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Banning nuclear and uranium weapons - Campaigning experience and outlook

Abstract/Summary

Prof. Mohr is presenting himself and his work within IALANA and ICBUW (Int. Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons) in Germany over the last 15 years. There is a growing conviction that the relationship between war and the environment has to be the starting point – to deal with the humanitarian consequences of using those horrible weapons. This means moving away from a weapons or disarmament perspective, laying emphasis on help for victims and less on perfect legal, or political solutions. Against this background, the pertinence of human rights arguments and procedures becomes obvious whereas International Humanitarian Law alone proves to be insufficient. In addition, as particularly demonstrated by the (new) concept of “Toxic Remnants of War” (www.trwn.org), Environmental Law is getting pertinent.

To broaden the focus is (also) intended as to overcome political blocking and to reach out to other allies, e.g. in the areas of human rights and environmental protection and related NGOs. On the other hand, it remains crucial to stay linked to the peace movement and to avoid misunderstandings such as pursuing the aim of (merely) “greening the war”. Flexibility and pragmatism in approaching these complex issues are of importance, to reach out to other circles within the civil and political society which (always) includes the military. This does not amount to putting away with principles, or to diminish the relevance of law. On the contrary, (multifold) legal arguments are needed to support the political and moral discourse being realistic about chances for treaty schemes. Such an experience has also been gathered while lobbying the (German) parliament.

Furthermore, the importance of media and art activities is growing. Just in the case of difficult legal and scientific subjects virtualization and “simplification” are demanded to attract the greater public including the youth. Fortunately, there are quite some examples of film and TV productions in Germany illustrating environmental destruction through war, i.a. by the use of uranium weapons or depleted uranium (DU). Just a few weeks ago, the Rio-based Uranium Film Festival (for the 4th time) came to Berlin to show the disastrous dimensions of the nuclear topic. Another example is related to the matter of Agent Orange where films and exhibitions helped to scandalize the ignorance of the political and legal system of the U.S. in relation to accepting some sort of liability for Vietnamese victims.

The great challenge, of course, consists in upholding a focus or profile when it comes to discussing these issues, not to get too broad or vague. There is also the risk that dealing with the environmental dimensions of war would be (again) too “political” for some as they would like to uphold military options. But even fighting the evil should not be done with evil means having long-term damaging effects for the people to be freed. Altogether, there seems to be no alternatives to broader perspectives if headway will be made. In such a vein: why not introducing the subject-matter of “Warfare Ecology” at universities worldwide...