



NFLA media release, 26th Sept 2024, For immediate use.

Ambassadors called upon to refrain from military action involving nuclear plants

Following a recent safety visit by Director General Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to the Kursk nuclear reactor in Southwest Russia, the Nuclear Free Local Authorities have written to the Russian and Ukrainian Ambassadors to the UK urging their armed forces not to take military action against nuclear power plants in the conflict zone.

Letters have also been sent to Mr Grossi and to the UN Secretary General Guterres urging them to take action to ensure that both the Russian Federation and Ukraine comply.

All nations already have existing international obligations under the 1949 Geneva Convention, Protocol 1, Article 56, not to target nuclear installations or to use military equipment based at such installations to launch offensive actions.

In response to previous military threats to nuclear power plants at Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia, Director General Grossi published his Seven Indispensable Pillars and Five Concrete Principles to ensure nuclear safety.

The NFLAs have urged both Ambassadors to ensure that their respective countries comply with Article 56 and adhere to the Director General's 'Pillars and Principles'.

In March 2022, we joined other international NGOs in sponsoring a joint letter to the IAEA calling for urgent action, shortly after direct military hostilities began between Russia and Ukraine.

Ends://...For more information, please contact the NFLA Secretary Richard Outram by email to richard.outram@manchester.gov.uk

This media release can also be found on the NFLA website at <https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/news/ambassadors-called-upon-to-refrain-from-military-action-involving-nuclear-plants/>

Notes to Editors

Letter sent to the UN Secretary General and IAEA Director General 13 September 2024:

Mr António Guterres,
Secretary-General,
United Nations,
New York

Mr Rafael Mariano Grossi,
Director-General,
International Atomic Energy Agency,
Vienna

Dear Mr. Secretary General Guterres and Director-General Grossi,

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR & RENEWABLE ENERGY ISSUES



I am writing to you as Chair on behalf of the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities.

Exactly two years ago, my predecessor Councillor David Blackburn, wrote to you outlining the concerns our member authorities have that in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine a nuclear power plant in the zone of contention could, through an intentional or accidental missile, drone or artillery strike, be damaged sufficiently to become a 'dirty bomb' releasing radioactivity over part or the whole of Europe.

Two years on, we continue to have those concerns. We are a nation which remembers being blanketed by radiation after the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, and the prospect of Europe being again afflicted by such contamination writ large is horrifying. In extremis, it could lead to a large geographical area becoming uninhabitable – perhaps forever - and with countless long-term consequential deaths from insidious radiation.

Nuclear civil reactors have never been designed to withstand a concerted military attack conducted with modern weapons. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that they can be weaponised either by being wilfully targeted or unintentionally struck by any of the combatants – with the most appalling outcome.

The potential consequences arising from a military strike by any future hostile power against civil nuclear facilities in the United Kingdom is one of many reasons why the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities remain opposed to the construction of any new civil nuclear plants and why we campaign for the early closure of existing ones.

Repeated incidents, or alleged incidents, at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, with each of the warring nations levelling accusations against the other, have left the world fearful that a real danger may eventually become manifest. Modern weapons continue to pose a real threat to the structural integrity of the plant or to the supply of power that maintain the essential safety and cooling systems. We note the recent comments of the Secretary General to the Board of Governors that: *'The situation at the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant remains precarious. Regular explosions, drone attacks, gunfire; repeated interruptions of external power supply, among other challenges, increase the risk of a nuclear accident'*ⁱ. So far, we have been fortunate, but for how long? Consequently, we were glad to hear that the plant has been put in cold shutdown and that *'on the Agency's advice, it is understood that no reactor will be re-started as long as the conflict continues to jeopardize the nuclear safety and security of the plant'*ⁱⁱ. It has also been a small comfort to know that the IAEA maintains an on-site team to provide some international oversight.

Whatever the actual strategic factors which motivated Ukrainian military forces to launch an offensive into Russia, more recently it was clear that the IAEA Secretary General must have felt there might be some possibility of an attack on, or hostile action at, the site of the Kursk nuclear power plant. Given *'the safety and security of all nuclear power plants is of central and fundamental concern to the IAEA'*, we commend the Secretary General for prioritising a visit to the plant in person to make an independent assessment of the situation on the ground on behalf of the international community. Contrary to those who have been critical of his actions, we concur with his view that seeking reassurance in person was a legitimate engagement. As at Zaporizhzhia, we would urge the IAEA to consider maintaining an on-site presence at the plant to continue to monitor developments.

