



THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP  
Global Security  
and Non-Proliferation



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United Nations

## Summary of APPG Meeting: Safeguarding Civil Nuclear Facilities During Conflict

*Written by Anahita Parsa, BASIC, on behalf of the APPG on Global Security and Non-Proliferation, and the All Party Parliamentary Group on the United Nations.*

On Thursday 13th October 2022, the APPG on Global Security and Non-proliferation and the APPG on the United Nations jointly hosted an APPG meeting on 'Safeguarding Civil Nuclear Facilities During Conflict', chaired by Lord Hannay of Chiswick. The meeting was joined by speakers Sarah Price, Head of the Counter Proliferation and Arms Control Centre, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, and Alberto Muti, Programme Co-Director, Verification and Monitoring Team, VERTIC.

The briefing reflected on the crisis in Ukraine, and the current situation regarding the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant. The ongoing conflict, particularly the heavy shelling within the direct area of the plant, has posed a serious threat to the safety and security of the nuclear facility.

The situation at the nuclear facility has raised uncertainty and concerns. Amongst the greatest worries in regards to the safety and security of the plant, is the risk of shelling causing continued damage to the power supplies. So far, back-up generators have been successful in responding to damage, though this might not be the case if attacks on the lines are more severe, or in multiple locations at once. Whilst shelling has not directly hit any of the buildings- which are built to be resilient to such attacks, there is uncertainty about whether either side might directly target any buildings at the facility.

Beyond this, there is a great concern with regards to the wellbeing of the staff onsite. Staff have struggled under coercive pressure, and an 'already stressful' job of ensuring the safe practice of the plant has become more difficult. They have often been unable to rotate on shifts, increasing the risk of human error, alongside impeded communications, and limited autonomy onsite due to the external situation- all of which can have dangerous implications for monitoring and safety.

The concerns raised by the ongoing situation highlight the inadequacy of international rules in safeguarding civil nuclear facilities during conflicts specifically. Furthermore, it raises questions

on how to respond to any lack of commitment by some states, to any currently-existing rules. Lessons learnt from other disasters, such as the Chernobyl Disaster of 1986, have made us

aware of just how devastating the humanitarian impacts of any nuclear catastrophe can be. The uncertainty around the ZNPP reminds us again of the need to develop an effective framework to mitigate these risks sooner, rather than later.

This risk may grow greater as the use of peaceful nuclear technology spreads, with a higher number of civil nuclear installations being located in potential conflict zones. Therefore, there is a need to make the world safe to facilitate the constructive use of civil nuclear facilities. Different international forums have sought to do so, but the focus of safeguarding has often been on very basic questions of safety, and in terms of security, has focused on the threats posed by non-state actors. Little has been done in relation to states, and the context of a conflict zone.

The briefing noted the steps taken by the IAEA, and its Director, Rafael Mariano Grossi, to mitigate the lack of policy on the issue at hand. Grossi's '7 Pillars' have offered guidelines on how to safeguard the ZNPP in the current situation. He has also attempted to declare a 'security protection zone' around the plant. Questions arise, however, on how to practically apply these pillars to a warzone- there are few measures to monitor or enforce them, which causes significant limitations to effectively safeguarding nuclear facilities in conflict zones, such as in the case of the ZNPP.

Since there has not been much focus on the issue until the recent context, much of the policy being developed in terms of establishing meaningful safeguarding mechanisms for civil nuclear facilities is currently being made in the midst of a conflict. This has raised obstacles in responses to such crises. More importantly, close attention should be paid to the action taken in the current context, because it may well set a precedent for other potential conflicts, offering a framework on how to respond to similar incidents in the future. The possibility no doubt remains, that future contexts may well be quite different from the situation facing the ZNPP, and so may require different approaches. Reflections must be made to consider all possibilities, plan for the future, and practice effective and meaningful safeguarding in the interests of preventing further nuclear catastrophes.