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On 2 March 2003 some 6,000 people from Hiroshima gathered on an empty space one kilometer from ground zero, where the first nuclear weapon killed hundreds of thousands and devastated the city, to form a message with their bodies, which read from the sky as NO WAR, NO DU!

Our warning was against war and the use of nuclear weapons by USA-UK forces. Our fear was based on the fact that the US has used illegal nuclear munitions and weapons containing Depleted Uranium (DU) and plutonium five times since Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed on 6 and 9 August 1945.

In 1991, forty six years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear weapons were used again for the first time by the same United States of America against Iraq. Depleted uranium munitions were first deployed during the Gulf War.

The first independent studies of the effects of DU conducted from 1993 confirmed that the same devastating effects of radiation had occurred in Iraq as earlier in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The special agency of the United Nations system dealing with nuclear questions, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has detailed knowledge of the impact of DU in Iraq. At the 42nd General Conference in September 1998, a document entitled "Radiation Effects" included information about the use of depleted uranium against Iraq. IAEA document GC(43)/INF/20 of 29 September 1999 stated that "Diseases which do not commonly appear in the region such as various forms of cancer, and early pregnancy abortion, deformed babies in addition to the after effects which may damage hereditary genes and future effects of radioactive waste resulting from radioactive aerosols due to the bombardment. This effect may be transferred to other regions in the country due to natural phenomena."

Based on the report of the 48th meeting issued by the UN Committee dealing with effects of Atomic radiation on 20th April 1999, noting the rapid increase in mortality caused by DU between 1991 and 1997, the IAEA document predicted the death of half a million Iraqis, noting that "...some 700-800 tons of depleted uranium was used in bombing the military zones south of Iraq. Such a quantity has a radiation effect, sufficient to cause 500,000 cases which may lead to death."

Despite this red alert and explicit scientific evidence of the horrific effects of uranium weapons, the US continued to use DU weapons of mass destruction in Bosnia 1995, Yugoslavia/Serbia 1999 and Afghanistan from October 2001.

The Human Rights Commission / Sub 2 1996 session, declared that DU was already banned because it is incompatible with existing humanitarian law and qualifies as a Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD). The UN body declared that DU weapons and ammunition were illegal, banned their use, and stated that use of DU weapons constitutes a crime against humanity.

The August 2002 report by the UN Human Rights Commission-Sub 2 stated that the use of DU shells and bombs by US-UK in four countries (Iraq, Bosnia, FRY, and Afghanistan) violated the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the Geneva Protocol of 1925, the Nuremberg principles of 1945, the Charter of the United Nations, the Anti-Genocide Convention of 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its Additional Protocol I and II 1977, the Convention Against Torture, the Conventional Weapons Convention of 1980, and the UN Human Rights Commission resolution of 1996.

These international law instruments expressly forbid employing "poison or poisoned weapons," and "arms, projectiles or materials calculated to cause unnecessary suffering." After the poison gas horrors of World War I, the Geneva Protocol of 1925 prohibited the use of radiation as a weapon. The 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions outlawed radiological intoxication of the environment.

A 2002 study of the UNCHR-Sub 2 on "Human rights and weapons of mass destruction, or with indiscriminate effect, or of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering," (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2002/38) concluded that in light of humanitarian law from all sources weapons are to be considered banned if their use:

(a) has indiscriminate effects (no distinction between civilians and belligerents);

(b) is out of proportion with the pursuit of legitimate military objectives;

(c) adversely affects the environment in a widespread, long term and severe manner;

(d) causes superfluous injury and unnecessary suffering.

All of these effects are clearly achieved in the case of mini nukes and bunker busters, especially the B61. The report expressed alarm at the instruction of the Nuclear Posture Review of the United States that includes plans for 'first use' against seven states, five of which do not possess nuclear weapons. The author finds the instruction contrary to human rights and humanitarian law, even relating to "mini nukes" or depleted uranium "fortified bunker busters." Additionally, anti-personnel mines, cluster bombs and fuel-air explosives are banned "weapons of indiscriminate effect," whose use violates the provisions of the Additional Protocol I relevant to such weapons. The report further warns of US-made "third generation fuel-air explosives that use uranium powder." Owing to the sheer scale of the explosions from fuel-air explosives currently in use, they can not be used without indiscriminate effects.

In using DU weaponry in Iraq for the second time, the leaders of the US-UK have thus flouted the UN resolution banning it, violated international law, and threatened the lives and health of millions of Iraqi people and of their own soldiers. Studies of veterans of the 1991 Iraq war reveal that many had children with severe illnesses, missing eyes, blood infections, respiratory problems and fused fingers. Shamefully, the US government has never acknowledged this fact and its clear link with DU. (See Horan P., L. Dietz L, A. Durakovic: "The quantitative analysis of depleted uranium isotopes in British, Canadian, and U.S. Gulf War veterans," Military Medicine, Aug 2002, 167(8):620-7: also: Dai Williams: DU Secret Unfolds. Part 1 DU investigations & briefings 2001, p. 28.) 199,000 veterans, more than one in four who served in the Gulf from August 1990 to July 1991, have filed disability claims, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Veterans' Administration (VA) had to admit that a study found Gulf war veterans are nearly twice as likely to develop amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) as other military personnel. (See Y.K.J. Yeung Sik Yuen: Human rights and weapons of mass destruction. Geneva June 2002, 34).

