40th anniversary of the Chornobyl disaster: UK statement to the OSCE

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Deputy Ambassador James Ford marked the 40th anniversary of the Chornobyl disaster, honouring those affected and stressing the enduring human and environmental consequences, while warning that Russia's war against Ukraine has revived acute nuclear safety risks across the OSCE region.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

As the Ukrainian Ambassador has noted, this Sunday marks the fortieth anniversary of the Chornobyl disaster, one of the most devastating nuclear disasters in history. And it is right that we pause to remember those who lost their lives, to honour the courage of the first responders and health workers, and to reflect on the profound and lasting human and environmental consequences of the disaster.

Forty years on, Chornobyl remains a powerful symbol of loss. Entire communities were displaced and lives were permanently altered. The health, social and environmental effects extended far beyond the immediate vicinity of the site and continue to affect people across borders and generations. These human realities must remain at the heart of our commemoration.

Chornobyl was also a turning point for the international community. It exposed the catastrophic consequences of secrecy, weak governance and the failure to uphold safety norms. In response, States strengthened nuclear safety standards, reinforced emergency preparedness, and deepened international cooperation. Above all, Chornobyl made clear that nuclear safety is indivisible. An accident in one place can have consequences far beyond national borders.

That lesson is as relevant today as it was in 1986. As we mark this anniversary, we cannot ignore that nuclear safety risks in the OSCE area have once again become acute owing to Russia's illegal war in Ukraine. Power disruptions, security challenges and physical damage across Ukraine's nuclear facilities serve as stark reminders of how fragile even well-established safety arrangements can be when basic norms are ignored.

The conditions required for nuclear safety, stability, transparency, professional operation and respect for international frameworks cannot be taken for granted. When safety norms and international law are disregarded, the risks of miscalculation and escalation grow, with potentially severe and lasting consequences.

Mr Chair, the OSCE's concept of security recognises that military, environmental and human security are deeply interconnected. Nuclear safety sits squarely within this framework. It depends on strong institutions, transparency, cooperation, and respect for sovereignty and international obligations.

The fortieth anniversary of Chornobyl is therefore more than a moment of remembrance. It is a call for vigilance, responsibility and resolve. By honouring those affected by Chornobyl, we reaffirm our shared duty to uphold the principles that protect us all - now and in the future.

Thank you.

https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/40th-anniversary-of-the-chornobyl-disaster-uk-statement-to-the-osce