August 24, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As a bipartisan group of experts on nuclear nonproliferation, many of whom have served in both Democratic and Republican administrations, we urge you to prioritize responding to Russia’s illegal seizure and mistreatment of Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and its staff. The most immediate priority should be ensuring the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) can visit the plant to ensure its operations are safe and secure.

As you know, the Russian military seized ZNPP, Europe’s largest nuclear power plant, in early March. Russia reportedly has since deployed additional forces there, using the facility as a base from which to shell nearby Ukrainian positions and population centers, knowing the Ukrainian military cannot risk responding in kind.

Moscow’s actions risk causing a transnational radiological disaster. Russian forces occupying ZNPP have reportedly subjected the plant’s workers to torture, interrogation, and other undue stress that could jeopardize vital safety functions. The Russia military’s reported shelling of the facility and damage caused to the complex have further threatened the safety and security of the plant and its surroundings.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has aptly described Russia’s actions as “suicidal” and on August 11 underscored the urgent need for an “agreement … at a technical level on a safe perimeter of demilitarization to ensure the safety of the area.” Nevertheless, Russia reportedly is planning a long-term occupation of ZNPP and intends to connect the facility to the electric grid in Russian-controlled territory in Ukraine.

We, the undersigned, commend the August 10 statement by the G7 foreign ministers, which demanded that Russia “immediately hand back full control” of ZNPP “to its rightful sovereign owner … to ensure [the plant’s] safe and secure operations.” We support the IAEA request to access the plant, and demand that Russia vacate the facility.

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi recently emphasized “the urgent need for the IAEA to be able to send an expert mission to carry out essential nuclear safety, security and safeguards work there.” Despite recently pledging to facilitate the visit, Moscow continues to drag its feet, citing alleged security concerns with the IAEA delegation’s traveling through Kyiv, as the Ukrainian government wants.

We urge you to work closely with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, UN Secretary-General Guterres, and IAEA Director General Grossi to secure an IAEA visit based on the agency’s long record of impartiality and neutrality. We agree with your ambassador to the IAEA, Laura S.H. Holgate, that such a visit should “occur in a manner that fully respects Ukrainian sovereignty and legitimate Ukrainian authorities, and the IAEA must not lend any legitimacy to Russia’s actions or control of the site.”
There is no place in the 21st century for the illegal seizure and use of a nuclear facility to terrorize a population. At this nuclear facility devoted to peaceful purposes, atomic scientists, technicians, and other staff must remain free to focus on their critical work. In addition, the IAEA must be granted immediate access to ensure the plant’s safety and security.

We know you share our serious concern about Russia’s reckless behavior and infringement of its nuclear safety and security obligations and the human rights of ZNPP’s staff. We hope you will take urgent action to help secure the IAEA visit to prevent a potential humanitarian and ecological disaster.

Sincerely,  

David Albright, Founder and President of the Institute for Science and International Security

Michael Allen, former National Security Council (NSC) Senior Director for Counterproliferation Strategy

Mariana Budjeryn, Senior Research Associate, Project on Managing the Atom, Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center

Susan Burk, Independent Consultant, and former Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation

Mark Dubowitz, Chief Executive, Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD)

Richard Goldberg, Senior Advisor, FDD

Lisa E. Gordon-Hagerty, former Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and Under Secretary of Energy for Nuclear Security

Robert Einhorn, Brookings, former Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation

Christopher Ford, MITRE Fellow and Director of the Center for Strategic Competition, Visiting Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, former Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation

Olli Heinonen, Distinguished Fellow, Stimson Center, and former Deputy Director General, IAEA

Larry D. Johnson, former Legal Adviser, IAEA

Robert Joseph, former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security

Ambassador (ret.) Laura Kennedy, former acting U.S. representative to the Vienna Office of the United Nations and acting U.S. representative to the IAEA

1 Affiliations listed for identification purposes only.
Orde Kittrie, Senior Fellow, FDD, Law Professor at Arizona State University, and former State Department lead attorney for nuclear affairs (Co-organizer)

Gregory D. Koblentz, Associate Professor and Director, Biodefense Graduate Program, Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University, and former Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations

Valerie Lincy, Executive Director, Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control

Brent Park, former Deputy Administrator, NNSA and former Associate Laboratory Director at Oak Ridge National Laboratory

Stephen Rademaker, former Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security and Nonproliferation

Bennett Ramberg, author of Nuclear Power Plants as Weapons for the Enemy: An Unrecognized Military Peril, University of California Press, and former State Department foreign affairs officer

Laura Rockwood, former Senior Legal Advisor, IAEA

Anthony Ruggiero, Senior Director and Senior Fellow, FDD’s Nonproliferation and Biodefense Program, and former NSC Senior Director for Counterproliferation and Biodefense (Co-organizer)

Gary Samore, Professor of the Practice of Politics and Director of the Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, and former NSC Coordinator for Arms Control and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Henry Sokolski, Executive Director, Nonproliferation Policy Education Center and former Deputy for Nonproliferation Policy, Department of Defense

Sharon Squassoni, Research professor, George Washington University, and former State Department and Arms Control and Disarmament Agency official

Andrea Stricker, Deputy Director and Research Fellow, FDD’s Nonproliferation and Biodefense Program (Co-organizer)

Jackie Wolcott, Chair, FDD’s Nonproliferation and Biodefense Program, and former U.S. representative to the Vienna Office of the United Nations and the U.S. representative to the IAEA