

U.N. watchdog warns of ‘nuclear disaster’ from shelling at Zaporizhzhia plant

4 min

By Praveena Somasundaram

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The United Nations nuclear chief warned of a potential “nuclear disaster” after shelling of Europe’s largest atomic power plant, once again urging Russia and Ukraine to allow access to the facility to help secure it.

The shelling of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southeastern Ukraine highlights the potential for “catastrophic consequences” from attacks on and near the facility, Rafael Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said in a [statement](#) on Saturday.

“Military action jeopardizing the safety and security of the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant is completely unacceptable and must be avoided at all costs,” Grossi’s statement said.




After the shelling Friday, Russia and Ukraine placed blame on one another for the attack. The facility near the front lines of fighting, has been under Russian control since March, according to Ukrainians.

In his nightly [address](#) Friday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky noted the shelling on Zaporizhzhia as another reason Russia should be recognized as a “state sponsor of terrorism,” a term repeatedly called for.

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Zelensky also argued for sanctions against Russia’s nuclear industry.

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“This is purely a matter of safety,” he said. “The one who creates nuclear threats to other nations is definitely not capable of using nuclear technologies safely.”

In turn, Russia’s Defense Ministry has accused Ukraine of the attack, stating that protection by Russian-backed forces was the reason the plant was not more extensively damaged. Two power lines and a water pipeline, leaving more than 10,000 residents without water and electricity, the Defense Ministry’s statement said.

Russia originally seized the facility after one of its projectiles caused a fire in the plant’s complex, igniting concerns about the safety of Ukraine’s four nuclear sites that have since.

“The Ukrainian staff operating the plant under Russian occupation must be able to carry out their important duties without threats or pressure undermining not only their own facility itself,” Grossi said in his statement.

The American Nuclear Society supported Grossi’s calls to halt attacks on the facility and to send a mission there, condemning the shelling in a statement Saturday.

“It is unjustifiable for a civil nuclear facility to be used as a military base or be targeted in a military operation,” said the organization’s president, Steven Arndt, and chief execut

The shelling on Friday did not damage any of Zaporizhzhia’s six reactors and did not release radioactive material to the environment, according to Grossi, but the plant sustaine

He added that an IAEA mission to the nuclear power plant would allow inspectors to assess it and gather information independent of reports from Ukraine and Russia.

But the situation around Zaporizhzhia is likely to grow more, not less, perilous, according to the British Defense Ministry because the heaviest fighting is shifting in the power p

The IAEA has been working for months to ensure the safety of Ukraine’s nuclear sites. In April, Grossi led a mission to the country’s Chernobyl plant — the site of one of the wo
disasters in 1986 — after Russian-backed forces withdrew from it in March.

He led a follow-up mission to the site in early June, with experts who assessed its status and provided training on radiation monitoring equipment. A similar mission to Zaporiz
“crucial” for its security.

“But this will need the cooperation, understanding and facilitation from both Ukraine and Russia,” he said, adding that U.N. Secretary General António Guterres supported the

Grossi was in New York on Monday for the 10th Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons review conference. In his keynote speech, he discussed the IAEA’s “seven
and security, which include facilities’ physical integrity, reliable communication with regulators, and the ability for staff to work safely.

Those pillars, Grossi said in his statement, had been violated at Zaporizhzhia — during Friday’s shelling and in the months since Russia’s invasion.

“We can’t afford to lose any more time,” he said. “For the sake of protecting people in Ukraine and elsewhere from a potential nuclear accident, we must all set aside our differe