Resolution on (depleted) uranium weapons and their effect on human health and the environment - towards a global ban on the use of such weapons

2008/2570(RSP) - 22/05/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 21 May 2008, the European Parliament adopted, by 491 votes to 18 with 12 abstentions, a resolution on (depleted) uranium weapons and their effect on human health and the environment – towards a global ban on the use of such weapons. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the PES, ALDE, UEN, Greens/EFA and GUE /NGL groups.

It recalls that ever since its use by the allied forces in the first war against Iraq, there have been serious concerns about the radiological and chemical toxicity of the fine uranium particles produced when such weapons impact on hard targets. Concerns have also been expressed about the contamination of soil and groundwater by expended rounds that have missed their targets and their implications for civilian populations. Despite the fact that scientific research has so far been unable to find conclusive evidence of harm, there are numerous testimonies as to the harmful and often deadly effects on both military personnel and civilians. The use of depleted uranium in warfare runs counter to the basic rules enshrined in written and customary international, humanitarian and environmental law.

Parliament urges Member States to adhere to paragraph 1 of UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/62 /30, adopted on 5 December 2007, which highlights serious health concerns about the use of depleted uranium weapons, and to submit a report with their views on the effects of the use of armaments and ammunition containing depleted uranium. It recommends that the EU High Representative include in the forthcoming revised version of the European Security Strategy the need to give serious thought to the future utility of unguided munitions, as well as cluster bombs, mines and other weapons of indiscriminate effect, such as depleted uranium weapons.

The Council and the Commission are requested to commission scientific studies into the use of depleted uranium in all regions where European and international military and civilian personnel have been deployed.

Member States are urged, within the framework of future operations, not to use depleted uranium weapons in European Security and Defence Policy operations and not to deploy military and civilian personnel in regions where no guarantee can be given to the effect that depleted uranium has not been, or will not be, used.

Parliament asks Member States, the Council and the Commission :

-to provide full information to their military and civilian personnel on mission, as well as to their professional organisations, about the probability that depleted uranium has been or might be used in their region of operations, and to take sufficient protective measures;

-to establish an environmental inventory of depleted uranium-contaminated areas (including testing ranges) and to provide full support – including financial support – for projects that could assist victims and their relatives as well as for clean-up operations in the affected areas, should a negative effect on human health and the environment be confirmed;

It strongly reiterates its call on all Member States and NATO countries to impose a moratorium on the use of depleted uranium weapons and to redouble efforts towards a global ban, as well as systematically to halt production and procurement of this type of weaponry;

Lastly, Parliament calls on the Member States and the Council to take the lead in working – through the UN or through a 'coalition of the willing' – towards an international treaty establishing a ban on the development, production, stockpiling, transfer, testing and use of uranium weapons as well as the destruction or recycling of existing stocks, should there be conclusive scientific evidence of harm caused by such weapons.