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# Greenpeace Activists May Be Home by New Year

By The Moscow Times

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The foreigners among a group of 30 people charged over a Greenpeace protest against Gazprom drilling in the Arctic will likely be able to leave Russia before the end of December, a defense lawyer said Monday.

The 28 activists and two journalists are expected to be freed by the amnesty recently passed by the State Duma, and the paperwork for getting the hooliganism charges against them dropped has been submitted, said the lawyer, Anton Beneslavsky. The activists and journalists were released on bail but have not been allowed to leave Russia with the case still pending.

"There is hope that the people will go home before the New Year," Beneslavsky said, Interfax reported.

An unidentified person close to Greenpeace told the news agency that all the members of the so-called "Arctic 30" have agreed to the amnesty, which entails the charges against them

being dropped without having to admit to wrongdoing.

Security forces seized the Arctic Sunrise boat and arrested the crew in the Pechora Sea in September after the activists scaled Gazprom's Prirazlomnaya rig in an attempt to draw attention to the environmental risks of producing oil in the Arctic. Greenpeace said the country does not have adequate means of cleaning up a potential oil spill in remote and frozen waters.

The Prirazlomnaya rig began production on Friday, and Greenpeace has submitted a request to the Prosecutor General's Office asking it to check the legality of the project. In its appeal to prosecutors, Greenpeace argues that Gazprom does not have a financial plan for dealing with possible accidents caused by the drilling.

"The Russian president regularly criticizes Greenpeace for not wanting to hold a 'normal discussion,'" said Vladimir Chuprov, head of the energy program at Greenpeace Russia, in a statement Monday. "At the same time, for a third year now we have been trying to attract the attention of the authorities to the obvious ecological, technical and economic problems of Prirazlomnaya."

Gazprom has in the past argued that the rig meets legal safety standards.

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