Russians Detain Greenpeace Members For Oil Protesting

Nataliya Vasilyeva, AP

A Russian court jailed a photographer and a Greenpeace activist who were part of the 30-member Greenpeace team protesting near an oil platform in the Arctic last week. The Coast Guard disrupted an attempt by Greenpeace activists on September 18 to scale the Russian Arctic platform. Russian authorities seized Greenpeace's ship the next day and towed it with the 30 activists aboard to Murmansk. The activists are being investigated for piracy. The court denied bail and sanctioned a two-month jail term for photographer Denis Sinyakov and Greenpeace spokesman Roman Dolgov, pending the investigation. Both are Russians. No charges have been brought against them yet.

The judge has yet to rule in the cases of the other 28 people. Although Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday the activists aren't pirates, he defended their detention. The detained activists are from 18 countries, including Russia, and a long detention or trials could draw unwelcome international attention to Russia's tough policy against protests. Judges in six courtrooms were hearing the cases of each activist individually and have not yet ruled in the case of foreign activists.

The Arctic Sunrise sails under the Dutch flag. The Netherlands has asked Russia to release the ship and its crew immediately, explain the legal basis for its actions, the exact location where the ship was seized and any charges against the activists. The platform, which belongs to an oil subsidiary of the state gas company Gazprom, is the first offshore rig in the Arctic. It was deployed to the vast Prirazlomnoye oil field in the Pechora Sea in 2011, but its launch has been delayed by technological challenges. Gazprom said earlier this month it was to start pumping oil this year, but no precise date has been set.

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