



General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 June 2020
English
Original: Arabic/English/French/
Spanish

Seventy-fifth session

Item 103 (cc) of the preliminary list*

General and complete disarmament

Effects of the use of armaments and ammunitions containing depleted uranium

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report contains views of Member States on the effects of the use of armaments and ammunitions containing depleted uranium. The Secretary-General has, to date, received six reports from Governments.

* [A/75/50](#).



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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in paragraph 2 of its resolution [73/38](#), invited Member States and relevant international organizations, particularly those that have not yet done so, to communicate to the Secretary-General their views on the effects of the use of armaments and ammunitions containing depleted uranium, and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the subject to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session.
2. On 20 January, a note verbale was sent to Member States requesting them to submit their reports by 15 May 2020. The Office for Disarmament Affairs also submitted a similar request to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Health Organization. To date, the Secretary-General has received six replies from Governments. The Government of Kiribati informed the Secretariat that it had nothing to report.
3. A revised note verbale was sent to Member States on 4 May 2020 extending the deadline for the submission of reports until 31 May 2020. Any views received after that deadline will be posted on the web page of the Office for Disarmament Affairs in the original language of submission. No addendum will be issued.

II. Replies received from Governments

Belgium

[Original: French]
[14 May 2020]

The Act of 11 May 2007 on the prohibition of weapons systems containing depleted uranium entered into force on 20 June 2009. Under the Act, inert munitions and armour plating containing depleted uranium or any other type of industrial uranium are classified as prohibited weapons. Such weapons may therefore not be manufactured, repaired, displayed for sale, sold, transferred, transported, stored, possessed or carried. The prohibitions set forth under the Act apply to the State, public authorities and private actors. The Act also stipulates that existing stockpiles of armaments containing depleted uranium in Belgium must be destroyed within three years of its publication in the Official Gazette.

The Act was passed after parliamentary hearings with contributions from scientific experts. Various points of view were expressed regarding assessment of the risks to health and the environment posed by the use of cluster munitions.

Belgium is the first country in the world to ban armaments containing depleted uranium, based on the principles of precaution and prudence.

Under the Act of 16 July 2009, financing the manufacture, use or possession of armaments containing uranium is also prohibited.

Belgium would be happy to provide the United Nations and its Member States with information regarding the definitions contained in, the aims of and the procedures relating to the two Acts.

Belgium is in favour of stepping up scientific research into the effects on human health and the environment of the use of armaments and ammunition containing depleted uranium.

Cuba

[Original: Spanish]
[17 April 2020]

Cuba shares the legitimate concern of the international community regarding the short-term and long-term effects on human health and the environment of the use of armaments and ammunition containing depleted uranium.

It is ironic that there is no restriction on the use of depleted uranium in the military sector, especially when it is used for offensive purposes to strengthen projectiles, bombs and missiles, although there are legally binding standards to regulate the use of nuclear material, including depleted uranium, for peaceful purposes.

In chemical and radiological terms, depleted uranium is a toxic substance. It retains 60 per cent of the radioactivity of natural uranium and emits high-energy alpha and gamma rays, capable of penetrating heavy armour plating and thick cement walls and of causing huge fires with temperatures reaching thousands of degrees Celsius. Exposure to depleted uranium can have serious consequences, including the destruction of all forms of life in the area where it has been used.

The data provided by countries affected by radioactive waste arising from the use of depleted uranium in armed conflict show that it can cause serious harm to human, plant and animal life and to the environment in general. That confirms the need for further research to assess the health risks and environmental impact in the long term. Regular monitoring of areas contaminated by radioactive materials is recommended. We call on the relevant international agencies, in particular the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to provide, under their cooperation mandates, the devices and equipment necessary to tackle pollution and reverse its effects.

In order to facilitate the assessment, administration and clearance of contaminated sites, it is vital that Member States that have used armaments and ammunition containing depleted uranium provide detailed information to the competent authorities of the countries concerned regarding the location of the sites in which they were used and the amounts.

