

**Amnesty International**  
**Global IHL Initiative, Workstream 4**  
**7 May 2026**

**Protecting energy infrastructure from attacks**

Amnesty International welcomes the opportunity to raise the paramount issue of the protection of energy infrastructure in armed conflict.

Under international humanitarian law, energy infrastructure, such as power plants or oil refineries, qualify as a civilian object which cannot be directly attacked. Energy infrastructure may be targeted only if it qualifies as a military objective, meaning it is being used to make an effective contribution to military action – for example by producing energy or fuel for the armed forces – and damaging or neutralizing it would yield a definite military advantage in the circumstances ruling at the time.

Even if those two elements exist, the attacking party must still consider any incidental civilian harm that would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated, and take all feasible precautions to avoid or minimize such harm. This includes any reasonably foreseeable indirect effects on civilians or civilian objects, particularly essential facilities and services.

Accordingly, even when a specific energy infrastructure qualifies as a military objective, this does not mean that it can – or should – be targeted.

Attacks on energy infrastructure may result in vast, predictable and devastating civilian harm, including major disruptions to essential services such as healthcare, water and sanitation, and food production, as well as environmental damage and severe long-term health risks.

When power plants collapse, horrific consequences cascade instantly. Water pumping stations stop functioning, clean water becomes scarce, and preventable diseases spread. Hospitals lose electricity, forcing surgeries to be cancelled and life-support machines to shut down. Food production and distribution networks collapse, deepening hunger and causing widespread food scarcity.

Given such devastating consequences, the substantial risk exists that attacks on energy infrastructure would violate international humanitarian law, particularly the principles of proportionality and precaution, and in some cases may amount to war crimes. Unlawful attacks on energy infrastructure also violate international human rights law, including the rights to life, health and an adequate standard of living, including water and food.

In light of the above, Amnesty International recommends that the final outcome document include the following guidelines:

- Parties to conflict should generally refrain from attacking energy infrastructure.
- Parties to conflict should qualify energy infrastructure as military objectives and execute attacks against them only in exceptional circumstances.