IAEA Director General's Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors

Vienna, Austria

We are meeting today to discuss the nuclear safety, security and safeguards implications of the conflict in Ukraine as a result of the Russian Federation's military operation that began on 24 February.

The situation in Ukraine is unprecedented and I continue to be gravely concerned. It is the first time a military conflict is happening amidst the facilities of a large, established nuclear power programme, which in this case also include the site of the 1986 accident at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

The safety and security of nuclear facilities, and nuclear and other radioactive material in Ukraine must under no circumstances be endangered.

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I have called for restraint from all measures or actions that could jeopardize the security of nuclear and other radioactive material, and the safe operation of any nuclear facilities in Ukraine, because any such incident could have severe consequences, aggravating human suffering and causing environmental harm.

In this context it is also imperative to ensure that the brave people who operate, regulate, inspect and assess the nuclear facilities in Ukraine can continue to do their indispensable jobs safely, unimpeded and without undue pressure.

From the beginning of the conflict, the IAEA has been monitoring the safety and security of Ukraine's nuclear facilities. Through the IAEA's Incident and Emergency Centre [IEC], we have been receiving updates from our counterpart

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at the State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate of Ukraine [SNRIU], allowing us to publish regular updates on our website. You've seen update number 6 just now.

Despite the extraordinary circumstances of an armed conflict causing increasing challenges and dangers, Ukraine's nuclear power plants are operating normally.

But while we may use expressions like "normal operations" in a technical context, I want to emphasise that there is nothing normal about the circumstances under which the professionals at the four nuclear power plants are managing to keep the reactors that produce half of Ukraine's electricity working.

Russia informed us yesterday that its military forces have taken control of the territory around Ukraine's Zaporozhnya [sic][i] Nuclear Power Plant, Ukraine's

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largest nuclear power plant, which houses six of the country's 15 nuclear power reactors.

It is of critical importance that the armed conflict and activities on the ground around Zaporozhnya [sic][ii] Nuclear Power Plant and any other of Ukraine's nuclear facilities in no way interrupts or endangers the facilities or the people working at or around them.

Russian forces have taken control of all facilities at the State Specialized Enterprise Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant, located, as you know, within the Exclusion Zone. No casualties or destruction at the industrial site were reported. While increased levels of radiation were initially measured at the site, likely due to the movement of heavy military vehicles disturbing the soil, the IAEA assessed that they remained low enough not to pose a hazard to the public.

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It is of utmost importance that the staff working at the Specialized Enterprise Chornobyl are able to do their job safely and effectively, and that their personal wellbeing is guaranteed by those who have taken control.

Yesterday, I received a letter from the SNRIU - the Ukrainian regulator - requesting me to extend immediate assistance to ensure the safety of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant and other nuclear facilities in the country. I am conducting consultations in order to address this request for assistance.

Mr. Chairperson,

On Sunday, the SNRIU informed the Agency that Russian missiles had hit the site of a radioactive waste disposal facility in Kyiv overnight. There were no reports of damage to the building or any indications of a radioactive release.

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The strike came a day after the regulator said 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.

The two incidents highlight the risk that facilities with radioactive material may suffer damage during the armed conflict, with potentially severe consequences.

In this context, it is necessary and urgent to renew an appeal to all States, without exception, to reaffirm their commitment to upholding international law and to fulfilling the obligation they agreed to when the IAEA General Conference unanimously adopted a decision in 2009 to reaffirm resolutions adopted already

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in 1985 and 1990, stating that, and I quote, “any armed attack on and threat against nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful purposes constitutes a violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter, international law and the Statute of the Agency”. Today, ladies and gentlemen, this commitment acquires a sense of profound moral significance.

Mr. Chairperson,

A nuclear accident can have a serious impact beyond the borders of the country in which it occurs and the world is relying on the IAEA to keep it informed with accurate and timely information.

A key source of information for the Agency is the Ukrainian regulator, which I mentioned. Ukraine’s ability to provide accurate and complete data on the safety and security of the operation of all nuclear facilities in Ukraine should not

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be interrupted, impeded or influenced. This is particularly critical during an armed conflict, which heightens the risk of nuclear accidents, and makes the response more difficult.

At the heart of nuclear safety are the three main safety functions: containment, control and cooling. And, in concrete terms, what this means:

1. The physical integrity of the facilities – whether it is the reactors, fuel ponds, or radioactive waste stores - must be maintained.

2. All safety and security systems and equipment must be fully functional at all times.

3. The operating staff must be able to fulfil their safety and security duties, and have the capacity to make decisions free of undue pressure.

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4. There must be secure off-site power supply from the grid for all nuclear sites.

5. There must be uninterrupted logistical supply chains and transportation to and from the sites.

6. There must be effective on-site and off-site radiation monitoring systems and emergency preparedness and response measures.

7. And finally, there must be reliable communications with the regulator and others.

Mr. Chairperson,

So far, I have described the Agency's monitoring of the safety and security of Ukraine's nuclear sites. As regards safeguards, let me inform you that

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safeguards in Ukraine are under the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and the Additional Protocol of Ukraine, and that the Agency's safeguards activities are ongoing. I will continue to keep the Board apprised of the Agency's fulfilment of its mandate with regards to nuclear safety, security and safeguards in Ukraine.

The IAEA's unique mandate makes it the sole independent international technical organisation providing regular updates on the safety and security of Ukraine's nuclear facilities. At a time of great uncertainty, this aspect of our work is indispensable.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me end by saying this: I enumerated a number of technical things, and I'm sure you will be discussing these and other things, and I am going to be

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working hard on them as well, but the best action to ensure the safety and security of Ukraine's nuclear facilities and its people would be for this armed conflict to end now.

Thank you.

[i] El orador dice erróneamente "Zaporozhnya". El topónimo correcto sería "Zaporizhzhya" (Запоріжжя), en la versión ucraniana, o "Zaparozhye" (Запорожье), en la versión rusa.
[ii] Véase la nota anterior.

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