

Secretary of State for Defence
Ministerial Correspondence Unit
Floor 5, Zone A
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall
London, SW1A 2HB



8th November 2011

Dear Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond,

In commemoration of two decades of depleted uranium (DU) contamination in the Gulf and to mark the International Day of Action Against DU and the UN International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict, the Campaign Against Depleted Uranium (CADU) are presenting to you with 2.3 tonnes of imitation DU dust. This act is in remembrance of the 2.3 tonnes of DU fired by UK forces in Iraq and Kuwait, during the 1991 and 2003 conflicts.

We present you this depleted uranium dust:

- demanding that you recognise that DU weapons leave civilians at potential risk of long-term chronic exposure to hazardous contamination. Morally, and under International Humanitarian Law, this fact should lead to a precautionary approach to the use of DU weapons, an approach that would preclude their use;ⁱ
- on this UN international day, and with international pressure against DU weapons growing, we ask the Ministry of Defence why it continues to use DU weapons and supports research into extending their use?ⁱⁱ
- **calling for the suspension of the CHARM 3 Life Extension Programme and the removal of the UK's DU munitions from service.**ⁱⁱⁱ

Yours Sincerely,

Rae Street

Chair of the Campaign Against Depleted Uranium

ⁱ The use of DU munitions results in the uncontrolled release of chemically toxic and radioactive particles of respirable size and can lead to the contamination of soils, infrastructure and groundwater. *In vitro* and *in vivo* studies, many undertaken by the US Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute have shown that DU is genotoxic. The WHO's specialist agency on cancer IARC, has also classed all internal alpha particle emitters as Class I human carcinogens. Numerous reports from health professionals across Iraq suggest increases in cancers and birth abnormalities following DU's use.

Despite this and despite that fact that the MoD has acknowledged that DU weapons are not 'safe', the MoD remains adamant that the use of DU does not put civilians, military personnel, or the environment at risk. Given that large scale epidemiological studies have not been undertaken in affected areas, and without reliable data on civilian exposure to DU dust, it cannot be asserted that DU poses no risk. A potential risk remains.

ⁱⁱ The use of DU weapons has been condemned by four resolutions in the European Parliament, including a landslide resolution in 2008, which called for a moratorium on DU's use and efforts toward a global ban. This resolution was supported by 94% of MEPs.

DU weapons have been the subject of domestic bans in Costa Rica and Belgium.

DU weapons have also been the focus of three resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly. In particular the November 2010 UN General Assembly resolution called for transparency around information on DU use. Greater transparency on DU use would support further research that could help ascertain exposure levels, thus enabling an understanding of the risks of DU. However the UK voted against the resolution, which was supported by 148 states, despite an Early Day Motion signed by 93 MPs urging them to do so. The MoD continues to incorrectly claim that DU poses no risk, in order to justify its continued use of the weapon.

ⁱⁱⁱ The UK currently has an opportunity to stop investing in, and to discontinue the use of DU weapons. The propellant charge of CHARM 3 the UK's sole DU munitions is due to expire in 2013.

CHARM 3 is not interoperable with the tanks of the UK's NATO partners and the UK has no manufacturing capacity to replace the weapons. It is also likely that a global ban will be implemented within the lifespan of any replacement. By making a move away from DU-based kinetic energy weapons now, the UK has an opportunity to take an international lead on this issue. We would of course remind the MoD that, despite their persistent and fallacious arguments concerning the claimed effectiveness of CHARM3, military utility does not outweigh humanitarian considerations.