

Explanation for UMRC Withdrawal from the Conference

Many attending this Conference had proposed the participation of UMRC of Canada. On September 17th, the Conference planners received the following message from the UMRC:

"The Board of Uranium Medical Research Centre, in its recent meeting, has re-evaluated its decision to participate in your upcoming conference in Hamburg. While we are impressed with the effort involved in organizing this meeting, UMRC's scientific and academic efforts have not been adequately recognized. We therefore respectfully decline the invitation to present at the conference."

We think that the Conference deserves the following explanation.

When the Conference planners originally invited Dr. Asaf Durakovic to present UMRC's recent findings at this Conference, we received word through the UMRC staff that he would attend only if he would be the keynote speaker and would be the one who leads the scientific Strategy Workshop.

The Planning Committee responded to Dr. Durakovic and UMRC that, because of UMRC's recent work in Afghanistan and the importance of Iraq due to the situation created by the impending war there, both Prof. Durakovic and Dr. Souad Al-Azzawi from Iraq, would receive 30 minutes to present their work, more than any other presenters. The Committee also informed UMRC that it had decided against keynote speakers at the Conference; and that all Conference sessions - panels and workshops -- would be run by independent facilitators.

Planners agreed early in the planning phases that the different scientific ways/methods employed by the different presenters each can provide unique evidence from which one can draw valid and reliable conclusions. Therefore, they need as much equal exposure as possible, an outcome which would have been impossible had workshops taken place under the leadership of a particular group or person. Planners believe that the combined results of these different scientific methods makes the case against DU in particular even stronger, and also strengthens the Movement in general. The Conference planners believe in the equality of all the Conference presenters, and the synergistic benefit of interdisciplinary scientific work, and do not want to build into the process an inadvertent hierarchy between different scientific fields and methods.

It is important for the strength of our Movement to overcome such competition and to work united.

Beyond the immediate problem that UMRC's absence creates for this Conference, the Movement may also have to discuss what Dr. Rosalie Bertell reported at the 2000 Manchester Conference: that UMRC's work can't currently be replicated by the Movement, since UMRC works with techniques/labratory equipment (very specialized, sensitive mass spectrometry microscopes) and military data bases accessible only with government clearance. Furthermore, it is important to collect simultaneously data by and from public sources, the access to which would not be restricted by government or military security clearance procedures, so as not to rely on evidence solely from a single group or person.

Dr. Bertell says in her paper in the 2000 Manchester report: "Among those who have been involved with trying to assist the Gulf War veterans, only Dr. Doug Rokke, health physicist, and Dr. Asaf Durakovic, nuclear medicine, have been potentially privy to classified military information on radiation exposure. There are a number of other persons who have written chapters in Military

Radiobiology [Ref. 1], the military textbook, who have not yet offered to help. Dr. Durakovic wrote the chapter on internal contamination.

"While I have FBI clearance for reading the Military Radiobiology materials, since I have served as a consultant to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, I have no direct access to the military data base. I, together with other competent researchers who are willing to assist the people exposed to DU, must build up our knowledge from civilian sources and experience, hence we need to collect a data base of DU-exposed persons in order to understand and document the whole picture of health damage. This is essential if we are to communicate the problems to civilian legislators or judges. The RAND report [Ref. 3] depended heavily on civilian experience, especially with uranium mining and milling. While they quoted military manuals, they failed to discover the text book[s] called Military Radiobiology. For many reasons theirs was an inappropriate choice of research documents. The second source of information was that recently produced by the U.S. National Academy of Science [Ref. 4]. It is much more professionally done. You will notice, however, that it made frequent use of the terms "inadequate and insufficient evidence" to conclude whether or not there would be health damage. They castigated the military for withholding vitally needed information, and while their references are more extensive than those of the RAND report, they also failed to consult Military Radiobiology. This withholding of health information on the part of the military is a historical problem dating back to the 1950s, and it distorts our understanding even today, for example through the IAEA lead in reporting on the Chernobyl disaster and the concurrent silencing of the World Health Organization. Radiation has been declared a physics problem rather than a medical problem."

[Dr. R. Bertell, „The Host Response to Depleted Uranium“, Conference Papers & Report, International Conference Against Depleted Uranium Weapons, 4-5 November 2000, Manchester, England, p. 45.]

It should also be noted that, in some more conservative circles, there is an advantage for organizations like UMRC to keep some distance between themselves and more activist-oriented groups; and that this distance may help strengthen their message, leading to more positive results for everyone when results turn out to be similar.

It is regrettable that UMRC will not be with us at the Conference, and that we will now have to discuss without them what importance their work will have and how it can be included in the future work of the Movement.

Sincerely,
GAAA's Conference Committee