Indigenous Peoples in Sakhalin, Russia, campaign against oil extraction, 2005-2007

January
2005
to:
January
2007

Country: Russia

**Location City/State/Province: Sakhalin**

**Location Description:** Sakhalin is an island off the Russian coast and is the homeland of many indigenous groups

**Goals:**
The indigenous groups in the area wanted an evaluation of potential ecological damage and a cultural impact assessment, as well as a compensation fund based on such an assessment. They demanded full inclusion in all future decision-making processes with regards to the protection of their land, traditional way of life, and socio-economic development. Later on in the campaign, they switched their focus to pressure the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to deny funding to the Sakhalin II oil extraction project.

**Methods**

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › list of demands
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 020. Prayer and worship › Nivkh shamanic ritual
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction › protesters blockaded roads leading to the oil facilities

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 016. Picketing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction › protesters blockaded roads leading to the oil facilities

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

**Methods in 4th segment:**
• 016. Picketing
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 172. Nonviolent obstruction › protesters blockaded roads leading to the oil facilities

Methods in 5th segment:
Methods in 6th segment:

• 002. Letters of opposition or support › to the EBRD

Classifications

Classification:
Defense
Cluster:
Economic Justice
Environment
Human Rights

Group characterization:

• Environmentalists
• Mostly indigenous peoples

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Indigenous communities - Evenk, Nivkh, Nanai, and Uilta. Sakhalin Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Association of Indigenous People of Russia

Partners:
Green Patrol, Sakhalin Environment Watch, Citizens of Sakhalin Against Sakhalin Energy Investment Company

External allies:
World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, Ivan Malakhov (governor of Sakhalin), international environmental activist groups

Involvement of social elites:
Ivan Malakhov (governor of Sakhalin) supported the campaign

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

• Green Patrol
• Greenpeace
• Indigenous communities. Sakhalin Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North
• Sakhalin Environment Watch
• World Wildlife Fund
• the Association of Indigenous People of Russia

Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:

- Citizens of Sakhalin Against Sakhalin Energy Investment Company
- Ivan Malakhov (governor of Sakhalin)

Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:
The joining order of international environmental activist groups is unclear, but many seemed to join toward the 5th segment when the campaign started focusing on the EBRD

Segment Length: 4 months

**Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

**Opponents:**
Shell, Exxon Mobil, Sakhalin Energy, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**
None known

**Campaigner violence:**
None known

**Repressive Violence:**
None known

**Success Outcome**

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**
3 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**
1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**
2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**
While campaigners did not achieve their goals of cultural assessments and guaranteed inclusion in future decisions of the use of Sakhalin for oil and gas extraction, they did pressure the EBRD to deny funding to the Sakhalin II project, which also led to restrictions on the project itself.

Sakhalin, an island off the eastern Russian coast and home to many indigenous groups, has long been of extreme interest to oil and gas companies. Exxon, Shell, British Petroleum, and their subsidiaries (Sakhalin Energy being a main one) had been extracting oil on and around the island for 8 years. Shell started working on Sakhalin II, the world’s largest integrated oil and gas project, in 1999.

Many indigenous groups in the area, including the Nivkh community, Sakhalin Evenks, the Sakhalin Nanai community, and the Uilta community, wanted an evaluation of potential ecological damage and a cultural impact assessment, as well as a compensation fund based on such an assessment. Most of the groups in the area rely upon reindeer pastures, rivers, and bays in order to subsist, and claimed that these had been damaged by the oil extraction projects. Oil companies had destroyed reindeer pastures and forests, as well as depleted fish populations via offshore drilling. This left traditional handicrafts and jobs with the
oil companies themselves as the few sources of livelihoods in the area. In October of 2004, a regional assembly of indigenous peoples decided that direct action was necessary because the oil companies refused to provide concrete project information or to engage in real dialogue with indigenous peoples’ organizations.

So in January 2005, the Sakhalin Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, including the Nivkh communities, Sakhalin Evenks, and the Sakhalin Nanaytsy community, as well as the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) planned two picket lines (one source says RAIPON, backed by the World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace organized and scheduled the protests). They planned to shut down the Exxon Sakhalin I and the Shell/Sakhalin Energy Sakhalin II facilities. Shell-led Sakhalin Energy and Exxon Oil and Gas sent representatives to indigenous peoples’ settlements to persuade them not to participate in the protest. About 30 indigenous people were involved with different oil extraction projects at the time. Company representatives threatened to fire these employees if they chose to participate in the protests. Oil company security squads were also sent to the Nogliki settlement to deter potential protesters. Regardless, organizers planned to begin protests in the Nogliki region of Sakhalin, while calling on oil companies to respond legally and ethically.

On January 20, 2005, approximately 250 protesters marched through the streets of the Venskoye settlement Nogliksky and held a meeting on the sacred ground of the Nivkh. Representatives of the oil and gas companies were invited, but did not attend. On January 21 and 22, the groups picketed and blockaded the Exxon project, and then the Shell project on January 23. 300 people attended the action, mostly comprised of the Evenk, Nivkh, and Uilta indigenous groups. Political party representatives and Sakhalin nongovernmental organizations such as Green Patrol and Sakhalin Environment Watch also attended. Protesters held banners with slogans such as “We demand a cultural impact assessment,” “Stop the politics damaging the life of Sakhalin’s Evenks,” and “Fish are our Wealth!” One banner quoted Russian president Vladimir Putin saying “Oil company people, you have to remember on whose land you are working – Putin, Salekhard, 2004.”

