

## Discussie DU-seminar Amershof, 14 februari 2008

**Carolien vd Stadt (WILPF):** Many years ago I had a speak-in with Minister of Defence Frank de Grave and they never seem to know when depleted uranium will be used. He said 'well it overcomes you'. The problem is we are part of NATO. And NATO decides, or in other words the United States, when DU is used it will not be told before I think. This causes the first problem, the first 3-4 years are spend with 'no it wasn't used, maybe it was used, we used something else' etc. In the mean time people suffer from al those effects. So most important of all we, or at least the ministry should know when/if depleted uranium is used beforehand.

**LaForge:** during a press conference in 2003 about Iraq bombardment the US and UK military was asked by the press 'do you intend to use depleted uranium?' And they would neither confirm or deny it, although at the same time I believe there where credible reports in the UK that DU was being ferried to the US-military basis in Germany.

**Frank van Schaik:** So it can only be known through leaks and unofficial ways because it's a military secret?

**Krista van Velzen:** we're in the middle of an ongoing official debate about clustermunition. There's a parallel whether it has been used during the war on the Balkan. Only now NATO is giving information about the targets. How can you clean up when you have no awareness if it has being used. Clustermunition is quite visible but with DU, an aerosol, this is quite difficult. In fact NATO seems a big institution with a lot of power but in fact it consists of our Ministers of Defence talking on behalf of us. So we have to put more pressure on our governments that if these type of weapons are being used there should be more transparency to make sure that we have no environmental impact and there are less casualties. This is a compromise off course because it shouldn't be used at all, but when it's been used these people should take responsibilities and that's not happening right now.

**Els de Groen (European MP):** there is a certain pattern in the attitude of the commission and the council. They always say 'you should turn to the national authorities', but the problem is that the national authorities do not have the knowledge about DU being used or not, and where and how much. Besides Euromil they are asking the same. Euromil that's the European Military Union, but they do not have the information either. Your send from one desk to another. When I asked the government directly, they told me they said 'no' to this General Assembly resolution because of it's wording ; 'possible and potential danger' because 'potential' would mean there is a danger and 'possible' we don't know. So this is a 'non-answer' I think. DU was not developed as a weapon, in fact it's waste, it was only discovered that we could use this waste. A fork is something to eat, but if I take that fork to Schiphol airport on a flight to New York, all of a sudden this fork it's a weapon. So we simple have to have a good legislation for dangerous weapons in order to ban them.

### **Bob Booms:**

Sorry mijn Engels is niet goed genoeg om een vraag daarin te stellen. Ik ben zelf veteraan heb aan verschillende missies meegedaan. Ik heb gemerkt dat als je een ongeluk overkomt dan moet je in feite vaak zelf via de Verenigde Naties het land waar je het hebt opgelopen aansprakelijk stellen. Ik vind het zo duidelijk als ik over die twee collega's op Netwerk hoor dinsdagavond, die bewaking moeten doen bij een dump van wapenafval. Dan is het voor mij als leek toch zo helder als wat dat die straling op die jongens afgekomen is. En dat je dan soms moet vechten tot aan je laatste dag voor je recht en dat je nooit meer van het leven hebt kunnen genieten. Onder welke categorie het valt, dat zal me worst wezen, wij komen gehavend thuis, we hebben ons land gediend en we worden vergeten. Alleen op 29 juni, Veteranendag, staan ze te klappen in Den Haag, maar voor de rest zijn we vergeten. Ik heb deze keer meegedaan met de alternatieve veteranendag en geprotesteerd tegen de oorlog in Afghanistan, in mijn veteranenpak, wat je daarna over je heen krijgt als gewoon soldaat dat wil je niet weten.

Ik zou wel veel meer informatie willen geven aan politici als Krista, maar je begint gewoon bang te worden want je hebt zwijgplicht. Dat gaat soms zover dat mensen in psychiatrische inrichtingen

terecht komen om ze het zwijgen op te leggen. Ik hoop dat u als deskundigen het voor ons (oud) militairen op wilt nemen om dit tot op de bodem uit te zoeken, om welke wapens het ook gaat, neem het alstublieft voor ons op.

**Krista:** dank je wel Bob, ik vind het heel moedig als ook mensen binnen defensie hun mond open durven doen. Ook mag je niet overal spreken maar het gaat jou en je collega's aan dan moet je op een bepaald ogenblik wel gaan spreken. Ik was ook blij verrast dat het AVMP (Militaire vakbond) hier vanavond wilde spreken en oproept tot een verbod op DU. Zij zijn al langere tijd in gesprek met mensen die lijden aan ziekten die heel goed gerelateerd zouden kunnen zijn aan verarmd uranium. Dat zijn militairen die nog in dienst zijn, die spreken daar niet gauw over in het publiek totdat één van die jongens zijn verhaal in het AD neerzette. Dat helpt ontzettend om de discussie te voeren op het moment dat het probleem een gezicht heeft, dat je weet dat het om jongens gaat van 26- 27 jaar die er aan kapot gaan.

**Bob:** zelfs een jongen van 20 jaar.....en het is niet alleen de soldaat, ik ben mijn vrouw kwijt geraakt, mijn kind kwijtgeraakt. Je raakt alles kwijt, nou ben ik 60 jaar en dan zeggen ze je moet er mee leren leven, nou je kunt er nooit meer leren leven. Elke nacht heb ik nog steeds bezoek van kinderen uit die oorlogen, het gaat gewoon niet van je netvlies af, plus de spijt die je hebt dat je mee hebt gedaan aan geweld, wat je veel liever niet gedaan had, maar ja .....ik ben nu eenmaal maar voor één ding opgeleid en dat is militair zijn, voor de rest kon ik helaas niks. Ik word erop aangekeken dat ik geprotesteerd heb op veteranendag maar ik hou van mijn vaderland laat dat duidelijk zijn. Ik neem het op voor de armoede in deze wereld daar zou ik nou nog tegen willen vechten.

