



**European Organisation
of Military Associations**
33, av. Général de Gaulle
B-1050 Bruxelles
Tel: 0032.2.626.06.80
Fax: 0032.2.626.06.99
Email: euromil@euromil.org

EUROMIL's position on Depleted Uranium (DU)

Background

It is known that DU weapons were used in the Gulf War, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. The debate on the impact of the use of these weapons on the health of those using the weapons, troops in mission in these areas, local populations and the environment has intensified over the years since their first use.

DU shells burn on impact, releasing microscopic, radioactive and toxic dust particles of uranium oxide that can travel hundreds of miles with the wind. DU can contaminate by seeping into the land and water, but the greatest danger that almost everyone agrees exists, comes when the particles are inhaled. From the lungs these particles travel through the blood stream, often landing in vital organs. Once inside the human body, DU can harm these internal organs both by its chemical toxicity as a heavy metal and its release of low-level doses of radiation over a long period of time. The toxic and radiological effects of uranium contamination may weaken the immune system. They may also cause acute respiratory conditions like pneumonia, flu-like symptoms, and severe coughs, renal or gastrointestinal illnesses.

The full impact of the use of DU weapons is yet unknown. On 5 December 2007, 136 countries voted in favor of a resolution (A/RES/62/30) highlighting serious health concerns over the use of depleted uranium weapons at the UN General Assembly.

Position EUROMIL

EUROMIL recognizes that there may be long-term implications for the health of soldiers performing duties in areas where DU weapons were used. To counteract any such effects governments should ensure that measures are put in place that guarantee the safety and protection of troops during their missions in areas contaminated as a result of the use of DU.

These protections should include the following:

- Full medical screening of troops
 - prior to departure
 - at regular interval during mission
 - on immediate return from the mission area
 - at regular intervals for the ten years post-mission
- Areas in which DU weapons were used to be clearly identified
- Pre-Posting briefings to troops on the known dangers resulting from DU weapons use
- Regular environmental impact assessment of contaminated areas, e.g. ground water testing and soil analysis.



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EUROMIL also recognizes that there may be long-term implications for the health of the population in the area where DU weapons were used. Besides, the impact on the environment can have a negative influence on the living and working conditions in the contaminated area, as well as during the military operation many decades after the attack with DU ammunition.

Above all, EUROMIL strongly urges governments to ban the use of DU weapons and to use their influence to promote a worldwide abandoning of DU ammunition. The first country in the world with a ban on DU ammunition although neither producing nor using such kind is Belgium after a voting in Parliament in March 2007. On 27 April 2011, the Congress of Costa Rica passed a law prohibiting uranium weapons in its territories, becoming the second country in the world to do so. The law prohibits the use, trade, transit, production, distribution and storage of uranium weapons on Costa Rican territory.

EUROMIL recalls:

- Resolutions 1996/16 and 1997/36 of the former UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, re-named UN Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in which this Sub-Commission urges all States to be guided in their national policies by the need to curb the production and the spread of among other things weaponry containing depleted uranium and the UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/62/30, adopted on 5 December 2007, highlighting serious health concerns about the use of depleted uranium weapons,;
- the Resolutions of the European Parliament of 17 January 2001, 13 February 2003, 17 November 2005 and 16 November 2006 (European Parliament Resolution on biological weapons and inhumane conventional weapons and the need to ban cluster munitions) and 22 May 2008 on (depleted) uranium weapons and their effect on human health and the environment – towards a global ban on the use of such weapons;
- and Recommendation 1495 (2001) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Environmental impact of the war in Yugoslavia on Southeast Europe).