

# Silent Genocide

By Robert C. Koehler

**03/25/04 "Tribune Media Services"** -- "After the Americans destroyed our village and killed many of us, we also lost our houses and have nothing to eat. However, we would have endured these miseries and even accepted them, if the Americans had not sentenced us all to death."

This will not be easy to read, especially if you've projected evil out of your own heart, into some cave in Afghanistan or a spider hole in Iraq, and reduced the age-old question it inspires to this one: How can we bomb it off the face of the earth?

Before the damage we inflict grows greater, before history's judgment gets worse, before we contaminate the whole world - even before we vote in the next election - we must stop what we're doing. We must stop now.

It's time to listen for a moment not to defense analysts briefing officers, poles or pundits, but to people like Jooma Khan, a grandfather who lives in a village in Laghman Province, in northeastern Afghanistan, who is quoted above. Surely he deserves 30 seconds of our undivided attention. "When I saw my deformed grandson," he told an interviewer in March of 2003, "I realized that my hopes of the future have vanished for good. (This is) different from the hopelessness of the Russian barbarism, even though at that time I lost my older son Shafiqullah. This time, however, I know we are part of the invisible genocide brought on us by America, a silent death from which I know we will not escape."

We're waging war-plus in Afghanistan and Iraq - in effect, nuclear war, with our widespread use of depleted-uranium-tipped shells and missiles. This is no secret. DU, with its extraordinary penetrating power and explode-on-impact capability, helps assure our military dominance everywhere we go. But people like Jooma Khan and his grandson reap its toxic legacy.

So, of course, do our own troops.

Kahn's words are only a sliver of the damning testimony contained in the documents of the International Criminal Tribunal for Afghanistan, a Japanese citizens' initiative that recently concluded its two-year inquiry into the first phase of the Bush Administration's war on terror. But they say everything that we cannot hear. If we could hear Jooma Khan, and others who are sounding the alarm about DU, such as former Livermore Labs geologist Leuren Moret, who testified at the tribunal, there would not be mere thousands of people in the streets of American cities demanding that we stop the war, but hundreds of thousands, or millions - the sort of numbers that turn out in other parts of the world. The use of DU weaponry is not the extent of our criminal irresponsibility in Afghanistan and Iraq, which led to the tribunal's guilty verdict against George Bush on charges of war crimes, but it's the most chilling. (You can check out the full report at, among other

places, [www.mindfully.org/Reform/2004/Afghanistan-Criminal-Tribunal10mar04.htm](http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2004/Afghanistan-Criminal-Tribunal10mar04.htm))

As Moret testified, depleted uranium turns into a infinitesimally fine dust after it explodes; individual particles are smaller than a virus or bacteria. And, "It is estimated that one millionth of a gram accumulating in a person's body would be fatal. There are no known methods of treatment."

And DU dust is everywhere. A minimum of 500 or 600 tons now litter Afghanistan, and several times that amount are spread across Iraq. In terms of global atmospheric pollution, we've already released the equivalent of 400,000 Nagasaki bombs, Moret said. The numbers are overwhelming, but the potential horrors only get worse. DU dust does more than wreak havoc on the immune systems of those who breathe or touch it; the substance also alters one's genetic code.

Thus, birth defects are way up in Afghanistan since the invasion: children "born with no eyes, no limbs, tumors protruding from their mouths ...deformed genitalia," according to the tribunal report. This ghastly toll on the unborn - on the future - has led investigators to coin the term "silent genocide" to describe the effects of this horrific weapon.

The Pentagon's response to such charges is denial, denial, denial. And the American media is its moral co-conspirator.

But blame is beside the point. Surely even those who still await "conclusive proof" that DU is the cause, or a factor, in the mystery illnesses and birth defects emanating from the war zones, can see the logic in halting its use now.

Global terrorism? Listen to Jooma Khan. Then look in the mirror.

- - -

*Robert Koehler, an award-winning, Chicago-based journalist, is an editor at Tribune Media Services and nationally syndicated writer. Tribune Media Services, Inc.*

© 2004 Tribune Media Services

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5941.htm>