Protesters also built bonfires and did traditional dances while in the picket line. Some Exxon trucks attempted another route to the facility, but one was overturned because the road was not meant for such large vehicles (there were no injuries). The overturned truck stopped any traffic that tried to reach the facility via the other route. This happened 15 minutes after protesters participated in a Nivkh shamanic ritual at the protest site. Some protesters took this as a sign from the Nivkh gods. They also sent copies of the memorandum of demands to regional and federal authorities (including President Putin), as well as to the oil and gas companies involved. They demanded full inclusion in all future decision-making processes with regards to the protection of their land, traditional way of life, and socio-economic development. The picket lines lasted through the 23rd.

Protesters held a press conference on January 24 in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, a main city on Sakhalin. It was covered by much local, national, and international press, but did not receive much television coverage because there was a national protest over welfare benefits on the same day.

Right before the protest, RAIPON-Sakhalin, the officially recognized nongovernmental organization to represent the indigenous peoples, was determined illegitimate by the Judicial Department. So, in March of 2005, organizers worked with indigenous peoples in Sakhalin to draft a charter for a new group: “The Union of Indigenous Peoples of Sakhalin.” They held elections to choose representatives for negotiations with the gas and oil companies.

By June, oil and gas companies had still made no moves to recognize the demands of the indigenous peoples, so protesters staged a second round of protests at the end of June, coordinated with actions in London, Moscow, and New York. On June 28, protesters closed down the road to the Shell project once again, and closed down the road to the Exxon facility on June 29.

Still, oil companies largely ignored the protesters’ demands. At that time, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was considering helping to finance Shell’s Sakhalin II project. The EBRD opened up a 120-day comment period that would end on April 21, 2006, after which they would come to a decision on whether or not to finance the project. Hence, organizers expanded the campaign focus to pressure the EBRD to deny Sakhalin II’s funding. In December of 2005, management of the EBRD tried to convince the bank’s directors that the Sakhalin II project met environmental and social standards.
On January 28, 2006, over 300 protesters blockaded Sakhalin Energy’s giant liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant that was part of the Sakhalin II project. The local government directly supported the action. Ivan Malakhov, the governor of Sakhalin gave a speech at the protest site in support of the protesters. Banners at the protest read: “Say NO to EBRD financing!”, “EBRD hands off Sakhalin II,” “Demanding re-calculation of environmental damage!”, “Fish are the main wealth of Sakhalin,” and “Demanding transparency for public control.” Protesters also put together two petitions, one of which was sent to the Russian government, the Sakhalin governor and Sakhalin Energy CEO Ian Craig, demanding a recalculation of the damage to fish stocks, as well as for the establishment of a sanitary protection zone extending 3.5 km around each project, instead of the existing 1 km zone. The second petition went to the Board of Directors of the EBRD. This petition demanded that the EBRD not fund Sakhalin II. Then on February 2, Governor Malakhov met with officials from the EBRD to discourage them from investing in Sakhalin II.

At this point, protesters had made some gains. Sakhalin Energy issued a statement containing a plan to reduce the project’s environmental impact, but said that further demonstrations would not “resolve the concerns” of the protesters or facilitate dialogue. Sakhalin Energy was also said to be working on a long-term Indigenous Peoples Development Plan, though it was never released, if they indeed completed the study. Additionally, a sacred site in the north part of the island was cleared of oil extraction equipment and reseeded (the exact impetus for this is unknown).


On September 18, 2006, Russian and international environmental activist groups sent a letter to the president of the EBRD insisting that Shell must demonstrate that Sakhalin II complies with the bank’s stated environmental policies. That same day, the Russian Ministry for Natural Resources revoked the environmental approvals for phase 2 of the Sakhalin II project. In December, prosecutors found over 100 violations of Russian legislation by the Sakhalin project.

Finally, on January 11, 2007, the EBRD confirmed that it would not provide a USD $300 million for the Sakhalin II project.

Throughout the campaign, indigenous protesters received international support, but the nature of that support and the accompanying actions is unclear.

At this point, indigenous organizers switched campaigns to turn their attention to other potential funders of the project.

On July 26, 2007, the Russian state agency responsible for industrial safety and environmental protection (Rostekhnadzor) suspended the construction of the Sakhalin II onshore pipelines because Shell was constructing them through an active seismic fault. On March 3, 2008, Sakhalin Energy withdrew financing from the project, saying there were too many project delays. However, the project had been unable to secure billions of dollars in funding due to pressure on banks to adhere to environmental regulations.

Research Notes

Sources:


"EBRD Must Respect Russian Law and Say No to Sakhalin II Funding, Say NGO's." 18 September 2006. Sakhalin Environmental Watch. 29 March 2011.


Additional Notes:
There are a lot of holes in this case, particularly in getting an idea of the organizing behind the actions, as well as the coalition building with politicians and international groups. There is also not much information about the international campaigns themselves. The exact demographics of those involved in the actions in Sakhalin are also unclear.

For pictures of one of the actions, go to http://www.forest.ru/eng/projects/sakhalin-oil/

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Hannah Jones, 04/02/2011

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