

Exiled Russian Environmentalist Wins International Prize

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Russian environmentalist Suren Gazaryan has won an ecology prize for his environmental work in Olympic host city Sochi.

A Russian environmentalist who fled Russia under the threat of imprisonment has won an ecology prize for his work protecting the area around the site of this year's Sochi Olympic Games.

Suren Gazaryan, a bat expert and member of the Environmental Watch on North Caucasus group, received the Goldman Prize and \$175,000 for his "multiple campaigns exposing government corruption and illegal use of federally protected forestland along Russia's Black Sea coast near the site of the 2014 Winter Olympics," a news release for the award said.

The awards committee cited Gazaryan's achievements in environmental activism in Russia, including blocking the construction of an ecologically "controversial presidential palace" for then-President Dmitry Medvedev and successfully campaigning for the creation of the 25,000-acre Utrish nature reserve in the Krasnodar region.

Gazaryan, who was due to receive the award in San Francisco on Monday, was granted political asylum in Estonia in 2012, having fled Russia after getting three years' probation for taking part in a public rally and being charged with threatening to kill guards at a construction site, which he denies.

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