The recommendations of IAEA, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme concerning mitigation of both confirmed and potential hazards from contamination resulting from the use of depleted uranium should be implemented by all those involved.

In strict compliance with the principles of international law, including international humanitarian law, Cuba supports the prohibition on the use of weapons, projectiles and materials that may cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering. Moreover, it should be recalled that the use of methods or means of warfare that are intended to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment is prohibited.

In situations of armed conflict, all States should comply fully with article 51 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts.

Ecuador

[Original: Spanish]
[31 May 2020]

In accordance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and its three pillars, Ecuador supports the use of nuclear energy for strictly peaceful purposes, especially in medicine, while maintaining the highest degree of safety and respecting the physical integrity of people and of nature.

Despite its name, depleted uranium retains 60 per cent of its natural radioactivity, making it a highly toxic substance. Further studies are therefore needed on the impact of weapons containing depleted uranium, including with regard to its dispersion when they are used.

Ecuador shares the view of the United Nations Environment Programme that the precautionary principle applies to the issue of disarmament. That internationally recognized principle has been incorporated into the legal system of Ecuador and has guided its foreign policy on the environment.

Because of the potential effects of such weapons on human beings and on nature, all States should refrain from their manufacture.

Ecuador possesses no nuclear reactors of any type and has neither used nor manufactured armaments or ammunition containing depleted uranium.

Lebanon

[Original: Arabic]
[31 May 2020]

The Lebanese Army Command wishes to transmit the following information:

To date, after searches carried out by the Engineering Regiment of the Lebanese Army and the national authority for implementing the country's commitments under international agreements on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials, no trace of the use of weapons or ammunition containing depleted uranium has been found. Those two bodies are responsible for investigating the issue from a scientific and legal perspective.

In cooperation with the Engineering Regiment, the Lebanese Atomic Energy Commission under the National Council for Scientific Research has conducted laboratory tests on samples collected on various dates at suspicious locations. No trace of the use of depleted uranium has been found.

Mexico

[Original: Spanish]
[19 March 2020]

The following remarks supplement the views that have been expressed by Mexico on previous occasions, most recently at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly in 2018.

Mexico believes that the use of depleted uranium should be limited to peaceful purposes, such as industrial, health and research activities and the production of electric power.

Mexico joins the international community in its concern, expressed at the General Assembly, about the effects on human health and the environment of the use of armaments and ammunition containing depleted uranium.

Mexico acknowledges that the use of such armaments and ammunition can cause serious harm to the environment and public health. Although Mexico has not been directly affected, it shares the concern of those countries that may be so affected.

Mexico notes the results of research carried out by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), in collaboration with the World Health Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, on countries affected by radioactive waste resulting from the use of depleted uranium in armed conflict. The research shows the serious harm that uranium can cause to human life and the environment, with major consequences for future generations. Further studies are needed to assess the long-term health risks and environmental impact.

In compliance with the safeguards agreement signed between Mexico and IAEA, the National Commission for Nuclear Safety and Safeguards strictly controls the import and export of such materials. That includes, in particular, those used in containers for radioactive material and anything classified as radioactive waste.

According to the information available to the Commission and the results of its monitoring activities, the Mexican Armed Forces neither possess nor plan to use armaments or ammunition containing depleted uranium. That applies equally to recently acquired military equipment and to its standing arsenal.

Similarly, the Commission has no record of any research conducted in Mexico on the effects of the use of armaments and ammunition containing depleted uranium.

Qatar

[Original: Arabic]
[20 April 2020]

- Qatar reiterates the views that it has made known to the United Nations at previous sessions.
- An international working framework (a team with government representatives) should be established to examine how to control and regulate the use of depleted uranium in war, handle armaments containing depleted uranium and dispose of such armaments safely, and to consider health and environment measures for sites that have been contaminated with depleted uranium.
- Given the dearth of necessary scientific studies and research or conclusive information on the impact of the use of armaments containing depleted uranium, Qatar proposes the establishment of a voluntary fund, to be financed in the first instance by the countries that use such weapons, to sponsor independent studies on the subject.