES LIBERTÉS FONDAMENTALES, OÙ QU'ELLE SE PRODUISE DANS LE MONDE

PROMOTION ET PROTECTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME : SCIENCE ET ENVIRONNEMENT

Note verbale datée du 3 février 2000, adressée au Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux droits de l'homme par la Mission permanente de la République d'Iraq auprès de l'Office des Nations Unies à Genève

La Mission permanente de la République d'Iraq auprès de l'Office des Nations Unies et des autres organisations internationales à Genève présente ses compliments au Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux droits de l'homme et a l'honneur de lui transmettre ci-joint* une étude concernant les conséquences de l'utilisation de l'uranium appauvri sur les droits de l'homme en Iraq.

La Mission permanente de la République d'Iraq saurait gré au Haut-Commissariat aux droits de l'homme de bien vouloir considérer cette étude comme document officiel de la cinquante-sixième session de la Commission des droits de l'homme.

* L'annexe est reproduite telle quelle, dans la langue dans laquelle elle a été reçue.

Annexe

The Use of Depleted Uranium and its effects on Human Rights in Iraq

More ordnance was rained down on Iraq during the six weeks of the gulf war (1991) than was dropped in the whole of the World War Two. Unknown to the public at that time, much of it was coated of depleted uranium (DU). This nuclear waste has replaced titanium as a cheap coating for weapons, which can pierce armor. It burns on contact, producing a fine dust which can be ingested and inhaled and which enters the food chain via water and soil.

The risk associated with DU are both chemical and radiological states the US Army's Environmental Policy Institute, emphasizing that as a low- level radioactive waste it must be deposited in a licensed repository and that inhaled insoluble oxides stay in the lungs and pose a potential cancer risk . Radioactivity only begins to diminish after 4,500 million years.

In 1990 the UK's Atomic Energy Authority sent a report to the British Government, estimating that if 50 tones were left in the gulf area there should be a war, then these would lead to an estimated 50000 extra cancer deaths in a decade.

The US Department of Defense estimates that approximately 315 tones Depleted Uranium was fired in the Gulf in 1991. This firing resulted in the release of large amounts of DU dust which contaminated thousands of tanks, vehicles, and land. Depleted Uranium dust can be transported by wind or water and can enter the human body via wound contamination or injection (as in fragments), inhalation or ingestion. Depleted Uranium has a half-life of 4 ½ billion years .As a result, hundreds of thousands of people, both civilians and soldiers, have suffered the effects of exposure of these radioactive weapons.

By early 1992, doctors in Iraq were bewildered by the rise in the birth deformities – some so grotesque and unusual that they expected to see them only in textbooks and perhaps once or twice in a lifetime. They compared them to those recorded in the Pacific islands after the nuclear testing 1950s. Cancers too were rising, especially amongst the young; the most susceptible to radiation.

In the US over one third of the 600,0000 veterans deployed in the Gulf have sought help from veterans' Administration hospitals; in Britain 8,000 of the 29,000 troops are ill and over 400 have died . In May 1999 ,a coroner in the north of England stated that he dealt with one case a week of Gulf War veterans committing suicide In Australia , Canada , and New Zealand similar scenarios are being recorded .

In Iraq , which has had nine years to feel the full effects of DU cancer has risen up to tenfold .Dr. Hudda Ammash , an environmental biologist at Baghdad University . who obtained her Ph.D. from the University of Missouri, calculates the prolonged effect of this (radiation) is over a period of more than ten years , equal to 100 Chernobyls.

In Basra , radiation levels in flora and fauna have reached 84 times the World Health Organization's recommended safe limit . Here, the unimaginable can be found . Dr. Jenan Ali at Basra General Hospital in southern Iraq has a photographic record of all the babies born with no eyes , brain ,limbs , genitalia ; internal organs on the outside ; grotesquely deformed heads and bodies .

In Mosul in northern Iraq, studies undertaken by four universities show a fivefold increase in cancers after 1991 . An informal survey in the area counted 20 malformed babies in 160 houses ; the majority of fathers had served in the Gulf War . It is estimated that if cancers continue on the present upward curve,

44 percent of the population will develop cancer within ten years.

It was not until 1993 that the fact that DU had been used in the Gulf War began to emerge . Concerns were countered by Washington and Whitehall along the lines of "no immediate danger" and "only, very mildly radioactive" .This was despite the fact that tanks returned to US from the Gulf War were immediately transported to the nuclear decontamination facility at Barnwell , North Coralina .

Depleted uranium was used in Bosnia in 1995 and cancers had risen threefold by 1997 . DU weapons extensively used in the recent war in the Balkans. Radiation readings in Hungry, Bulgaria and Greece have recorded air samples exceeding by 40 times the recommended safety limit of radiation associated with DU.

The British Ministry of Defense points out that the Armed Forces Minister Douglas Henderson had given restrict instructions that no troops were to approach any target which might have been hit by DU unless they were wearing protective clothing against radiation. Asked about the problem of the people living in and returning to the region, the Ministry of Defense said that was for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to resolve.

The United Nations Human Rights Commission has taken up the issue of depleted uranium weaponry through its Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities . The Sub-Commission adopted resolutions in 1996 and 1997 which included depleted uranium weapons among weapons of mass or indiscriminate destruction ,incompatible with international humanitarian or human rights law . in 1997 the UN Sub-Commission appointed Mme. Clemincia Forero De Castellaons (Columbia) Rapporteur to take over the study of DU and other weapons of mass or indiscriminate destruction .

DU weapons are not conventional weapons . They are highly toxic, radioactive weapons . All international laws on warfare have attempted to limit violence to combatants and to prevent the use of cruel and non-focused weapons . International agreements and convention have tried to protect civilians and non-combatants from the scourge of war and outlaw the destruction of the environment and the food supply in order to safeguard life on earth.

Consequently, DU weapons violate international law because of the inherent cruelty and unconfined death-dealing effect. They threaten civilian populations now and for generations to come. These are precisely the weapons and uses prohibited by international law for more than a century including the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional of 1977.

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