Mr Secretary General and Mr IAEA Director General, the NFLAs urge you to use the recent incident at Kursk to once more press Russia and Ukraine to respect and adhere to:

- The IAEA 'Seven Indispensable Pillars'ⁱⁱⁱ.
- The IAEA 'Five Concrete Principles', first established to protect the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant^{iv}.
- Their international obligations under the 1949 Geneva Convention, Protocol 1, Article 56, not to target nuclear installations or to use military equipment based at such installations to launch offensive actions:

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Article 56 - Protection of works and installations containing dangerous forces

1. Works or installations containing dangerous forces, namely dams, dykes and nuclear electrical generating stations, shall not be made the object of attack, even where these objects are military objectives, if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequent severe losses among the civilian population. Other military objectives located at or in the vicinity of these works or installations shall not be made the object of attack if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces from the works or installations and consequent severe losses among the civilian population.

However, the prohibition of attacks against 'works or installations' is caveated to situations where these 'works or installations' are '*not used in hostilities except for defensive actions necessary to respond to attacks against the protected works or installations and that their armament is limited to weapons capable only of repelling hostile action against the protected works or installations*'.

Mr Secretary-General and Mr IAEA Director General, we urge you to continue to use every endeavour to draw the attention of Ministers in the Russian and Ukrainian Governments to adhere their obligations not to take offensive action against or from nuclear power plants, and to press the nations of the world to use their influence with both warring parties to ensure both governments henceforth observe them – for the sake of the world.

Please direct any response to NFLA Secretary Richard Outram at richard.outram@manchester.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Lawrence O'Neill,
Chair of the UK/Ireland NFLA Steering Committee

Letter sent to the Russian Ambassador 19 September 2024:

HE Mr Kelin Andrey Vladimirovich,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom,
The Embassy of the Russian Federation in the UK,
6/7, Kensington Park Gardens, London

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you as Chair on behalf of the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities.

An identical letter is also being sent to the Ambassador of Ukraine to the UK.

The UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities were established in 1981 as the collective voice of local authorities opposed to nuclear power and nuclear weapons and in favour of renewables and peace. Our membership comprises local authorities in Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Like any war, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine is tragic, but I wish to convey to you the concerns of our member local authorities about one especial factor that has emerged from the fighting - the possibility of damage to one of the nuclear power plants in the zone of conflict.

Mr Ambassador, civil nuclear reactors have never been designed to withstand modern weapons and this war has demonstrated that they can be weaponised either by being wilfully targeted or accidentally hit by any of the combatants, possibly with the most appalling outcome.

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Clearly a military strike that comprises the structural integrity of a nuclear power plant or the operation of critical safety or cooling systems could in extremis turn the plant into a 'dirty bomb'. This could lead to the release of radioactivity, contaminating Eastern Europe. This would harm Russian and Ukrainian civilians alike.

Mr Ambassador, permit me to make you aware of the IAEA General Secretary's

- 'Seven Indispensable Pillars'.
- 'Five Concrete Principles', first established to protect the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.

Some helpful infographics follow the text of this letter.

All nations already have existing international obligations under the 1949 Geneva Convention, Protocol 1, Article 56, not to target nuclear installations or to use military equipment based at such installations to launch offensive actions:

Article 56 - Protection of works and installations containing dangerous forces

1. Works or installations containing dangerous forces, namely dams, dykes and nuclear electrical generating stations, shall not be made the object of attack, even where these objects are military objectives, if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequent severe losses among the civilian population. Other military objectives located at or in the vicinity of these works or installations shall not be made the object of attack if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces from the works or installations and consequent severe losses among the civilian population.

However, the prohibition of attacks against 'works or installations' is caveated to situations where these 'works or installations' are '*not used in hostilities except for defensive actions necessary to respond to attacks against the protected works or installations and that their armament is limited to weapons capable only of repelling hostile action against the protected works or installations*'.

https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0321.pdf

Mr Ambassador, the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities endorse the recent comments of Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General at the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, who called 'for **maximum restraint and vigilance to avoid a nuclear incident**, the consequences of which could be catastrophic to the region and the world.'

May we respectfully ask you to use every endeavour to ensure that the Russian Federation adheres to the 'pillars and principles' identified by the IAEA Director General and the obligations of the Geneva Convention by committing to make every effort not to engage in any military action that may compromise the safety and security of any nuclear power plant in the region.

For our part, I assure you that we shall also be making this appeal even-handedly to the Ambassador of the Ukraine to the United Kingdom.

Thank you for taking time to consider this letter.

Please direct any response to NFLA Secretary Richard Outram at richard.outram@manchester.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Lawrence O'Neill,
Chair of the NFLA Steering Committee

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Letter sent to the Ukrainian Ambassador on 19 September 2024:

HE General Valerii Zaluzhnyi,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the United Kingdom,
The Embassy of Ukraine in the UK,
60, Holland Park, London

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you as Chair on behalf of the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities.