**Frank:** de laatste keer op de Alternatieve Veteranendag kwam Staatssecretaris van der Knaap ook even langs om met de mensen te praten, misschien dat deze dag daardoor ook wat meer bekendheid kan krijgen en de aandacht er voor kan groeien.

**Bob:** wij bestrijden elkaar als veteranen ook niet, ik wil het voor die jongens opnemen, dat als je uitgezonden wordt en je komt zonder benen thuis dat je fatsoenlijk verzekerd bent en je kind zijn studie af kan maken. Op de Leusder hei wonen nu twee jongens omdat ze daar de hele dag geschiet horen en dan voelen ze zich 'thuis', ik breng ze elke dag eten. Hier wonen dus ook versholene veteranen in de bossen, niet alleen in Amerika, volledig buiten de maatschappij.

**Question:** I also like to know what happens to the environment after DU-contamination, can you grow vegetables on that land? Or becomes this poisoned? We say we liberate a country but instead poison it?

**LaForge:** That's difficult to answer, I know they did research in Kosovo 2 years after the war was ended, they still found DU in the air. Their recommendations were the topsoil had to be removed. I don't recall how deep, but that's a massive undertaking and a very expensive one. I think people don't take that into consideration as they say DU is cheaper as a weapon to use than tungsten.

**Question:**

What is the problem with groundwater, isn't that a much bigger problem?

**Baverstock:** The situation in Kosovo was most air to tank ammunition, a lot of it was fired only a few bullets' got into the tanks, but most of it goes into the ground and it doesn't burn, so it sits there as the metal and it corrodes, given the natural amount of uranium that is already in the ground that isn't going to increase over the country as a whole. So that's not going to be a public health problem. In Finland for example in some places drinking water is consumed that contains 50 times the normal level of uranium, but people don't get sick. I think you can take relatively large amounts of uranium in drinking water over the natural level without getting sick.

**Question:** But what about Iraq, I was in a hospital in Baghdad in 1995 and met a lot of sick children with leukaemia or other forms of cancer.

**Baverstock:** don't get me wrong I think that the biggest problem with depleted uranium is in Iraq because of the very dry atmosphere, but it's not in drinking water, the primary problem is inhalation. That is a far more effective way of getting the DU into the blood. And it has to get into

the blood to cause leukaemia. It's first of all an inhalation problem, not an ingestion problem. If you inhale it there nothing that's going to stop it getting into the blood. So inhalation is far worse and I think children living in those dry areas polluted with DU-dust they are exposed to it day in day out and that is the real problem.

**Question:**

I have a question for Avril. You stated that it's not a biological or chemical weapon. As long as the experts don't know exactly what we are talking about, how can you be so sure that none of the international laws can be used for this particular weapon?

**Avril:**

Well we saw through the fork-example that everything can be weaponised. So first of all we had to find out what the stuff is we're dealing with. I did not conclude that there is no law dealing with depleted uranium, I said that there were two parts of the law on armed conflict that could be relevant. I think people focus too much on what is not known about depleted uranium then to what actually is known. We know something about the effects we are not totally shooting in the dark. And we know these effects could be serious. We just don't know everything that's the point. So what we are trying to do with our pre-cautionary approach is to account for the foreseeable effects of a weapon. So when you are in a tank and this gets hit by an uranium grenade and you survive we know this is a high risk situation and that you could get sick, these are known or foreseeable effects. The problem is the effects don't show immediately, you have to wait a while, that what makes it difficult to prove their negative effects.

**Question:** but a government which uses a weapon which they don't know exactly what it causes, you could go to the civil court and say listen you used weapons of which you didn't know exactly what the effects would be. So you are liable for the fact that I have cancer or whatever kind of sickness that was created by a weapon you didn't know what the effects would be.

**Avril:**

It's not as clear-cut as that in a sense, there's always the unknowable in armed conflict situations. You do know certain effects and that are the only effects you have to take into account. Not the effects you don't know or can't know. That are the parameters you are operating with in a sense. More research will make the case stronger. A state is not allowed to ignore the outcome if you can conclude it's a harmful weapon otherwise this state would be violating the law.

**Question:** Why doesn't the government like a research on DU, why did they try to block the discussion in parliament?

**Els de Groen:** because they don't want to know anything about victims or pollution. This is the very reason: money, money, money. And if you have to pay the victims you are losing money.

**Krista:** I start with the question, why is the Netherlands not doing any research. The phrase of the UN-resolution was 'DU is potential harmful' and that's not where our government is yet. That's why they voted against this resolution. So we tried to change these phrase 'potential harmful' into 'possible harmful'. However our next chance voting in favour of the resolution is in a year and I'm not that patient.

**Question:**

We have heard of these aerosols. Is there a chance to get them into our country?

**Baverstock:** well no, I don't think it travels those distances from Iraq or the Balkan to our country. The initial fall-out is pretty local, it falls in about half a kilometre. In dry circumstances like Iraq it in time can spread over about tens of kilometres but not hundreds or thousands. It's not a Chernobyl thing.