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Court Releases 2 of 'Arctic 30' on Bail

By The Moscow Times

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The Arctic Sunrise ship's doctor, Yekaterina Zapsa, center, entering court Monday. She was released on bail. **Maxim Zmeyev**

ST. PETERSBURG — A Russian medic and a Russian photographer among 30 people seized by coastguards during a Greenpeace protest against offshore Arctic oil drilling were granted bail on Monday, signaling some leniency was possible in a case that has drawn criticism abroad.

But earlier Monday, a separate court denied bail to another arrestee in the case, Colin Russell of Australia. He had served as a radio operator on the Greenpeace ship, the Arctic Sunrise, that launched the action.

The 30 face up to seven years in jail if convicted of hooliganism for the September protest, in which activists tried to scale an offshore oil rig that is crucial to Russia's drive to tap the Arctic's energy resources.

The court ruled that Yekaterina Zaspa, a Russian who served as a medic on the Arctic Sunrise but was not among those who tried to climb the Prirazlomnaya rig, could be released on 2

million rubles ($61,300) bail. It later ruled that freelance photographer Denis Sinyakov could also be let go on bail.

Courts have repeatedly denied previous bail requests from all 30 people held, and their current term of custody ends Nov. 24. But the judge at Zaspa's hearing said there were no grounds to extend her arrest for another three months.

Zaspa, 37, smiled as she listened to the ruling from a cage in the courtroom. She made no comment as guards led her out.

It was not immediately clear why the courts ruled to release Zaspa on bail but to extend the term of custody for Russell, who also did not attempt to scale the rig.

"I'm here to defend my innocence. I have not committed a crime," said Russell, who was led into court in handcuffs and confined to a barred defendant's cage. "I have not lifted a hand in [an] angry manner ever in my life. I have never been violent."

"This is of course positive news, but this does not mean Yekaterina's ordeal is in any way over," Greenpeace representative Mads Christensen said in a statement, noting that she is still charged.

Greenpeace hopes the release of the 30, who hail from 18 countries, could be secured on Friday when the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is expected to rule in a case the Netherlands lodged against Russia. But Russia has refused to take part in the case, suggesting it may not adhere to the court's ruling.

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