

## Fact Sheet: Armaments and Ammunitions containing Depleted Uranium

### Introduction

Weapons with Depleted Uranium (DU) have emerged as a subject of significant concern due to their military applications and the potential consequences they entail. 7 States are known producers of DU weapons, more than 10 other countries have imported foreign DU ammunition and armaments in the past. The U.S. and UK have confirmed to have used DU weapons previously and large quantities of DU were fired in Iraq and the Balkans. In view of the potential DU use in Ukraine by either of the belligerent forces, ICBUW has created this fact sheet, describing the key issues and dangers of DU-based weapons and armor.

### 1. Health Impacts

- DU exposure has been linked to various harmful health effects, including kidney damage, oxidative stress, cancer, birth defects, and neurological abnormalities.
- DU has negative impact on the immune system, developmental processes, and thyroid function.
- Especially inhalation or other absorption of DU nanoparticles poses a threat to human health.

### 2. Legal and Ethical Concerns

- DU weapons deployment is illegal under international humanitarian law (IHL), violates human rights and environmental protection standards.
- The use of DU munitions contravenes the human right to a healthy environment and is critically dealt with by UN GA Resolutions on the issue, which may accompany the process of totally banning DU weapons (through an international agreement).
- Of special relevance is the precautionary approach or principle which is an imperative when it comes to use of weapons with an unforeseeable array of harmful effects on the population and the environment.

### 3. Environmental Contamination

- DU munitions contaminate the environment with radioactive and chemically toxic dust, which is dangerous to humans and animals, and are part of the “toxic remnants of war”.
- Especially the chemical aspect poses a significant threat to the environment and on the other hand there is no safe dose of radiation.
- Apart from the dust itself, the slow corrosion of unexploded DU munitions poses a long-term threat to groundwater and soil.

### 4. Victim Assistance and Environmental Remediation

- DU weapons create lasting health and environmental hazards, that make reconstruction efforts difficult.
- A victim-centered approach has its legal basis in IHL and human rights law, having been reflected in the ILC Draft Principles on Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts (PERAC).
- Environmental remediation is a necessary measure for contaminated areas, but such measures are very time- and cost-intensive, if possible at all.

### 5. Complexity of the Issue

- Balkan and Gulf Syndrom studies have shown the complexity of the issue and call for large-scale epidemiological studies.
- While further research is recommendable, harmfulness of DU to health and environment is clear and may fully be argued for the application of the precautionary approach.