

SEMINAR

"ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY IN WAR AND ARMED CONFLICT"

November 6, 2024, New York, UN Headquarters



Conference Hall of the United Nations Headquarters



Participants of the seminar, representatives of governments, political circles, and civil organizations from over 20 countries worldwide

Among the statutory tasks of the Ukrainian Peace Council is addressing the most pressing issues that concern the civil society of Ukraine and impact the well-being of our citizens. In particular, environmental problems, especially critical during wartime, affect the future life and development of the state. Recognizing this as one of the fundamental values for the development and survival of humanity, the Ukrainian Peace Council, in close cooperation with the Council on Environmental Safety, initiated and organized the International Forum “Ecology and Peace” in Kyiv on May 15–16, 2024. The event received widespread recognition both in Ukraine and abroad.

Understanding the importance of this environmental issue, Dr. Kristina K. Durbak, Chair and Founder of the international organization World Information Transfer, reached out to the Ukrainian Peace Council and the Council on Environmental Safety with a proposal to jointly prepare and hold a corresponding environmental event at the UN headquarters. The event was scheduled for November 6, on the day the world observes the "International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict," as per UN Resolution A/RES/56/4.

The Ukrainian Peace Council and the Council on Environmental Safety gratefully accepted this invitation and approached the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine with a proposal to provide organizational support and participate in the event.

Thus, the "Ecological Forum" of the Ukrainian Peace Council, held in May 2024, became the initiator of uniting the efforts of civic, governmental, and international organizations, including the UN, in organizing the seminar "Environmental Security in War and Armed Conflicts" on November 6, 2024, at the UN headquarters in New York, USA. The event was attended by representatives of international organizations, governments, and civil society from over 20 countries worldwide, including:

- Member of Parliament and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland **Mr. Pekka Haavisto**;
- Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN **Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya**;
- Permanent Representative of Finland to the UN **Ms. Elina Kalkku**;
- Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine **Ms. Svitlana Hrynychuk**;
- Minister of Climate and the Environment of Finland **Mr. Kai Mykkänen**;
- Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) **Dr. Jamil Ahmad**;
- Chair and Founder of the international organization World Information Transfer **Dr. Kristina K. Durbak**;
- Director General of the New York Office of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) **Ms. Vivian Okkake**;
- Chair of the Ukrainian Peace Council **Mr. Mykhailo Zgurovsky**;
- Advocacy Advisor for the NGO PAX (Netherlands) **Ms. Brittany Roser**.

During the concluding discussion, representatives from UN member countries, including Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Lithuania, France, Latvia, and the EU, made statements.

The organization and conduct of the seminar were supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, as well as the Permanent Missions of Ukraine, Finland, Germany, and Bulgaria to the UN. Significant contributions to preparing the event were made by members of the Ukrainian Peace Council and the Council on Environmental Safety: Valeriy Tsybukh, Yuriy Sergeyev, Yuriy Shcherbak, Volodymyr Novokhatsky, Natalia Vynnyk, Serhiy Orekhov, Ihor Vitenko, Eduard Ryabyi, and others. Natalia Vynnyk, representing the Ukrainian Peace Council, and Ihor Vitenko, representing the Council on Environmental Safety, participated in the event in person.

The Ukrainian Peace Council continues its work, focusing on pressing issues of Ukraine's post-war economic recovery, the humanitarian and social spheres, and the mental health of the nation, engaging national specialists and experts from various countries worldwide.

The video recording of the event is available at: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k17/k17k7fakgw>. On the day of the event, it was possible to follow the seminar live online. A detailed report on this event was also published in the

Ukrainian national newspaper for scientists and educators Svit: <https://svit.kpi.ua/en/2024/11/11/un-seminar-environmental-security-in-war-and-armed-conflict/>. Information about the seminar's content and the text of the speech by Mykhailo Zgurovsky, Head of the Ukrainian Peace Council, are provided below.