An identical letter is also being sent to the Ambassador of The Russian Federation to the UK.

The UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities were established in 1981 as the collective voice of local authorities opposed to nuclear power and nuclear weapons and in favour of renewables and peace. Our membership comprises local authorities in Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Like any war, the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia is tragic, but I wish to convey to you the concerns of our member local authorities about one especial factor that has emerged from the fighting - the possibility of damage to one of the nuclear power plants in the zone of conflict.

Mr Ambassador, with your military background, and recent experience of directing operations in Ukraine, you will know very well the devastating impact of modern weapons. Civil nuclear reactors have never been designed to withstand them and this war has demonstrated that they can be weaponised either by being wilfully targeted or accidentally hit by any of the combatants, possibly with the most appalling outcome.

Clearly a military strike that comprises the structural integrity of a nuclear power plant or the operation of critical safety or cooling systems could in extremis turn the plant into a 'dirty bomb'. This could lead to the release of radioactivity, contaminating Eastern Europe. This would harm Ukrainian and Russian civilians alike.

Mr Ambassador, permit me to make you aware of the IAEA General Secretary's

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However, the prohibition of attacks against 'works or installations' is caveated to situations where these 'works or installations' are '*not used in hostilities except for defensive actions necessary to respond to attacks against the protected works or installations and that their armament is limited to weapons capable only of repelling hostile action against the protected works or installations*'.

https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0321.pdf

Mr Ambassador, the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities endorse the recent comments of Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General at the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, who called 'for **maximum restraint and vigilance to avoid a nuclear incident**, the consequences of which could be catastrophic to the region and the world.'

May we respectfully ask you to use every endeavour to ensure that Ukraine adheres to the 'pillars and principles' identified by the IAEA Director General and the obligations of the Geneva Convention by committing to make every effort not to engage in any military action that may compromise the safety and security of any nuclear power plant in the region.

For our part, I assure you that we shall also be making this appeal even-handedly to the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom.

Thank you for taking time to consider this letter.

Please direct any response to NFLA Secretary Richard Outram at richard.outram@manchester.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Lawrence O'Neill,
Chair of the NFLA Steering Committee

The letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) endorsed by the NFLA dated 1 March 2022:

International Atomic Energy Agency
Vienna, Austria

Re: Open Letter from Civil Society Organizations Regarding the Situation in Ukraine

Dear International Atomic Energy Agency,

We, the undersigned, represent civil society organizations across the world.

We are deeply concerned about the safety of the people of Ukraine under the current military aggression, which has put the lives of civilians at great risk, threatening a humanitarian disaster on an enormous scale.

Specifically, we are very concerned about the ongoing situation at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and at Ukraine's 15 commercial reactors. We understand that Russian forces have taken control of the Chernobyl nuclear site and are also approaching – or may even be occupying - the six reactor Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant in eastern Ukraine.

We currently have little information regarding the radiation safety of these and the three other nuclear power plant sites.

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According to SaveEcoBot and MEDO, online radiation monitoring sites of Ukraine, the radiation data provided by the State Specialized Enterprise Chernobyl nuclear power plant has not been fully updated since the morning of February 25, 2022. The data from the Chernobyl site recorded an exceptional jump in the radiation counts of 65500 nSv/h at 21:50 on February 24. Another concerning increase of 93000 nSv/h was recorded at 10:40 on February 25.

On February 28, 2022, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued a statement that:

‘Last week, Ukraine informed the IAEA that Russian forces had taken control of the facilities of the State Specialized Enterprise Chornobyl NPP, located within the Exclusion Zone set up after the 1986 accident. The regulator said today that the shift supervisor at the site had not been replaced since 24 February but that he continued to perform his duties. SNRIU (State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate of Ukraine) also provided radiation readings from the site which the IAEA assessed as low and in line with near background levels.’

The IAEA statement does not provide an explanation for the exceptional jump in the radiation counts that were recorded on February 24 and February 25.

On February 27, 2022, the IAEA published an update that:

Ukraine informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) today that missiles hit the site of a radioactive waste disposal facility in Kyiv overnight, but there were no reports of damage to the building or any indications of a radioactive release.

The IAEA also highlighted that a similar incident also took place in another city:

An electrical transformer at a similar disposal facility near the north-eastern city of Kharkiv had been damaged, also without any reports of a radioactive release. Such facilities typically hold disused radioactive sources and other low-level waste from hospitals and industry.

