

Belgium Bans Uranium Weapons and Armour

They were first with land mines, first with cluster bombs - now Belgium has become the first country in the world to ban uranium weapons! ICBUW praises the hard work and commitment of the Belgian Coalition Stop Uranium Weapons.

On March the 7th, 2007, the Belgian Chamber Commission on National Defence voted unanimously in favour of banning the use of depleted uranium "inert ammunitions and armour plates on Belgian territory." Although Belgium isn't a user of DU, it is the home of NATO and regularly has US DU shipments travelling through its port of Antwerp.

Acknowledging the Precautionary Principle, the deputies agreed that the manufacture, use, storage, sale, acquisition, supply and transit of these conventional weapon systems should be prohibited. At the last minute, the term "weapon" was deleted to make sure that the law proposal would not cover the US thermonuclear bombs that are stored on the Air Force base of Kleine Brogel.

On Thursday 22nd March, the bill was adopted by Parliament, again with a unanimous vote from across the political spectrum; making Belgium the first country in the world to ban ammunitions and armour that contain depleted uranium, or any other industrially manufactured uranium.

Because it was suggested that the government needs time to promote the ban outside Belgium, and because the Dutch-speaking liberal-democrat party wanted to know if other countries would be willing to follow the Belgian example, it is now stipulated in the accepted text that the law will enter into force two years after its publication in the Belgian Statute Book.

The decision is the culmination of more than three years hard work, direct action and lobbying by the Belgian Coalition 'Ban Uranium Weapons'. While many Belgian politicians were extremely supportive of the process, ICBUW praised Dirk van der Maelen, the leader of the Flemish Socialists, in particular for his commitment to our cause. Muriel Gerkens and Marie Nagy of the Greens and Joseph Arens of the Christian Democrats also played an important part in the process. The work of expert witnesses such as Dr Keith Baverstock and the support of the military, represented by EUROMIL, was also crucial.

The vote represents a growing awareness of the issue among European countries, thanks in no small part to the European Parliament's repeated calls for a ban on the use of uranium weapons. ICBUW is convinced that Belgium will soon be followed by other states in implementing domestic bans, which in turn will give the campaign more leverage at an international level.