Chairperson Mr. Pekka Haavisto (Finland) and Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya

The event was moderated by Mr. Pekka Haavisto, a member of parliament and former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland. In his opening remarks, he emphasized that environmental security is one of the key challenges for the international community, citing examples of the devastating impacts of war on nature in Syria, Afghanistan, Liberia, Sudan, and other regions of the world. He stressed the importance of uniting efforts to implement Point 8 of Ukraine's peace formula. Environmental violations during war contradict international law and require international support. The global community must assist Ukraine in assessing the damage, developing response measures, legally evaluating and documenting instances of environmental crimes for future compensation and accountability, as well as restoring the environment through reclamation, demining, reforestation, creation of protected areas, and water purification. Environmental security demands coordinated efforts from states, international organizations, and society for sustainable recovery and the protection of nature, ensuring peace and prosperity for future generations.

Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya and Permanent Representative of Finland to the UN Ms. Elina Kalkku, in their opening speeches, highlighted the global environmental consequences of the war in Ukraine.



Speech by the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN, Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya

Sergiy Kyslytsya expressed gratitude to the seminar organizers, representatives of Finland, Germany, Bulgaria, Ukraine, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, and international organizations, emphasizing that Russia's aggression has caused irreparable damage to Ukraine's environment. The seizure of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, constant attacks on energy and industrial infrastructure, dam demolitions, and water and soil pollution have led to catastrophic consequences for nature and people. In 2024 alone, over 24,000 hectares of forest were destroyed by fires, releasing 180 million tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere – equivalent to the annual emissions of over 90 million cars, posing a threat to other countries due to the transboundary nature of these threats. He called on the international community to actively support Ukraine in environmental recovery by providing assistance and conducting legal assessments of the damage.



Speech by the Permanent Representative of Finland to the UN Ms. Elina Kalkku

Elina Kalkku emphasized that on the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War, representatives from various countries gathered at the UN to support Ukraine, which is fighting for its sovereignty, while other countries also suffer from war-related destruction, including Sudan, the Palestinian territories, and others. She reminded that lasting peace cannot be built on foreign domination or dictation. Today's event followed a high-level working group meeting attended by the Prime Minister of Ukraine.

During the seminar, video materials prepared by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine were shown, illustrating the environmental losses caused by the war. A panel discussion chaired by Pekka Haavisto brought together representatives from different countries, international organizations, and experts.



**Speech by the Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine
Svitlana Hrynychuk**

The Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, Svitlana Hrynychuk, stressed that today, Europe's environmental security is inseparable from its military security. Ukraine's experience and the registration of environmental damage confirm this. As a result of military actions, the natural environment of the country has suffered damage exceeding \$71 billion. More than 10,000 missiles have been launched at infrastructure, including energy facilities and residential buildings. In October 2024 alone, Russians launched 2,000 drones at these facilities. There is substantial evidence of environmental destruction in occupied territories, ranging from illegal land use to the removal of animals from the Askania-Nova reserve. The minister also presented Ukraine's efforts to implement European environmental protection standards as part of its EU integration and emphasized that Ukraine, acting in line with the eighth point of its peace formula, is doing everything possible to mitigate the environmental consequences of the war, including land clearing, forest restoration, and the creation of protected areas.



Speech by the Minister of Climate and Environment of Finland, Mr. Kai Mykkänen

The Minister of Climate and Environment of Finland, Mr. Kai Mykkänen, emphasized that Ukraine is defending its right to exist as a sovereign nation while also fighting against colonialism on behalf of the entire democratic world. He stated: “It is a great honor for me to report on the international conference on environmental security held in Helsinki on October 19, 2024. It was a pleasure to share this conference with my colleague, the Ukrainian Minister Svitlana Hrynychuk. During the conference, we identified four key aspects of this issue: assessing the damage and destruction of Ukraine’s natural environment, ensuring accountability for inflicted damage, restoring the environment damaged by the war, and enhancing resilience to climate change and future environmental disasters. Based on President Zelensky’s Peace Formula, we support the work of the international group on these matters, which completed the first stage of its work in February 2024. The group continues to assist the Ukrainian government in implementing environmental recommendations.”



**Speech by the Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP),
Dr. Jamil Ahmad**

The Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Dr. Jamil Ahmad, spoke about the role of the UN in monitoring the environmental impacts of the war and highlighted the importance of assessing these damages for planning restoration efforts. He noted that UNEP has recently conducted six studies on the impact of military conflicts on the environment in various countries, including Ukraine. Dr. Ahmad mentioned that research had been conducted and a report published on the consequences of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant dam explosion. At the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Berlin (June 11-12, 2024), in cooperation with the German Ministry of the Environment, the OECD, and the UN Economic Commission for Europe, an action platform for Ukraine's green recovery was presented. He noted that Ukraine recently ratified the BRS Conventions (Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions) and is working towards ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as these conventions are important international agreements.



