

Mr. Sergey Lavrov
Minister of Foreign Affairs
32/34 Smolenskaya-Sennaya pl.
119200, Moscow G-200
Russian Federation

Amsterdam, 28 August 2013

Dear Minister Lavrov,

Re: Entry of the icebreaker *Arctic Sunrise* to the Northern Sea Route

Yesterday, Russian media reported that your Ministry had described the entry of the Greenpeace ship *Arctic Sunrise* to the Northern Sea Route (NSR) as a “planned action to provoke Russian authorities”.

However, the above statement is not correct. Greenpeace International applied three times for permission to enter the western part of the Kara Sea, following the procedure established by Russian law. We were transparent that our purpose was to hold peaceful and legal protests against oil exploration by Rosneft and ExxonMobil, within and next to the Russian Arctic National Park, established in 2009 in order to protect important populations of whales, polar bears, walrus and seals. You are well aware of the environmental record of these companies.

All three applications were rejected, each time at the last permissible moment and each time a different reason was given. All the reasons stated were related to the ship’s ability to withstand ice, even though there is no ice in this part of the Kara Sea at present and the *Arctic Sunrise* is an icebreaker. Indeed, its ice classification is superior to that of the six vessels being used for oil exploration in the area.

After the refusals, we wrote to the Northern Sea Route Administration explaining that we fully support the Russian Federation’s adoption of rules to protect the Arctic marine environment from the impact of shipping. However, we underlined that we feel it is important to apply these rules in an objective manner and not as a means to prevent protest against environmentally irresponsible oil exploration. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, under whose flag the ship sails, also urged reconsideration of the refusal.

Under international law, all ships have the right to navigate in the Exclusive Economic Zone. The Russian stance was not in agreement with this rule and we decided, accordingly, to proceed with entry into the NSR where we were immediately met by the Coastguard. They declared a 4 mile exclusion zone around the vessel against which we wished to protest and threatened to open fire if we did not agree to an inspection of the *Arctic Sunrise*, followed by an immediate departure from the NSR.

International law prohibits safety zones of more than 500 metres wide around research vessels. It allows inspections of foreign ships only with consent of the captain, or if there is a suspicion of violating fisheries law or evidence of a substantial discharge of pollutants into the sea. None of

these conditions were present. Although we strongly disagreed with the Coastguard's unlawful actions, we agreed to leave, in order to avoid further aggravation of the situation.

If there was any provocative action on Monday, it was the threat to use force against an unarmed foreign vessel exercising its rights to freedom of navigation and freedom of protest. The Government of the Netherlands has rightly demanded an explanation for these actions. Meanwhile, our campaign to prevent irresponsible industrial development in the Arctic will continue and we are counting on you to fully respect our right to protest.

Yours sincerely,



Kumi Naidoo
Executive Director
Greenpeace International