



Foreign &
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London SW1A 2AH

Caroline Lucas MEP
European Parliament
B-1047 Brussels

From The Minister of State

Dear Caroline

Thank you for your letter of 3 January to the Foreign Secretary about a European Parliament Resolution calling for a ban on the use of depleted uranium (DU) munitions. I am replying as the Minister responsible for arms trade policy.

There is no reliable scientific or medical evidence to suggest that DU has been responsible for post-conflict incidences of ill health. DU's level of radioactivity is lower than most man-made radionuclides, such as americium used in domestic smoke detectors, and its chemical toxicity is similar to that posed by other heavy metals such as lead. Many independent reports have been produced that consider the battlefields effects of using DU munitions. These include work by the Royal Society DU Working Group, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). None of these organisations has found a connection between DU exposure and illness, and none has found widespread DU contamination sufficient to impact the health of the general population or deployed personnel.

With regards to civilians, the Royal Society reports that "*For those returning to live in areas where DU munitions were deployed, including peace-keepers, the inhalation intake from re-suspended DU are considered to be unlikely to cause any substantial increase in lung cancer or any other cancers*"

With regards to Iraq, efforts are being made by the Ministry of Defence to reassure the civilian population by emphasising the minimal risk posed by DU. They are providing details of DU strike sites to UNEP in support of their post-conflict environment assessment, and directly to recognised non-governmental organisations in response to enquiries. Surface-lying DU ammunition is being cleared from the battlefield, along with dangerous remnants of the conflict. Iraqi civilians have also been warned that they should not go near or touch any debris they find on the battlefield.

With respect to our own armed forces, appropriate safety instructions were issued to all those who deployed to Iraq. They describe the potential risks and include pragmatic advice on procedures for minimising any potential intake of DU dust.



They also include procedures for transporting and handling DU ammunition. Radiation dosimeters were issued to those who spend time in tanks loaded with DU munitions

UK military personnel that may have been contaminated with DU are having that fact annotated in their medical and personal records. All UK personnel who have served in the Iraq theatre of operations are being advised of their access to biological monitoring and have the option of medical tests accessing their uranium exposure.

In Afghanistan, the inexplicable surges in various childhood cancers cannot be due to residual radioactivity left by depleted uranium, as neither the UK nor US expended DU rounds.

Concerning the Balkans, the United Nations Environment Programme Post Conflict Assessment Unit's report entitled "Depleted Uranium in Kosovo" may be found at <http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications.htm>. It states that:

"Non-measurable contamination of the ground means that any widespread DU contamination at the investigated areas is so small that it is not discernible from the natural concentrations of uranium in the soil...The corresponding radiological and chemical risks from all points of view are consequently insignificant".

For these reasons the UK government does not support such a ban on the use of DU munitions. I hope, however, that you are reassured you that we, in line with our international commitments and in conjunction with our global partners, work to ensure that the use of DU do not adversely affect the general population of the area, nor the military personnel who deploy it.

KIM HOWELLS