**Speech by Dr. Christine K. Durbak, President and Founder of the international organization
World Information Transfer**

Dr. Christine K. Durbak, Chair and Founder of the international organization World Information Transfer, emphasized that the war in Ukraine has been ongoing for almost 11 years, causing long-term and irreversible damage to the environment and society. This includes deforestation, the destruction of hydroelectric dam facilities, the devastation of major industrial sites, nuclear energy threats, and more. She stressed that the environmental crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine are not isolated incidents but have been enabled by the indifference of international law and institutions. Russia has violated nearly all acts of international environmental law, including the UN Convention No. 92 on Chemical Weapons, the 1976 UN Convention prohibiting the use of environmental modification techniques for military purposes, key articles of the 1977 First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention, and many others. The consequences of these actions constitute crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the International Criminal Court concerning environmental destruction. Dr. Durbak emphasized that only a shift in the international community's approach and a concerted effort to assist Ukraine can stop this destructive process.



Speech by the Director General of the New York Office of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Ms. Vivian Okkake

Vivian Okkake, Director of the New York Office of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), drew attention to the risks associated with nuclear energy in the conflict zone, particularly the situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and highlighted the importance of international monitoring to prevent potential nuclear disasters. She noted that IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi proposed an assistance program to President Volodymyr Zelensky, similar to the support provided to countries after natural disasters and accidents. Such assistance was previously given to Peru in 2022 for cleaning significant areas after an oil spill and to Turkey and Syria in 2023 after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake. The initial assistance for Ukraine amounted to €2.7 million, which was increased by 65% in September 2024. New areas of support for Ukraine are currently being explored to prevent nuclear catastrophes potentially caused by military actions.



Speech by the Chairman of the Ukrainian Peace Council, Mr. Mykhailo Zgurovsky

The Chairman of the Ukrainian Peace Council, Mykhailo Zgurovsky, on behalf of Ukrainian non-governmental organizations — the Ukrainian Peace Council and the Council for Environmental Safety — addressed the global community, urging attention to the scale of environmental destruction in Ukraine, whose consequences extend far beyond the country's borders and pose serious environmental, food, and nuclear threats to the entire world. He emphasized that since the start of the war in 2014, and especially after the full-scale invasion in 2022, more than 300,000 hectares of Ukrainian land have been environmentally contaminated. One of the most serious threats has been the mining of over 170,000 square kilometers of Ukrainian territory, which constitutes about 28% of the country's total area. This mining has not only rendered vast areas of arable land unusable but has also exacerbated the global food crisis, particularly in countries dependent on Ukrainian grain exports. The destruction of over 500,000 hectares of forests and protected areas has led to significant biodiversity loss and increased greenhouse gas emissions, negatively impacting global climate stability. The destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant in 2023 caused the flooding of over 100,000 hectares of land, leaving about one million people without access to drinking water. This has created a risk of transboundary water and air pollution, already affecting Poland and Hungary. The occupation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, shelling, and power supply disruptions pose an unprecedented risk of nuclear catastrophe, whose consequences would have devastating effects on the health, economy, and environment of the entire continent. Mykhailo Zgurovsky stressed that the war is inflicting irreparable harm on the health of Ukrainians, which is why the Ukrainian Peace Council has launched the “Peace and Healthy Ukraine” program, focusing on providing psychological support to wounded soldiers, veterans, and displaced persons. Thanks to the successful Ukrainian startup “Rozмова” platform, more than 750 professional psychologists are already providing support to those affected. Mykhailo Zgurovsky called on the international community for decisive and united

action to end this war, which not only destroys nations but also threatens the ecological stability of the planet.



Speech by PAX Advocacy Advisor Ms. Brittany Roser

Advocacy Advisor for the non-governmental organization PAX (Netherlands), Ms. Brittany Roser, delivered a presentation highlighting the nature and scale of the destruction of Ukraine's natural environment. She emphasized the importance of documenting the damages to understand specific environmental risks, facilitate prompt response and mitigation measures, and enhance emergency preparedness. Documenting these damages is also crucial for incorporating environmental considerations into post-conflict assessments, reconstruction systems, and green recovery planning, as well as for collecting evidence to establish accountability for environmental harm (damage register and proceedings at the International Criminal Court). Additionally, it raises awareness in international policy regarding the environmental aspects of armed conflicts and ecocide.

