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NATO Information

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Actions Taken by Switzerland Concerning Depleted Uranium

AD HOC Committee on Depleted Uranium (AHCDU)

Actions taken by Switzerland concerning depleted uranium
As of 22 January 2001

In the past

In 1960 - 1970, Oerlikon-Contraves and Hispano Suiza, two private Swiss companies, separately tested DU ammunition in Switzerland, in the cantons of Schwyz and Geneva.

The Federal Military Department (former Swiss Federal Department of Defence) tested DU ammunition between 1975 and 1980. In all, 176 g of DU were fired in an enclosed test tunnel. DU was not deemed to show significantly better results than Wolfram. The DU tests were accordingly brought to an end.

After the start of NATO operations in South Eastern Europe

In the framework of Operation Focus, (a humanitarian relief action undertaken in 1999 by Switzerland, Greece and Russia in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), experts mandated in August 1999 by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation conducted research in Serbia in 1999 on spent DU ammunition. All results concerning health hazards were negative.

In January 2000, the AC-Laboratorium Spiez - an advanced research facility of the Swiss Department of Defense - determined through analysis conducted as of April 1999 that the health hazards related to DU are negligible.

In April 2000, Switzerland initiated and funded a UNEP research program on possible risks linked to spent DU ammunition. First results of this research are expected in February/March 2001.

In 2001

Swiss authorities reacted swiftly after news appeared in early January about leukemia cases among KFOR soldiers. As soon as January 9, interministerial action undertaken by the Swiss Departments of

Defence, of Foreign Affairs, of Justice and Police and of Finance led to a general mailing of information to all past and present Swiss military personnel and civilian experts active in the alkans. All were informed of the possibility to undergo blood tests. These tests are voluntary, and are coordinated with the relevant humanitarian organizations. Furthermore, spent ammunition samples collected against regulations in the field and brought home illegally by some soldiers are being collected by Army services, and help is being offered to the soldiers concerned.

On January 7, The Swiss Department of Defense set up hotlines giving information on medical and other issues related to DU.

As soon as the DU issue was known to worry public opinion, the Swiss Chief of general Staff ordered a fully open and transparent information policy. On January 16, the Security Policy Committee of the National Council (lower Chamber of Parliament) has acknowledged the openness of the Department of Defenses information policy.

Concerned about the fate of civilian populations in the affected areas, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has contacted UNMIK, the Office of the High Representative in osniaHerzegovina as well as UNEP to inuire about steps taken to safeguard civilian populations.

On January 17, The Head of the Department of Defence, Federal Councillor Samuel Schmid, has tasked the AC-Laboratorium Spiez to test spent DU ammunition samples for possible plutonium content. First results are expected to be available at the end of February 2001.

Switzerland has ruled out calling back SWISSCOY soldiers.

On January 18, the President of the Swiss Confederation, Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger, suggested that consideration be given to a proposal that the December 2001 Geneva CCW Review Conference take up the matter of a ban on DU ammunition.

