## UN General Assembly supports precautionary approach to depleted uranium weapons

155 states have supported a resolution calling for a precautionary approach to depleted uranium weapons during voting at the UN General Assembly.

3 December 2012 - ICBUW



Following initial voting on the NAM-sponsored resolution *Effects of Arms and Armaments Containing Depleted Uranium* at the UN First Committee in November, where it was supported by 138 countries, **155** states have now supported the far reaching resolution at the UN General Assembly. Just four countries - the US, UK, France and Israel - voted against and 27 abstained, down from 28 in the November vote.

The resolution was informed by the UN Environment's Programme's (UNEP) repeated calls for a precautionary approach to the use and post-conflict management of the controversial weapons. The passage of this fourth General Assembly resolution is a further challenge to the use of radioactive and chemically toxic conventional weapons that can lead to environmental contamination and humanitarian harm.

"While non-binding, these resolutions are significant as they demonstrate global governmental opinion on DU weapons," said an ICBUW spokesperson. "That just four states actively opposed the resolution clearly shows that governments around the world deem the use of DU to be unacceptable. ICBUW welcomes the inclusion of precaution in this year's text and hopes that it will provide the trigger for meaningful debate about the applicability of peacetime environmental and health protection norms for civilians facing the legacy of military-origin toxics like DU."

The resolution recalls the positions taken by the UNEP after their fieldwork on DU affected sites in the Balkans, which called for a precautionary approach to DU. In UNEP's view, precaution should be backed by clean-up and decontamination, awareness raising measures to reduce the risk of civilian exposure and the long-term monitoring of contaminated sites.

The resolution built on previous texts and once again included a call for greater transparency from DU users. It contained the same language as 2010's resolution which called for states to transfer quantitative and geographic data on DU usage to affected governments when requested to do so. The US had refused to share data on DU use in Iraq with UNEP, something that, together with security problems, ensured that they were unable to fully survey contamination in the country. 2010's resolution was passed by the General Assembly with 148 votes in favour and 30 abstentions.

Abstentions were down from 2010, with Macedonia and Kyrgyzstan voting in favour. Bulgaria, which had previously abstained, was absent from the vote. Nevertheless, 27 abstentions were recorded, these included Albania, Andorra, Australia, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Palau, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and Ukraine.

Once again the US, UK and France were strongly opposed, their primary argument being that the they do not recognise the potential health impact of the weapons. They were also strongly opposed to the inclusion of UNEP's call for a precautionary approach in the resolution's preamble. While the specific quote was from UNEP's 2010 report to the UN Secretary General on DU, UNEP had made similar calls for a precautionary approach after each of its studies in the Balkans. The US, UK and France also argued that the quote was selective and did not reflect the complete statement, however in offering their own version of the wording they also selectively quoted the statement, ignoring the call from UNEP for "action be taken to clean up and decontaminate the polluted sites...awareness-raising among local populations and future monitoring."

As in previous years the influential EU bloc was split on the issue, and it is likely that pressure from the US, UK and France played a significant role in this. Nevertheless, abstentions should not be seen as endorsement of DU

munitions as realpolitik and diplomatic bargaining plays a significant role. Ultimately only four states were willing to stand up for the continued use of the weapons.

A fifth resolution on the issue is scheduled for autumn 2014.

Notes:

 $Resolution \ text: \underline{http://www.bandepleteduranium.org/en/docs/206.pdf} \\ Voting \ results: 155-4-27 \ \underline{http://www.bandepleteduranium.org/en/docs/203.pdf} \\$ 

EU Member State	Vote 2012 UNGA resolution	DU user/stockpiler
Austria	Yes	No
Belgium	Yes	No
Bulgaria	Absent.	No
Croatia	Abstain	No
Cyprus	Yes	No
Czech Republic	Abstain	No
Denmark	Abstain	No
Estonia	Abstain	No
Finland	Yes	No
France	No	Yes
Germany	Yes	No
Greece	Yes	No
Hungary	Abstain	No
Ireland	Yes	No
Italy	Yes	No
Latvia	Abstain	No
Lithuania	Abstain	No
Luxembourg	Yes	No
Malta	Yes	No
Netherlands	Yes	No
Poland	Abstain	No
Portugal	Abstain	No
Romania	Abstain	No
Slovakia	Abstain	No
Slovenia	Yes	No
Spain	Abstain	No
Sweden	Abstain	No
United Kingdom	No	Yes