

By Carol Dudek

Nearly a majority of the UN General Assembly First Committee voted for a new resolution calling member states to come to the assistance of the regions contaminated by depleted uranium weapons. It also presses for serious study of the effects of DU on civilian areas. Only the US, UK, Israel and France voted no. A wealth of new peer-reviewed studies, including a report of the enormous rise of cancer and birth defects in Fallujah - the highest rate of genetic damage in any population ever studied - obviously made an impression on the members. Despite the World Health Organization's classification of DU as a Group 1 Carcinogen, there has been little research on potential long-term risk to humans and the environment.

This resolution asks member states that have used DU to reveal the amounts and locations in order to facilitate the cleanup of the contaminated hot spots. Primary research so far has been in a military setting and not on communities living with the contamination, especially vulnerable children and pregnant women. Civilian infrastructure and buildings have been targeted with DU, despite international outrage.

The resolution is not binding on member states, however. There is no legal definition of the obligations for post-conflict cleanup. International guidelines on radioactive waste management have been ignored, and the US has refused to disclose targeted areas. At this time when the US is sending DU-weaponized aircraft for use against Iraq and Syria, there is an urgent need for international pressure. Several nations have banned DU and 94% of the European Parliament supports a ban, as do Latin American Parliaments.

We can support the UN by writing letters to the media, signing the numerous petitions banning DU, circulating information sheets among friends, writing representatives, and protesting outside banks that invest in uranium weapons manufacture.