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PRESS RELEASE

April 25, 2003

IS THE DESTRUCTION OF HOSPITALS AND PUBLIC HEALTH RECORDS A COVER UP OF “DEPLETED” URANIUM HEALTH IMPACTS IN IRAQ?

A CALL FOR INDEPENDENT OBSERVERS TO DOCUMENT POSSIBLE LOW LEVEL RADIATION SICKNESSES IN IRAQ RELATED TO THE USE OF ILLEGAL DEPLETED URANIUM WEAPONS

Press Release issued by the Association of Humanitarian Lawyers, Inc, a Nongovernmental Organization accredited to the United Nations. (see below for contact details)

The unchecked looting of hospitals and the destruction of nearly all the Ministries and other centers storing public health records, has dismantled the public health system in Iraq beyond recognition, and has puzzled the world public. Was this an operational failure? Or a deliberately staged event?

To activists working on a campaign to permanently ban the use of “depleted” uranium weapons, the destruction of hospitals and baseline health data serves an obvious legal purpose. The looting has made it impossible for hospitals to function at the present time, and obstructs the ability to document or report symptoms linked to the use of “depleted” uranium or other more experimental weapons used by the US/UK military.

Furthering suspicions, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has hired the World Health Organization (WHO) to identify the population’s immediate health needs, at a cost of \$10 million. This raises concerns about a conflict of interest. Any data-gathering of immediate health impacts of “depleted” uranium is being paid for by the US, which is the major entity potentially liable for costs relating to those impacts. This conflict of interest could compromise the goals of H.R. 1483, a bill introduced by U.S Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA) requiring studies on the health effects of DU munitions.

The sights targeted for looting and burning (Ministry of Planning, Information, Health etc) support speculation that a concerted attempt has been made to destroy crucial data. Heavy guarding of the Oil and Interior Ministries by US tanks and soldiers to prevent looting, and the glaring absence of military guards at other public sites which were looted and destroyed by fires, suggests further deliberate destruction of the Iraqi infrastructure.

The data from pre-Gulf War II health records is critical to establish a baseline showing increases in post-Gulf War II levels of cancers and birth defects in Iraq. Predictably, the direct bombing of cities in Gulf War II with “depleted” uranium weapons will cause greater increases than in Gulf War I where “depleted” uranium weapons were used on battlefields south of Basra. The increases in the amounts used and the targeting of cities will accelerate the onset and intensify the numbers of illnesses and deaths related to DU exposures.

“Depleted” uranium weaponry, cluster bombs, and fuel air bombs have been declared to be in violation of international law by the United Nations experts sitting on the UN Sub-Commission on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights. Reports and studies from the UN Secretary General and the Sub-Commission followed reports of high levels of cancers and birth defects after the introduction in 1991 of “depleted” uranium weapons by the US and UK during the first Gulf War.

Attorney Karen Parker, who since 1996 has argued the illegality of DU at the United Nations, states: "Since the United Nations Sub-Commission first found that DU weaponry violated existing law, the evidence against DU is even stronger. I have always thought that the U.S fought so hard to maintain the sanctions regime against Iraq in part due to the need to cover-up as much as possible the effects of DU in Iraq. Now the destruction of hospitals and the records compiled by Iraqi scientists on DU further supports a conclusion that the goal of the US is to cover up the truth about DU. And as the International Committee of the Red Cross has stated, it is the duty of the United States forces to protect hospitals. The absolute failure to do so is a major violation of the Geneva Conventions."

Leuren Moret, independent depleted uranium expert and former scientist at the Livermore Nuclear Weapons Lab, comments that the use of "depleted" uranium weaponry in the first Gulf War broke a 46 year taboo against the military use of radiological weapons on the battlefield. The use of depleted uranium in Gulf War I "...established a military precedent to introduce the use of 4th generation nuclear weapons."

With H.R. 1483, a bill introduced by U.S. Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA) requiring studies on the health effects of DU munitions, it becomes imperative for physicians to work immediately to document any initial symptoms that humans will display after being exposed to contamination from these radioactive weapons.

Sources indicate that in this recent conflict five times the amount of "depleted" uranium was used by the US/UK than in the previous Gulf War. The "depleted" uranium in cruise missiles and other weapons aerosolizes on impact, causing inhalation of large amounts of superfine radioactive particles and sending tiny shards of uranium through the body like a knife slicing through butter. Initial symptoms will be mostly neurological, showing up as headaches, weakness, dizziness, muscle fatigue etc. Long term effects are cancers, birth defects, and other radiation related illnesses such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, joint and muscle pain, rashes, neurological and/or nerve damage, mood disturbances, infections, lung and kidney damage, vision problems, auto-immune deficiencies, loss of feeling, etc.

In this current Gulf War, any troops with symptoms of low level radiation sickness will report to their units. Their symptoms will be denied by the military to be linked to depleted uranium exposure, because the US policy is and has been to deny that the DU weapons can cause sickness. Military and civilian doctors were trained in Gulf War I to define neurological type sicknesses as post traumatic stress disorder, and to leave radioactive shrapnel in the bodies of the veterans. It can be expected that the military will repeat this policy.

Douk Rokke, former head of the US Army DU Project, who has been campaigning against the use of DU, reports that US troops are falling sick already with a series of Gulf War symptoms.

Philippa Winkler, a political analyst and longtime anti-DU activist, calls for immediate independent studies: "It is imperative that independent health scientists observe, test and interview Gulf War II soldiers, Iraqi citizens, Medical Doctors in Iraq, journalists, human shield and other volunteer personnel for symptoms linked to depleted uranium exposure and the possible use of exotic weapons."

CONTACTS

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