During the closing discussion, representatives from various UN member states, including Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Lithuania, France, Latvia, and the EU, made statements. They expressed support for Ukraine in overcoming the environmental consequences of the war and stressed the need to hold those responsible for environmental damage accountable during conflicts. The speakers called for coordinated international efforts to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

In conclusion, Chairperson Mr. Pekka Haavisto summarized the seminar. He emphasized the unanimous support of the international community for Point 8 of Ukraine's Peace Formula, aimed at addressing the environmental consequences of the war. The Chair proposed supporting the activities of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine as the coordinator of joint efforts to protect the environment during the war. He underscored the importance of organizing coordinated actions focused on the restoration and protection of Ukraine's environment and holding those responsible for the destruction accountable. He stressed that only global cooperation and increased environmental awareness can help prevent ecological tragedies and ensure a stable and secure existence for future generations.

FULL SPEECH OF MYKHAILO ZGUROVSKY, HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN PEACE COUNCIL, AT THE UN INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR 'ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY IN WAR AND ARMED CONFLICT', November 6, 2024, New York, UN Headquarters

Distinguished participants of the conference, representatives of the United Nations, international community, and all who care about the future of our planet!

On behalf of Ukrainian non-governmental organizations — the Ukrainian Peace Council and the Council on Environmental Safety — allow me to express our deep gratitude for the opportunity to address you. It is a great honor for us to be invited to this esteemed forum.

We extend our sincere thanks to the co-organizers of the conference — the Permanent Missions of Finland, Germany, Bulgaria, and Ukraine to the UN, as well as Ukraine's Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, for their significant contribution to organizing this event. Special thanks to Dr. Kristina Durbak, Chair of World Information Transfer, Inc., for her tireless initiative and extensive preparatory work, which made this important meeting possible.

Today, we address the international community with an urgent call to recognize the devastating environmental consequences of Russian aggression in Ukraine. This is not only about the loss of human lives but also about the massive destruction of the environment, with consequences that extend far beyond our country. This war poses severe environmental, food, and nuclear threats to the entire world.

Since the beginning of the war in 2014, and especially after the full-scale invasion in 2022, over 300,000 hectares of Ukrainian land have been environmentally contaminated. Military actions have caused industrial accidents and leaks of hazardous substances from

factories, mines, and oil storage facilities, resulting in the pollution of soil, water resources, and air.

One of the most serious threats is the mining of over 170,000 square kilometers of Ukrainian land, which accounts for about 28% of the country's total area. This mining has not only rendered large areas of arable land unusable but has also intensified the global food crisis, especially in countries that rely on Ukrainian grain exports.

The destruction of over 500,000 hectares of forests and protected areas has led to a significant loss of biodiversity and increased greenhouse gas emissions, which negatively affect global climate stability.

The destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant in 2023 flooded over 100,000 hectares of land, leaving approximately one million people without access to drinking water. This has heightened the risk of spreading dangerous infectious diseases and created a threat of cross-border water and air pollution, already affecting Poland and Hungary.

Particular attention should be paid to the situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which is located in a conflict zone. The occupation, shelling, and power supply interruptions create an unprecedented risk of nuclear disaster, with devastating impacts on the health, economy, and environment of the entire continent.

The war inflicts irreversible damage on the health of Ukrainians. There is a marked increase in respiratory diseases, allergies, cancers, and mental illnesses. The long-term consequences of environmental factors on public health are especially concerning, with the scale of these impacts currently difficult to predict.

The Ukrainian Peace Council has launched the 'Peace and Healthy Ukraine' program, focusing on providing psychological assistance to wounded soldiers, veterans, and internally displaced persons. Thanks to a successful Ukrainian startup — the 'Rozмова' platform — over 750 professional psychologists are providing support to those affected.

Honorable members of the international community! We call for decisive, united actions to end this war, which not only devastates nations but also threatens the ecological stability of our planet. Only through combined efforts can we halt this destructive impact on the environment and secure a safe future for our shared home.

Thank you for your attention.

Glory to Ukraine!