International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons
Statement to General Assembly First Committee 28th October 2014

Ladies and gentlemen

It is astonishing that, more than two decades after the 1991 Gulf War, there are no concrete obligations for the post-conflict clearance of depleted uranium contamination. Perhaps more astonishing, is the apparent disinterest from the international community in studying the impact of the weapons on the civilians forced to live, work and play in, or around, contaminated sites. ICBUW urges member states to collaborate with affected states and civil society in remedying both these omissions as a matter of urgency.

Since 2010, these resolutions have called for greater transparency from DU users. The release of detailed and accurate targeting data is a prerequisite for the call for meaningful research and assistance included in this year’s text. There are precedents for this. Both NATO in the conflict in the Balkans, and the United Kingdom in southern Iraq, made targeting data available. Data on the use of depleted uranium throughout Iraq is needed now. The ongoing refusal to release it in full is placing civilians at unnecessary risk of exposure.

The rush to develop and deploy depleted uranium weapons far outpaced the scientific understanding of the risks they pose to civilians. This should serve as a warning to states over how the safety of materials used in munitions is reviewed. While state practice on the screening of toxic weapons components has improved in recent years, much remains to be done, particularly in integrating civilian health risks into assessments. The growing body of evidence on the carcinogenicity of depleted uranium during the last decade underscores the need for precaution in munitions development, in the use of munitions and in post-conflict response.

Few countries understand the burden that depleted uranium use places on states recovering from conflict as well as Iraq. ICBUW therefore welcomes its call for a global treaty ban on the weapons and we urge the international community and UN agencies to heed their request for assistance in managing the legacy of the more than 400,000kg of depleted uranium dispersed on their territory.

It is clear from the overwhelming and growing support for General Assembly resolutions on depleted uranium weapons that substantive progress is required on the issue. ICBUW urges member states to support efforts to tackle the problem. As many concerns associated with the weapons are not unique to depleted uranium, this may best be achieved within the broader context of reducing civilian and environmental harm from conflict pollution and all toxic remnants of war.

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