Beyond Nuclear recently published the following concerns related to nuclear facilities in Ukraine:

- (1) The 15 operating reactors in Ukraine — located at Rivne (4), Khmelnytsky (2), South Ukraine (3) and Zaporizhzhia (6) — are all vulnerable to catastrophic meltdown, even if they are not directly attacked or accidentally hit.
- (2) Of even greater concern are the fuel pools containing irradiated fuel rods, which are unprotected by the containment building. Fuel pools contain far more radioactivity than the reactor itself and a fire would release even greater amounts of radiation.
- (3) A war zone could also create a dangerous environment for the nuclear workforce and their families, tempting some to evacuate. But a nuclear power plant, even under daily, routine operations, is not walkaway safe and cannot be abandoned.

Damaged nuclear power plants or radioactive storage sites could result in devastating radioactive impacts in the region.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call on the IAEA to:

1. Determine who is currently responsible for the operation and the radiation safety of the Chernobyl site and investigate their degree of technical capability to deal with nuclear emergencies;
2. Conduct assessments to identify the necessity to send additional nuclear technicians to maintain the safety of the Chernobyl site;
3. Investigate and establish the status of Ukraine’s 15 reactor sites, to ensure their continued operation under qualified personnel;
4. Ensure transparency and protect the right to information of local people by promptly publishing all relevant data and information, in the local language and English, regarding the radiation safety of all nuclear facilities and nuclear power plants in Ukraine; and,

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5. Request member states of the IAEA, in particular those of all parties to the conflict, to refrain from any military or other action that could threaten the nuclear safety and security of nuclear facilities in the conflict zone.

Sincerely,

Endorsed by
Beyond Nuclear
Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility
Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, Japan
DiaNuke.org
Manhattan Project for a Nuclear-Free World
Nuclear Free Local Authorities
Ontario Clean Air Alliance
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
Veterans For Peace Golden Rule Project
Veterans For Peace Linus Pauling Chapter 132 Corvallis-Albany, OR
World BEYOND War

Notes to Editors

Links to recent statements from the IAEA

<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/update-3-iaea-director-general-statement-on-situation-in-ukraine>

<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/update-4-iaea-director-general-statement-on-situation-in-ukraine>

Link to a briefing issued by the Nuclear Free Local Authorities

<https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/briefings/nfla-policy-briefing-227-the-potential-impact-of-the-conflict-in-ukraine-on-nuclear-power-plants-and-potential-nuclear-escalation/>

ⁱ <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/iaea-director-generals-introductory-statement-to-the-board-of-governors-9-september-2024>

ⁱⁱ Ditto

ⁱⁱⁱ A useful infographic:

Nuclear Free Local Authorities

Councils working for a renewable, safe and peaceful future



SEVEN INDISPENSABLE PILLARS

FOR ENSURING NUCLEAR SAFETY AND SECURITY DURING AN ARMED CONFLICT

- 1 PHYSICAL INTEGRITY**
The physical integrity of facilities – whether it is the reactors, fuel ponds or radioactive waste stores – must be maintained.
- 2 SAFETY AND SECURITY SYSTEMS AND EQUIPMENT**
All safety and security systems and equipment must be fully functional at all times.
- 3 OPERATING STAFF**
The operating staff must be able to fulfil their safety and security duties and have the capacity to make decisions free of undue pressure.
- 4 OFF-SITE POWER SUPPLY**
There must be a secure off-site power supply from the grid for all nuclear sites.
- 5 LOGISTICAL SUPPLY CHAIN**
There must be uninterrupted logistical supply chains and transportation to and from the sites.
- 6 RADIATION MONITORING AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**
There must be effective on-site and off-site radiation monitoring systems, and emergency preparedness and response measures.
- 7 COMMUNICATION**
There must be reliable communication with the regulator and others.

iv A second useful infographic:

FIVE CONCRETE PRINCIPLES

FOR PROTECTING THE ZNPP

- 1** There should be no attack of any kind from or against the plant, in particular targeting the reactors, spent fuel storage, other critical infrastructure, or personnel.
- 2** The Zaporizhzhya NPP should not be used as storage or a base for heavy weapons (i.e. multiple-rocket launchers, artillery systems and munitions, and tanks) or military personnel that could be used for an attack from the plant.
- 3** Off-site power to the plant should not be put at risk. To that effect, all efforts should be made to ensure that off-site power remains available and secure at all times.
- 4** All structures, systems and components essential to the safe and secure operation of the Zaporizhzhya NPP should be protected from attacks or acts of sabotage, and
- 5** No action should be taken that undermines these principles.

v https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0321.pdf

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR & RENEWABLE ENERGY ISSUES

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