

Rockers Petition for Arctic Activists

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Zorge's Yevgeny Fyodorov joins other musicians in supporting activities to 'improve the situation globally.'

Russian authors and musicians have petitioned for the release of the Arctic 30, an international group of Greenpeace activists held in a Russian prison in Murmansk for nearly two months after being arrested in the wake of a protest against oil drilling in the Arctic Sea. Yevgeny Fyodorov, the singer and bassist with St. Petersburg art-rock band "Zorge," explained why he added his signature to the petition.

"Due to personal reasons, I have some inside information about what really happens in the Arctic Circle environmentally," Fyodorov told The Moscow Times on Nov. 8.

"I mean in precisely this area where the protest was held as well as more northern territories; how they were being explored and used by the Russian military and what kind of things happened there in the process. There is an absolutely horrendous environmental situation caused by human activity in places where none of us go on holiday, above the Arctic Circle.

The area was highly polluted because of human activity even before any oil drilling started.

"We support any attempts to improve the situation globally because the planet should be protected, irrespective of government and oil interests. I also have long-time friends who work with Greenpeace, including its press service. So when they called and asked, 'Will you support us?' I said, 'Absolutely!' Greenpeace does resort to radical methods by landing or climbing somewhere but, as a rule, it goes peacefully with neither human victims nor harm to public or private property, so why not?"

Apart from Fyodorov, those who signed the Oct. 5 petition included singer-songwriter Jenia Lubich, as well as rock musicians such as Mashina Vremeni's Andrei Makarevich and Alexander Kutikov, Voskreseniye's Alexei Romanov, Krematory's Armen Grigoryan, Noize MC and Belarussian band Lyapis Trubetskoy.

Earlier, musician Yury Shevchuk — who is now on tour with his rock band "DDT" — also spoke in defense of the Arctic 30 on Ekho Moskvyy radio, saying that he had been planning to be part of the Greenpeace mission on the Arctic Sunrise, but had failed to go for family reasons.

Fyodorov said he admires the Greenpeace mission of saving the environment.

"They are people who care, not Kremlin trolls who imitate activism and attack people for money because of their poor education," he said.

Greenpeace activists "are concerned, educated people who try to improve the situation globally — that's it. They realize what our excessive appetite leads to."

On Sept. 18, the Russian coast guard descended from helicopters onto the Arctic Sunrise, seizing the ship and arresting all of the people aboard soon after the Greenpeace activists attempted to board a Russian oil rig to protest against the high risk it poses to the environment. The attack on the ship allegedly involved firing automatic weapons and threatening the crew with knives and guns.

Initially, the arrested activists and other people who were on board, including Russian photographer Denis Sinyakov, Russian medic Yekaterina Zaspá and Ukrainian cook Ruslan Yakushev, were charged with piracy. On Oct. 23, the piracy charges were reclassified as criminal misconduct, which carries a maximum sentence of seven years.

"The reaction is absolutely over-the-top," Fyodorov said.

"Everything that our state has undertaken in the past few years looks like the reaction of an offended person. A person who reacts like he is offended by something is not right to start with and he knows that he is not right. The offended person is already in the position of a person who is not right, because he feels it in the depth of his heart. I believe the Russian leadership feels it but continues to take the idiotic, hyperactive stance of not allowing anybody anything and putting everyone in prison. These people have no noble generosity."

The public reaction to the persecution of the Arctic 30 was more subdued in Russia than in the West, where such celebrities as actor Jude Law and musician Damon Albarn joined the protest outside Russia's London embassy on Oct. 5.

"The state and its television channels and other media outlets masterfully distract the Russian population from real problems," Fyodorov said.

"They redirect people's attention to other areas. I am convinced that the inciting of nationalist hysteria today is created artificially. I am completely sure of it. Now we [Russians] fight for some 'national identity' instead of dealing with actual problems. Before that we [fought] homosexuals because [the state and its media outlets] created a problem that had never existed from nothing at all."

"We are all being distracted from the most important things. Their dupes sit in the State Duma and invent idiotic laws, and the people discuss them. Moreover, the active part of society discusses them, people who could have done the really useful job of bringing about social change."

"That is why society is not that active — it is because the [former] KGB are outstanding at refocusing our attention on other things. It is done via social networks as well, where certain things disguised as anti-governmental appear all the time, so one has to think carefully not to get caught by them. They are masters of two- or three-stage operations; I think they are taught at the FSB school how to create such diversionary maneuvers and other things like this."

On Nov. 1, the news broke that the imprisoned activists would be transferred from the northern city of Murmansk to St. Petersburg. Neither the reason nor date for the transfer was given.

"They want to have them closer for some quick exchange operation for somebody," Fyodorov said.

"The Russian authorities use proven special-op methods, absolutely. These include collecting compromising information about everybody to use when the need arises. Secondly, they need to always have some hostages so they can exchange them for somebody or something else. Now they have excellent hostages who can be exchanged for a valuable decision from some European organization. The people are hostages of big politics that are executed with dirty hands, as usual."

Fyodorov said he — along with his former band "Tequilajazzz" — took part in Greenpeace events to raise awareness of a number of issues in the past.

"We tried to fight the felling of trees in Karelia and helped to win a forest reserve there, and there were also problems of oil spills in the Tyumen Oblast," he said.

"We took part in events to raise awareness about the issue and played a concert, though it was a long time ago, in the 1990s."

Fyodorov said he would take part in a concert in support of the Arctic 30 if such a concert were organized.

"As a rule, we do not plan anything ourselves. When we are approached and find it appropriate, and see that the issue really exists and we can do something about it, we don't usually refuse and participate by doing our own work — by making music."

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