

Resolution Against the Use of Depleted Uranium in Weaponry

Introduction

The use of weapons as tools of war and violence has long been seen by the Church of the Brethren as sin. In our nearly 300 years of history and heritage as a church which reflects the peace and nonviolence of Jesus Christ, we have named war as sin and have upheld the biblical instruction to “beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks” (Micah 4:3).

Given that history, it might seem unnecessary to debate or form resolutions around the issue of depleted uranium being used in weapons of war. At times, though, specific acts of violence must be named and identified to bring attention to the destruction and evil of their existence. The use of depleted uranium (DU) is such an act. The violence extends beyond its initial use, with many people suffering from long-term exposure.

Background

Depleted uranium is what is left over when most of the highly radioactive types of uranium are removed for use as nuclear fuel or for nuclear weapons. The military uses DU for defensive armor plating and in armor-penetrating military ordnance because of its high density.

The primary danger of using DU in weapons comes from breathing in the DU dust created by burning or exploded weaponry, or from ingesting DU dust that has contaminated the food or water supply. A growing body of evidence suggests such exposure may increase a person’s cancer risk and cause birth defects. The Veterans Administration and physicians in both the US and Iraq, as well as Great Britain, have documented health issues such as cancers and mutations in offspring. The US House of Representatives on May 11 passed legislation that includes an amendment by Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.) ordering a comprehensive study on possible health effects for US soldiers and their children from exposure to depleted uranium.

Because there has not been full public disclosure by the US military about the use of this ordnance, it is not clear when these weapons were first used or distributed through international arms sales. However, as McDermott’s bill noted, there is evidence of hundreds of metric tons of DU being used by US forces (as part of NATO) in the former Yugoslavia, as well as in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, the United States has provided or sold DU and DU munitions to several other nations

Action

We are called to make a choice in our response as a living peace church. We remember Jesus’ commandments to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 19:19) and “love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44) and to care for “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40). We hear the admonition of scripture to “keep peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:14, 1 Pet. 3:11). Therefore, as the Church of the Brethren General Board:

- We declare that the use of depleted uranium in weapons of violence is a specific and compelling example of the sinfulness of war.

- We call for full public disclosure that these weapons are being used in war and for public discussion of the long-term health effects on the populations affected by the use of such weapons.
- We join the World Council of Churches (Central Committee public issues statement, 2005) in calling on the US government to “assist and enable independent, credible, and accurate third-party verification of casualty levels on all sides during this conflict---assigning responsibility for the deaths, illnesses, traumas, and injuries caused directly and indirectly” by the use of depleted uranium.
- We appeal for the manufacturers of these weapons and those in military and political leadership to immediately stop the manufacture and use of depleted uranium in all forms of weaponry.
- We lift up and pray for members of Christian Peacemaker Teams who are gathering data and keeping a watch on the arsenals that house and produce this deadly isotope.
- We direct the Church of the Brethren General Board’s Brethren Witness/Washington Office to continue to monitor the legislative and administrative choices of our nation in this and related issues, advocating for the elimination of such weapon production and keeping members informed of relevant legislation and actions.

Adopted by the Church of the Brethren General Board on June 30, 2007