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## *The UN Proved Its Usefulness in Crafting Ukraine Grain Deal*



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The United Nations has some bragging rights in Ukraine after months of criticism it could not stop the disastrous war, devising a deal with Turkey, Ukraine and Russia that could deliver much-needed corn, grain and wheat.

The landmark pact was announced on July 22 after two months of talks brokered by Turkey and the UN and was aimed at freeing up nearly 25 million metric tons of grain meant for the international markets that was trapped inside Ukraine's blockaded Black Sea ports since February. Meanwhile, a separate agreement eases the shipment of grain and fertilizers from Russia.

Before the war, Ukraine exported more than 45 million metric tons of grain annually to the global market. The war has caused grain prices to rise dramatically.

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“Today, there is a beacon on the Black Sea,” said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres about the signing of the agreement on July 22. “A beacon of hope—a beacon of relief—in a world that needs it more than ever.”

### **Bombing and Nuclear Leaks**

As the war continues, Russia could bomb the Ukrainian Black Sea ports of Odesa (again), Chernomorsk and Yuzhny, and this may result in goods being redirected toward the much slower Danube waterway. And now the world fears a nuclear disaster with the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe, having fallen under Russian occupation.

Some 84 Ukrainian ships, many of them carrying grain, were stuck in the Black Sea till June. On August 19, port officials in Istanbul reported grain and foodstuffs exported from the three Ukrainian ports amounted to 656,349 metric tons under the Black Sea Grain Initiative. This figure is half of how much Ukraine was exporting on a daily basis before the start of the war. The operation is, however, dependent on commercial shippers and their insurance companies.

Although UN officials say the venture has lowered the price of foodstuffs worldwide, getting grain or wheat to the neediest countries is now up to the UN World Food Program (WFP). The WFP chartered the Liberia-flagged *Brave Commander* to carry 23,000 metric tons of wheat to Ethiopia, one of the 43 countries facing acute food insecurity, which is bordering on famine. Other vessels are expected to follow. On August 16, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the United States had contributed \$68 million to the operation.

Taking an unprecedented risk, Secretary-General Guterres traveled to Lviv, Ukraine, some 43 miles from the Polish border, on August 18 to meet Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who arranged the meeting. The object of this meeting was to boost grain exports from Ukraine and discuss security around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine.

Chief UN spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, who was on the trip to Lviv, said Guterres visited the Black Sea port of Odesa to view the resumption of exports under the UN-brokered deal, and he boarded a pilot boat in the Sea of Marmara on August 20 where he examined a ship ready to leave the port. The secretary-general then went to the Joint Coordination Center in Istanbul, Turkey, comprising Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish and UN officials, who were overseeing exports of Ukraine grain and fertilizer under the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Much of the heavy lifting in setting up the agreements was done by Martin Griffiths, the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, and Costa Rica's former Vice President Rebeca Grynspan, now the secretary-general of the UN Conference on Trade and Development, who negotiated for the export of fertilizers from Russia amid sanctions.

### **Damage to Nuclear Plant Is 'Suicide'**

Russian troops captured the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine in early March. The Russian and Ukrainian governments have accused each other of shelling the power plant site. With its six reactors and a net output of 5,700 megawatts, it is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe.

Guterres, while speaking to reporters during his visit to Lviv, emphasized the need to withdraw Russian military equipment and personnel from the plant and further called for efforts to ensure that the site is not the target of military operations. But Russia has rejected calls to demilitarize the area.

"Any potential damage to Zaporizhzhia is suicide," Guterres said.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has asked to visit the nuclear plant complex, and everyone has agreed for months. But with shelling in the area, his route to the plant is dangerous.

"The IAEA has received information about this serious situation—the latest in a long line of increasingly alarming reports from all sides," Grossi said. He, however, indicated that he may still be open to visiting the site "within 'days,'" during an interview with France 24 on August 25.

All this occurred amid a Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) that takes place once every five years. The conference focused on the nine countries with nuclear weapons (the U.S., Russia, the UK, France, China, North Korea, India, Pakistan and Israel)—and the rest of the world.

Argentine diplomat Gustavo Zlauvinen, president of the conference, said the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant could endanger the safety of civilians. The conference drew "lessons learned" on the need for "safety for civilians" from nuclear facilities.

### **Now What?**

The United Nations is a sprawling organization with many agencies and programs, not all under the auspices of the secretary-general. But its 15-member Security Council and 193-seat General Assembly allow those opposed to the war to score positive votes.

"Even in an increasingly divided and competitive strategic environment, the United Nations offers a stage for major powers to vent their grievances—and a channel for them

to find a few remaining ways to cooperate,” said Richard Gowan, the UN director at the International Crisis Group, in an article for War on the Rocks.

The debate continues. The war, the slaughterhouse, goes on.

*This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).*

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