5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Capacity-building and institutional strengthening are challenging in the best of circumstances. When they are undertaken in a country with serious logistical and security challenges, extensive planning and effort are required over a sustained duration to successfully impart knowledge and resources to local experts.

Although it was not clear at the onset that the approach would be successful in Iraq, the capacity-building exercise delivered the expected results. The following conclusions may be drawn from this exercise:

1. The work demonstrated that developing national capacity to undertake complex DU analyses is possible when international agencies pool their resources and provide sustained support;
2. The national team showed a high degree of technical expertise as well as personal commitment in undertaking the project in spite of the very difficult security environment in Iraq;
3. Creative use of modern information system tools such as high resolution satellite images and high accuracy global positioning systems made it possible for the international experts to steer the national experts precisely to target areas;
4. Even though the final results are still being interpreted, the study resulted in a number of very useful findings, such as the presence of DU-impacted tanks in open areas and uncontrolled recycling of DU impacted scrap, which could be used as the basis of decision-making for immediate action;
5. At a technical level, the work demonstrated that military equipment impacted by DU ammunition had in many cases not been collected or moved to secure areas;
6. The assessment also found that local people were being exposed to DU and other heavy metals in uncontrolled scrap yards and scrap metal processing areas, with potential consequences for their health. Indeed, it should be noted that the toxic effects of DU may be more serious for human health than its radiological effects; and
5. The results clearly indicated that methodological improvements were needed in some areas for such a capacity-building process.

The following recommendations can be made in light of these findings:

1. The Iraqi Ministry of Environment should continue to receive support from the international community to maintain staff expertise and morale;
2. All tanks, armoured personnel carriers, and other military equipment hit by DU ammunition should be identified and isolated to prevent access by the general population;
3. All metal scrap yards that have received scrap related to the conflict(s) should be assessed for the potential presence of DU;
4. Health and safety precautions in scrap yards and scrap processing plants should be improved to minimize long-term health impacts to people working there. With respect to human health, the radiotoxicity or radiological effects of DU should be considered secondary to its chemical toxicity;
5. Education and awareness-raising efforts on DU-related issues should be scaled up throughout the country to avoid that the population be accidentally exposed to DU residues and DU-impacted scraps; and
4. The issue of the storage and disposal of DU-contaminated scrap metal should be taken into account as part of national efforts to decommission and store radioactive sources.