

Growing risks to security from environmental threats and damage to critical energy infrastructure: UK statement to the OSCE

Thank you, Mr Chair. And many thanks to the speakers for their particularly enlightening presentations on this interesting topic.

I would like to start by thanking you as chair of the Economic and Environmental Committee (EEC) for dedicating a session to a topic that is of utmost importance and relevance to the OSCE. As we have recognised, changes to the environment can affect security, for example, the exacerbating effect of climate change on security, through issues like resource scarcity, crop failure, and driving displacement.

But as we have heard, conversely, conflict and insecurity can have an effect on the environment, via pollution, contamination and degradation – impacting those directly affected by conflict, with spill over consequences for the surrounding regions.

[As Secretary General Helga Schmid said recently](#), we are seeing more and more accounts of the potentially disastrous environmental impacts of President Putin's unprovoked and illegal war in Ukraine. And as always, innocent civilians are paying the heaviest price.

International humanitarian law recognises that some harm to the environment is an inevitable consequence of armed conflict. But it includes provisions on protecting the natural environment and requires warring parties to take the possibility of environmental damage into account – another international obligation that Russia is ignoring.

As the Deputy Minister mentioned earlier, yesterday was International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day. It is with gravest concern that we have witnessed attacks at Ukrainian nuclear facilities. We are deeply concerned over the working conditions at Zaporizhzhya, and until recently, at the Chernobyl site. Ukrainian authorities must have unfettered access to all nuclear facilities on Ukraine's sovereign territory. We stand ready to support Ukraine and work with agencies and expert partners in the UK and internationally to ensure that all risks have been considered. Such risks can spill over to other countries in region – as we saw in 1986, Hungary, Poland, and Scandinavia all endured increased radiation levels following the Chernobyl disaster.

The brutal attacks in Ukraine have shown the environmental damage that militaries can do. But even militaries at peace can have significant environmental impact. In the UK for example, defence accounts for 50% of central government emissions. In future, our armed forces will embrace the

green energy transition, trialling new types of vehicles, fuels standards, and energy storage. Our defence ministry's Climate Change and Sustainability Strategic Approach report sets out how we will do this.

President Putin's war against Ukraine has resulted in the destruction of gas pipelines and thermal and hydroelectric power plants. This damage to energy infrastructure creates insecurities far beyond Ukraine's national borders. In the UK, in response, our Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure – who provide guidance to government and industry on infrastructure vulnerability – have updated their guidance on personnel and physical security, espionage and hostile activity.

Mr Chair, the UK believes that the OSCE will have a role to play in a post-Ukraine conflict environment. For instance, [last year's Decision on security and climate](#) was hard-fought, and provides a solid basis for further work by the OSCE and collaboration between participating States. But as well as damaging the planet, conflicts also divert attention and resources away from addressing existential climate challenges and break down the cooperation needed to address them. We look forward to continuing in this sense of collaboration when this again becomes possible.

President Putin has chosen this war, and so is choosing the international isolation that comes with it. Many countries are limiting their consumption of Russian energy, with the UK planning to phase out imports of Russian oil by the end of this year. Reducing our collective dependence on Putin's oil and gas has a practical as well as moral imperative – we must accelerate the drive for renewables, go twice as fast as we can on wind, and make better use of hydrocarbons.

As the world collectively shows its disgust at President Putin's illegal war of aggression, and stops buying his oil and gas, the Russian state will ultimately be forced to return to one of its most successful international exports – human misery.

Thank you.