



Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY ESTHER VAN NES, CHARGÉE D'AFFAIRES
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1461st MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 February 2024

Madame Chair,

On 11 February, a Russian missile attack on Kharkiv killed seven people, including – as just described by the Ukrainian delegation - an entire family with three children: Oleksiy, 7 years old, Mykhailo, 4 years old, and the youngest, Pavlo, only 7 months old. Fifty-seven residents have reportedly lost their homes and all their possessions.

Daily reports of death, destruction and suffering in Ukraine caused by the Russian Federation are intolerable. We cannot become desensitized to them - these are the stories of human beings and human suffering.

These reports are a constant reminder for us that the Russian Federation bears full responsibility for this war, and for its impact on the people of Ukraine.

Madame Chair,

We remain deeply concerned by the nuclear safety and security risks at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant caused by Russia's seizure and militarization of the site.

During his fourth visit to the site last week, Director General of the IAEA Rafael Grossi warned against complacency towards the very real dangers that face the plant. These dangers are a direct result of Russia's war of aggression.

In the last two years, the plant has lost all its off-site power eight times and has been forced to rely on a network of wells to cool its reactors instead of the Kakhovka dam's reservoir, which was destroyed during the aggression.

Most recently, Russian operators of the plant announced that remaining Ukrainian staff who have not signed an employment contract with the Russian operating company would no longer be permitted to access the plant. This has placed additional strain on an already diminishing pool of qualified personnel able to service the plant.

Russia's war against Ukraine has put us all in danger of potentially catastrophic consequences.

It is Canada's firm position that ZNPP is a Ukrainian nuclear facility. The only way to ensure nuclear safety and security at the facility is to immediately return full control of the plant to the competent Ukrainian authorities.

We reiterate our call on Russia to cease all actions at and against nuclear facilities in Ukraine in line with resolutions of the IAEA Board of Governors and General Conference.

Madame Chair,

During an event on Tuesday this week, we heard from wives of detained Ukrainian servicemen who were protecting the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. They are unaware of their husbands' whereabouts. They are denied contact with them. We asked them what they would tell the Ambassador of Russia if he were in the room.

They said they wanted Russia to stop the war. To withdraw its forces from Ukraine. To release their family members and all Ukrainian Prisoners of War, and to return all Ukrainian children who were deported to the Russian Federation.

We fully agree and call on Russia to do so.

Madame Chair,

Russia continues to use threatening nuclear rhetoric, as they have done since the early days of the full-scale war. Such rhetoric is an irresponsible scare tactic that seeks to undermine global support for Ukraine.

We are also deeply concerned by credible reports that the Russian Federation used riot control agents as a means of warfare against Ukraine. Doing so is a violation of the foremost article of the Chemical Weapons Convention to which Russia is a Party.

It has already been established that Russia used a Novichok nerve agent in the UK in 2018 in an assassination attempt on Sergei and Yulia Skripal, and Russia has refused to credibly answer questions about the attempted assassination of opposition politician Alexei Navalny on its own territory in 2020.

It is not at all surprising that States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention ousted Russia from the OPCW's governing body.

Madame Chair,

Russia continues to show a disregard for its obligations under international law and for its OSCE commitments and it continues to threaten the security of our region.

We support Ukraine's right to self-defense. Russia started this unprovoked, unjustifiable, and illegal aggression, and bears full responsibility for its terrible consequences.

We are with Ukraine now, and we always will be.

Thank you, Madame Chair.