

Gazprom starts producing oil at Arctic rig raided by Greenpeace

December 20 2013



Greenpeace activists board Gazprom's "Prirazlomnaya" Arctic oil platform somewhere off Russia north-eastern coast in the Pechora Sea on August 24, 2013

Russia's state-held energy giant Gazprom said Friday it had launched production at an Arctic oil rig raided in September by 30 Greenpeace activists whom the authorities later detained for two months.

The landmark announcement marked the formal start of Russia's long-planned effort to turn the vast oil and natural gas riches believed to be buried in the frozen waters into profits for its ambitious state energy firms.

But it is also certain to outrage campaigners who see the Arctic as one of the world's last pristine reserves whose damage by [oil spills](#) and other disasters would be enormously difficult to contain.

Gazprom made its announcement in a statement that stressed that the company also had rights to 29 other fields it planned to exploit in Russia's section of the Arctic seabed.

"Gazprom has begun [oil](#) production at the Prirazlomnoye deposit," the company said in a statement.

"This is the first project in Russia's history aimed at developing the resources of the Arctic shelf and the start of large-scale work by Gazprom that will create a major hydrocarbons production centre in the region."

Several Greenpeace activists aboard the Arctic Sunrise icebreaker attempted to board the Prirazlomnaya platform on September 18.



Greenpeace's Arctic protest ship the Arctic Sunrise pictured on September 17, 2013 somewhere off Russia's north-eastern coast in the Pechora Sea

Russian coastguards helped the Gazprom crew fend off the open-sea protest.

Armed security agents later boarded the Arctic Sunrise and arrested the crew of 28 activists and two journalists.

The group hailed from 18 countries besides Russia and saw governments ranging from Australia to Britain criticise the arrests.



Greenpeace activists scale Gazprom's Paris offices on October 9, 2013, to hang banners demanding the release of the 30 crew members of the Arctic Sunrise imprisoned in Russia at that time

The crew was initially accused of piracy before those charges were reduced to the lesser crime of hooliganism.

Russia's parliament approved a Kremlin-backed amnesty this week that should end the prosecution of the entire crew.

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