

International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict: more relevant than ever

ICBUW Statement, November 6th, 2022

In view of the war in Ukraine following Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022, the relationship between war and the environment is becoming more and more evident. There is an ongoing and intensified discourse on this relationship, leading, inter alia, to the adoption of the [International Law Commission \(ILC\) Draft principles](#) on protection of the environment in relation to armed conflict. One part of this overall picture is the issue of weapons with catastrophic toxic effects and drastic consequences for the environment, including (depleted) uranium weapons.

And it is no coincidence that November 6th has been proclaimed as International Action Day by the International Campaign to Ban Uranium Weapons, ICBUW – right alongside the [UN Day](#). The crucial action area here relates to the process of banning uranium weapons or ammunition in every form. This process is backed by biennially adopted resolutions of the UN General Assembly on the subject. The [resolution](#), just approved by the UNGA First Committee on November 3rd, 2022, with an overwhelming majority of 144 member States in favor, contains important principles such as transparency, assistance to affected States and of a precautionary approach. Together with Reaching Critical Will, ICBUW prepared a topic overview as well as a list of recommendations in relation to the the First Committee, which is [published](#) in the Briefing Book 2022.

The process, which is carried along by civil society actors like ICBUW, has led to a [trend](#) of replacing depleted uranium (DU) weapons. But even if these weapons disappear, or are no longer used, victims and a severely damaged environment remain. Thus, the sphere of victim assistance and environmental remediation retains practical importance as in the case of nuclear weapons, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Even independent of a specific ban treaty there are an abundance of legal standards and arguments to cover this sphere and to give victims a standing in domestic and international proceedings. The legal approaches range from humanitarian and human rights law (with the right to a healthy environment in the center) up to environmental law. Now, in a time of disturbances and confusion the reliance on law, institutions and procedure is more important than ever before. It helps us get to a more neutral, pragmatic, and most importantly effective approach – for the sake of victims and the environment avoiding politicized or doctrinal debates.

Nevertheless, one has to reach out to the public (opinion). Media remain important and ICBUW has experienced many examples of engaged journalism to communicate the complex message of DU weapons destroying human lives, future generations (damaging genetic material) and the environment in various parts of the world. Also art comes into play, illustrating the complicated issue through e.g. the [International Uranium Film Festival](#). And finally, facts (countering fake news) have to be researched, collected and disseminated. ICBUW will continue to help ban DU weapons and will continue with its observation and denunciation of the use of DU weapons in the Ukrainian war scenario as it did in previous ones...