

Thursday 30 August 2012

Dear Mr. President,

I write these lines to you on board the Greenpeace vessel Arctic Sunrise, as we leave the Russian economic zone waters north of the Kola Peninsula. You may be aware that for the last 5 days people from our ship were engaging in a peaceful protest against the planned start up of drilling for oil on the Russian Arctic shelf by Gazprom's Prirazlomnaya platform. I want to personally assure you that these protests were in no way directed against the interests of Russia, of people working on the platform, or even against the company of Gazprom. These protests are part of a global campaign that we have been carrying out for a number of years, protesting against oil drilling in the Arctic Ocean, from Greenland to Alaska.

Mr. President, it is my deeply held conviction that oil production in the Arctic is counter to the environmental and economic security of Russia. Two weeks ago I had the privilege of meeting with your minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Mr Donskoy. I presented him with the findings of the group of respected Russian scientists, who concluded that oil production even on a comparatively near- shore platform such as Prirazlomnaya, carries a high risk of severe contamination of the fragile Arctic marine and coastal environment, while the ability to clean up such a spill is extremely low, due to the climactic and geographic conditions of the region.

In the same week, I also had the honour of addressing a group of Russian Indigenous Peoples who were gathered in Usinsk, Komi republic, for an Arctic Indigenous conference, hosted by local ecological organisations and Greenpeace, exploring the impacts of oil development on their communities. The result of the conference was a joint statements opposing Arctic drilling in their traditional territories. I was personally inspired by their courage and determination to defend their environment that has sustained them for centuries, but is now under serious threat.

You can read the full joint statement to the government of Russian Federation in Russian here:

<http://www.greenpeace.org/russia/ru/press/reports/19-08-2012-sovmestnoe-obrashenie-korennyh-narodov-k-pravitelstvu-rf/>, and in English here:

<http://www.greenpeace.org/russia/en/press/reports/Joint-statement-addressed-to-the-government-of-the-Russian-Federation/>.

Indigenous peoples of the Russian North also released with a joint statement to governments of Arctic states, all indigenous peoples of the Arctic and international organizations:

http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/Indigenous_Peoples_statement.pdf (English), <http://www.greenpeace.org/russia/ru/press/reports/19-08-2012-sovmestnoe-obrashenie-ko-vsem-korennym/>(Russian).

Mr. President, I would like to emphasize again, that this is not unique to Russia. Similar analyses have yielded similar results for oil production on the Greenlandic and US Arctic shelves.

The Minister also received from us a report presented earlier this year which analyses the economic feasibility of oil production on the Arctic shelf. It is clear that the production costs are so high as to make the venture unprofitable. Indeed, instead of contributing positively to the Russian economy, it is more likely to become a drain on the Federal, and perhaps regional budgets.

(http://www.greenpeace.org/russia/ru/press/reports/16_04_12_report_on_investments_risks).

Ironically, we are just now passing close to the Shtokman gas field – a project which has now hit what seems to be a final obstacle and is in the process of dissolution, testifying its economic unfeasibility. Mr. President I want to be very clear, we are not calling for stopping the use of petroleum products today. However, it is clear that global oil production will not be able to be maintained much longer at the current level. We will be forced to develop and implement alternative, sustainable sources of energy. Russia possesses an immense wealth of such sources – from wind and solar to biomass and geothermal, as well as having huge potential for energy conservation. This would provide a cheaper and quicker energy alternative than that which is to be obtained from drilling on the Arctic shelf. Russia is capable of become the LEADING country in the world for developing clean energy for the future.

Mr. President, I am deeply concerned that the decision to develop oil fields on the Arctic shelf risks devastating the environment, while closing the channels of investment towards renewable energy sources. I completely support the sentiment you expressed at the congress of the All-Russian public organization “Business Russia” when you said: “It is obvious for us that the ambitious goals that we set for ourselves can only be achieved within the framework of a new model of economic growth, whose driver will be not the resource complex, but a powerful high technology-based business...”

Opening extremely expensive oil fields in Arctic offshore doesn't help stop the dependence of the Russian national budget on oil and gas and on their volatile prices on the international market.

Mr. President, one other aspect needs to be mentioned. The climate crisis that the scientific community has been warning about for years is upon us. The data released 3 days ago by scientists from the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) clearly shows that the extent of the Arctic ice cover is at its all-time minimum – frightening proof of the fact that the geophysical profile of our planet is undergoing rapid and violent changes. These changes threaten all of our futures, and are indeed already causing humanitarian catastrophes, both in my homeland, where droughts are devastating the African continent, as well as in yours, Mr. President, where we witnessed widespread forest fires two years ago.

I am sure you agree with me, Mr. President that it is unjust that people in the developing world who have contributed least to carbon emissions, are the ones that are already paying the first and most brutal impacts of climate change.

Part of Greenpeace's mission is to bring to the public eye the destruction that our planet is suffering. Our ship will now proceed to the edge of the Arctic ice north of the Norwegian coast where, together with representatives of the scientific community and representatives of the global public, we will document and bear witness to the reality of the disappearance of the Earth's ice shield.

Mr. President, I am reminded of your words in the interview to a Canadian newspaper in 2000. You said "I've always admired people who devote their lives to environmental problems, I've watched with astonishment as a group of people on a little boat oppose a military or industrial ship. I must say it inspires only sympathy." Mr. President, I hope that you understand that our protest at Prirazlomnaya was done with the spirit of taking personal action that you say you admire. In the same spirit I would like to extend an invitation to you. I would be honored if you joined us on board the Arctic Sunrise in the upcoming trip to the retreating edge of the Arctic ice, so you could see for yourself the beauty of this remarkable region, the risk that it is exposed to, and hopefully be inspired to use your position to protect it against destruction. We need global leadership to ensure that the Arctic is declared a global sanctuary and I appeal to you to step forward to provide it.

With deep respect,



Kumi Naidoo

International Executive Director