Meanwhile the death toll in Iraq and birth deformations among Iraqi children and the spread of all types of partly unknown cancers have reached catastrophic proportions. Long-term studies focusing on developments in the last 11 years by Dr. Jawad Al-Ali (Basra Hospital) and Professor Prof Husam al-Jarmokly (Baghdad University) showed a rapidly increasing death toll in Iraq since 1991 due to cancer and leukemia caused by US radiological warfare. (Presentation of Iraqi doctors, Dec 1, 2002, at Peace Memorial Hall, Hiroshima; also Visie Foundation www.xs4all.nl/~stgvisie/battelle1.html).

Despite these well-known facts, DU weapons rained down on Iraq yet again. During the current war, the US-UK forces used banned nuclear weapons in the most densely populated areas of Iraq against a defenseless population. From day 1 huge bunker buster DU bombs were used in Baghdad, a city of 5 million inhabitants. The city center may have to be closed due to massive nuclear contamination and radiation.

In 1999 the IAEA estimated that the effect of 700-800 metric tons of DU weapons would be to kill half a million Iraqis near and around Basra, a city of 1.5 million inhabitants. In the current war US-UK had used an estimated 2,000 plus tons of DU as of early April. In 1991 the DU ammunition was mainly used against Iraqi tanks in the desert near Basra, while in the present war DU is being used all over Iraq, even in densely populated areas including the heart of Baghdad, Mosul, Tikrit and other cities. Based on previous research on the impact of DU and the mortality estimates by the IAEA, the death toll may surpass a million deaths over the next few years, with more to follow!

Moreover, the exponentially increasing number of birth deformities and cancer in Iraq in the years since the war of 1991 (cancer increased between seven and ten times and deformities between four and six times) will in all probability be greatly increased by my much higher quantities of DU weapons deployed in the present war. In full knowledge of the horrific impact of uranium weapons, US-UK leaders are putting millions of Iraqis and hundred thousands of their own soldiers at a deadly risk.

Unfortunately radiological warfare is not the only massive threat against the lives of the Iraqi people. A devastating impact on civilians is also achieved by other banned illegal weapons such as cluster bombs and

"Daisy Cutter" thermobaric bombs used by US-UK forces. Particularly following the April 1 order to US troops to use tougher tactics, hundreds of civilians were shot down on the roads, in their homes, on their farms while missiles landed in markets and residential neighborhoods.

Another form of mass killing is the systematic targeting of water supplies and purification plants, a tactic already previously employed in the 1991 war. The situation is most appalling in Basra, where British troops surrounded 1.5 million people, who were starved and dehydrated; they remained without drinking water for weeks. In most of the larger cities the targeting of the civilian infrastructure used in 1991 was repeated. (Thomas Nagy's report, based on declassified US Defense Intelligence Agency documents, "How the U.S. Intentionally Destroyed Iraq's Water Supply," The Progressive, September 2001.)

The result is mass killing beyond imagination. UNICEF and WHO have spoken of 500,000 victims, mainly children, dying of diseases and under-nourishment as a result of the Gulf War. In 1998, the UN carried out a nationwide survey of health and nutrition. It found that mortality rates among children under five in central and southern Iraq had doubled from the previous decade. That would suggest 500,000 excess deaths of children by 1998. Excess deaths of children continue at the rate of 5,000 a month. UNICEF estimated in 2002 that 70 per cent of child deaths in Iraq result from diarrhea and acute respiratory infections. This is the result, as foretold accurately by US intelligence in 1991 (DIA reports), of the breakdown of systems to provide clean water, sanitation, and electrical power. Adults too, particularly the elderly and other vulnerable groups, have succumbed.

The evidence of the effect of the sanctions came from the most authoritative sources. Denis Halliday, UN humanitarian coordinator in Iraq from 1997 to 1998, resigned in protest against the operation of the sanctions, which he termed deliberate "genocide" (quoted from Research Unit for Political Economy: Behind the Invasion of Iraq. Mumbai Dec. 2002/ Monthly Review Press, March 2003). More than 1.2 million Iraqis have died from soaring mortality rates since sanctions were imposed in 1990. The July 1999 UNICEF Report on Mortality Rates from 1979-1999 revealed that IMR has increased from 47 deaths per 1000 live births for the period 1984-89, to 108 deaths per 1000 live births for the period 1994-99. Mortality rates for children under five increased over the same time period from 56 deaths per 1000 live births to 131 deaths per 1000 live births. (http://www.unicef.org/reseval/pdfs/irqscont.pdf).

The use of terror weapons such as Depleted Uranium, thermobaric and cluster bombs, the systematic targeting of water supplies and the use of sanctions to compound the impact on the Iraqi people violate the Anti-Genocide Convention, Article 2c, "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part," 2d, as well as the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, particularly Protocol 1, Article 54, "Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited."

The International Criminal Tribunal (ICC) must not avert its eyes from crimes against humanity, war crimes, breaches of world peace, and violations of a list of international instruments currently being committed in Iraq.

The author: Christian Scherrer is a researcher at the Hiroshima Peace Institute. He has investigated and written about genocide and exterminism in Rwanda, East Timor, Cambodia, Burma, Sudan, and elsewhere. His most recent books are Genocide and Crisis in Central Africa (Praeger 2001), Structural Prevention of Ethnic Violence (Palgrave 2002), and Ethnicity, Nationalism and Violence (Ashgate 2003).