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*For immediate release*

## **New study finds strong correlation between birth defects and white phosphorus exposure of parents**

According to a new scientific study there is "a strong correlation of birth defects newborns and parent's exposure to attacks with white phosphorus": at the registration at birth 27% of parents with birth defect children declared exposure to white phosphorus while only 1.7% of parents with normal children made the same declaration.

The report entitled "Birth Defects in Gaza: Prevalence, Types, Familiarity and Correlation with Environmental Factors", published today by International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, was carried out by a team of Palestinian and Italian researchers at the Al Shifa hospital, where 28% of total births in Gaza Strip occur.

This is the first report of registration at birth, and of incidence of major structural birth defects obtained in Gaza. Doctors registered in five months 4,027 deliveries, with a protocol comprehensive of clinical, demographic, kin and environmental questions: 55 birth defects, 94 late miscarriages, and 30 still born deliveries have been recorded in a five month period (May-September 2011). None of the pregnancies here registered occurred during the major war events when the WP and bombs were used.

The study finds that the prevalence of major structural birth defects in Gaza strip is 14/1,000. Within the limits due to differences in diagnostic levels, dimension of samples and methodologies, this is slightly higher than that of less industrialized countries in the area (8-11/1,000) and lower than that reported for more industrialized US (30/1000 and Europe 23/1,000).

The team conducted this study because presence of teratogen elements in the post-war environment is expected in Gaza after operation Cast Lead. A group of scientist including some of those in this team found previously proof of principle of their presence in victims wounds in a study published in January, 2010<sup>1</sup> and in children hair<sup>2</sup>. The kind of metals detected in the wounds and hair have low mutagen but high teratogen and carcinogen potentials, cannot be eliminated from the environment and are capable to act as metalloestrogens affecting multiple cellular pathways during

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1 Skaik S, Abu-Shaban N, Abu-Shaban N, Barbieri M, Barbieri M, Giani U, Manduca P.Metals detected by ICP/MS in wound tissue of war injuries without fragments in Gaza. BMC Int Health Hum Rights. 2010 June 25<sup>th</sup>

(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20579349>).

<sup>2</sup>See *Metals detected in Palestinian children's hair suggest environmental contamination*, march 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010

(<http://www.newweapons.org/?q=node/112>).

embryo and fetal development. The scientists say that "before being conclusive on the specific elements in these weaponry that may cause such effects, analysis of contamination by war-related toxicants needs to be done on the specific subjects".

"Metal load - the experts say - in living organisms is cumulative, and its effects, if any, show over time. We here investigated if there are long term effects on reproductive health that can be associated to cumulative, chronic exposures due to documented weapon's targeted environment".

Statements of residents about locations where they were would have been exposed to white phosphorus and bombing have found correspondence with maps from Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), and data from UNSCO (United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, formerly known as the United Nations Special Coordinator) and UN Mine Action Team Gaza.

### **About New Weapons Research Group**

Newweapons Committee is group of academics, researchers and media professionals focused on promoting risk assessment surveys on the effects upon individuals and population of the most recent kinds of weapons used in the course of wars. The group was born in the third quarter of 2006 after Israel-Lebanon conflict.

Within a week from the beginning of the war between Israel and Lebanon on July 12, 2006 doctors in Lebanon and in Gaza denounced weapons previously unseen by medical personnel which in both cases had long experience of emergency medicine in warfare situation. The question that reached us was: "we never saw before wounds and corpses like those that arrive in the ward. What are these new weapons that cause such wounding and horrible deaths? Help us to find out what to do for the people". The large majority of victims were women children and elders, in both locations, as direct consequence of the attacks on housing, markets, streets and communication roads and of the use of largely excessive force.

Newweapons work is mostly concerned with researching and analyzing reports and data to understand the agents utilized in the war and to promote risk assessment surveys for the long term effects on individuals and population, in order to know how to cure and protect survivors by medical and predictive studies. This implies actions at different levels and at different times and for different length of time and multiple professional actors and methodologies: information collection and information verification, survey, analysis and elaboration of data, and research projects and is done sharing of all the tasks with concerned local partners, providing the results to tribunals, information sources and for medical follow up.

### **CONTACTS**

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