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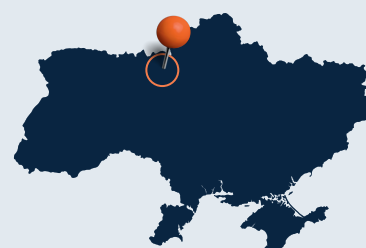
I opened my eyes – it was dark and silent. I thought: That’s it, this is the end. Then I felt my arms and legs. That meant I was alive.

Daria, nurse

Photo: Unsplash

2022:

The occupation of Chernobyl



The site of the 26 April 1986 civilian nuclear disaster, the worst in history, became an early target of Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion, heightening the risk of radioactive hazards. During the occupation, hundreds of Chernobyl nuclear power plant personnel were captured and mistreated, and critical infrastructure was damaged.

ISSUE

- Abuse during occupation
- Disregard of nuclear hazards

CRIMES

- Unlawful detention
- Exposure to radiation
- Kidnapping
- Torture and inhuman treatment



9 March 2022
**The power
plant loses all
off-site power**

24 February 2022
**Russian forces
capture the power
plant**

31 March 2022
**Russian forces
withdraw, taking
the power
plant's national
guards to a
detention centre
in Russia**

The 1986 Chornobyl nuclear disaster caused long-term damage across eastern and northern Europe. As part of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian military forces seized the power plant and its personnel, raising concerns of a new disaster. They also occupied the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which remains under Russian control.

More than 300 staff, including 178 National Guard members, were taken captive from Chornobyl. They were forced to sleep on cold floors, deprived of food and fresh air, exposed to radiation, and subjected to physical and psychological abuse. About two weeks into the occupation, the detainees' health deteriorated as hardships and rising radiation levels took their toll.

After being forced to withdraw from the power plant, Russian troops took 169 National Guard members to the Novozybkov detention centre in Russia. Designed for 300, the facility held more than 600 Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians. They were subjected to beatings, forced squatting exercises, electric shocks, and compelled to shout, "Glory to Russia." There were instances of people being forced to stand for up to 15 hours without rest.

In October 2022 and May 2026, Ukraine and Russia conducted a prisoner exchange that included detainees from the Chornobyl power plant. Several more were subsequently released, while two died before the transfer. Three remain in captivity.

in collaboration with

