

US military radiation expert backs Greenpeace call for full inspection of contaminated communities in Iraq

Baghdad June 24 2003: A US military health physicist and radiation expert in Iraq today endorsed the call from Greenpeace for the UN nuclear experts, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to be given a full mandate to search, survey and decontaminate towns and villages around the Tuwaitha nuclear facility near Baghdad.

The call, made by the head of the US Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventative Medicine, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Melanson, came after Greenpeace activists returned a large cannister containing uranium 'yellowcake' to the Tuwaitha facility this morning. The cannister, the size of a small vehicle, had been left abandoned in an open field in a nearby village. When they invaded Iraq, the US and UK failed to safeguard dangerous nuclear material, secured at Tuwaitha while under Saddam Hussein's regime, and highly radioactive materials have ended up in local communities where they are threatening people's health and environment.

"I would recommend the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Health Organisation get involved and do an assessment. They've got involved in other instances, like in Brazil, where sources have ended up being distributed in the community and they actually assess the risks from that," said Lt. Col. Melanson of the US military. "The faster it happens the better".

His comments came the same day the IAEA were due to leave Iraq, having only been allowed by the occupying powers to return to Iraq to carry out a limited inventory inside the Tuwaitha nuclear plant. The Greenpeace team, that has been in the country for only a week conducting surveys in the local community living near the plant, has found a number of radioactive areas including one in a house that measured 10,000 times above normal levels and another outside a 900 pupil primary school that measured 3,000 times above normal levels.

Today, having returned one radiation source to the US military, Greenpeace took them to the radioactive house where troops verified the levels of contamination at 10,000 higher than normal, removed the source and took it back to the Tuwaitha complex for storage.

"The military has rightly taken back both these highly dangerous radiation sources," said Mike Townsley of Greenpeace. The action Greenpeace took today merely serves to highlight a much larger radioactive crisis. The US and UK must accept full responsibility for this situation and allow the UN nuclear experts to return to Iraq as soon as possible and do a full investigation without interference from the occupying forces he added.

Notes:

For a copy of today's earlier press release please contact the press office or see www.greenpeace.org
Two members of the Greenpeace team are maintaining a weblog of their mission to Iraq. You can review a history of the expedition to date and monitor live developments at { HYPERLINK
<http://weblog.greenpeace.org/iraq> }<http://weblog.greenpeace.org/iraq>