

Statement of Ukraine on the environmental consequences of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine

Dear Chair, distinguished delegates,

Today is the 75th day of a full-scale unprovoked and unjustified war launched by Russia against Ukraine, against Europe and the whole world, in a brutal violation of the UN Charter, the international law, including on nature protection, sustainable development, humanitarian law, basic norms of morality and principles of human coexistence. It is the most horrible and large-scale invasion since the Second World War.

Russia launches horrific missile attacks on residential areas, attacks with aviation, tanks and artillery, sends subversion and reconnaissance groups, continuing to destroy Ukrainian cities and villages. Already dozens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians have lost their lives in this war. Quarter of Ukraine's population left their homes to escape constant shelling. And we have all seen the real face of Russian world on the photos from Bucha, the village in the Kyiv region.

Russia's ongoing attack on Ukraine, supported by the republic of Belarus, causing extensive environmental damage, as water supply, sewage systems and communications are targeted, port infrastructure along the coasts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov is attacked, and nature and biosphere reserves and national nature parks have suffered significant losses.

According to the UNICEF, more than seven weeks of war in Ukraine have devastated both water and electricity networks, over 6 million people in Ukraine are struggling every day to have drinking water, one of the most essential human needs.

Nuclear threats and radioactive pollution are still of a top concern.

In the first days of the invasion, Russian military forces occupied **Chornobyl exclusion zone**.

The radioactive pollution **rose by seven times** due to hundreds of trucks and tanks, which passed through contaminated areas, spraying radioactive dust into the air.

Chornobyl is a place where explosion of nuclear powerplant happened in 1986 leading to a long-lasting and globally spread radioactive pollution. Now the zone additionally has nuclear fuel storage and other nuclear waste.

For several weeks there was no connection of the Chornobyl zone with IAEA and there were problems with electricity, which put at risk operation of key equipment.

When Russian troops left, we learned that they destroyed the laboratory for monitoring for radioactive pollution, stole 133 hazardous sources of radiation. They even were digging trenches in the highly contaminated area.

Now Chornobyl is under Ukrainian control. However, since March 4, Russian troops occupied the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant - the biggest operating nuclear powerplant in Europe.

Russians burned the office building of NPP to the ground and shelled the confinement of the first reactor unit.

Heavy weapons are still on the territory of the Zaporizhzhya NPP, and the dam of the Kakhovka Reservoir nearby is mined.

Staff of the Zaporizhzhya NPP is working under huge psychological pressure.

On April 22, the State Enterprise “Energoatom” published evidence of a Russian cruise missile flying over the Pivdennoukrainska (South Ukraine) nuclear power station. On April 25, two cruise missiles fired by the Russian military were observed over the Khmelnytsky NPP cooling reservoir.

Whatever intended action or unintended mistake can lead to huge environmental catastrophe.

Ukraine is a large, industrial country with thousands of industrial sites, dozens of dams, and other environmentally sensitive objects. Many dangerous industrial enterprises and facilities have been hit, including chemical and metallurgical plants, refineries, oil and fuel depots, chemicals warehouses emitting toxic chemicals. Targeted strikes are carried out on oil depots, causing large-scale fires. Russians are also using incendiary weapons with white phosphorus.

There is direct impact on nature and biodiversity. More than one-third of the total territory of protected areas has been damaged by military activities, passage, or continued presence of heavy machinery.

Impacts on **climate change mitigation** would be huge in Ukraine as enormous amounts of GHG emissions were embedded in numerous destroyed military equipment, buildings and infrastructure, which now have to be rebuilt.

While Ukraine reaffirms its commitments to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, we would like to stress that our priority – for all countries of the region - should be the restoration of peace in the region. Which is only possible when Russia will withdraw its troops from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Therefore:

1. We support the inclusion of the paragraph on condemnation of Russia's unjustified barbaric war against Ukraine and its negative local and global impacts on the environment in the outcome documents of upcoming Ministerial Conference.
2. Considering the gravity of the situation and its long-lasting effects, we call on members to discuss the issue of negative environmental impact of the Russian aggression on Ukraine and beyond its borders at the Ministerial Conference.
3. We call on member states to approve embargo on imports of Russian fossil and nuclear energy as soon as possible, since Russian regime and this war to a large extent is funded with fossil fuel exports to Europe and other countries.
4. Ukraine condemns the support of Belarus to the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, as there no doubts that the territory of Belarus has been actively used for Russian military purposes. Thus, Ukraine will oppose nominations of Belarus officials to any leadership and expert positions within the framework of UNECE.
5. We also ask members to consider further possible consolidated steps to evaluate environmental damage to Ukraine caused by the Russian aggression and approve the concrete measures on technical assistance to Ukraine in restoration of its environment and protected areas to ensure further promotion of sustainable development.

To conclude I would like to thank those countries who clearly stated their solidarity with Ukraine condemning Russian actions and call on those members, who are still hesitant, to stand with Ukraine in this fight for democratic principles and safe future for all Europe.