

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS
Green Party

for the South East of England

Taoiseach Ahern
Department of the Taoiseach,
Government Buildings,
Upper Merrion Street,
Dublin 2

July 21st 2005

Dear Mr Ahern,

It has come to my attention that five men from Rossport in County Mayo have been imprisoned for protesting at the construction of the Corrib pipeline by Shell. It appears that Shell applied for a court order to prevent the five from interfering with works associated with the construction of the pipeline. A court order was issued and Philip McGrath, Brendan Philbin, Vincent McGrath, Willie Corduff and Micheál Ó Seighin are now being detained for refusing to abide by its terms.

There are a number of points that I would like to make about this case.

I am appalled that a court order has been granted when the grounds for doing so were themselves unlawful. By starting some aspects of work in Rossport prior to receiving the correct authorisation Shell have acted illegally. I understand that Shell have now amended the terms of the court order to encompass only preparatory work on the proposed site of the pipeline. This does not alter the fact that five men have been imprisoned for defending their right to protest against what was at the time unapproved construction work. I hope that the Irish government will be starting proceedings against Shell for breaches of planning procedure.

The right to protest is enshrined in both the Irish constitution and in the European Convention on Human Rights. It is unacceptable that this entitlement has been over-ruled to, I assume, protect the interests of a multinational corporation such as Shell. The five Irish men were imprisoned ten years after the jailing of protestors in Nigeria, challenging a Shell pipeline destroying the land of the Ogoni peoples.

The five protestors have argued that their main objection to the Corrib pipeline relates to its safety. I understand that the proposed pipeline will run through volatile wet peat close to family homes and land, putting them at risk if there is damage to the pipe. The pipe will contain pressurised, wet and untreated gas, full of impurities, straight from the well. The level of pressure in the pipeline will be three times the typical international standards set for onshore pipelines. Given these legitimate concerns I believe it is incumbent on your government to carry out an independent, detailed and thorough public evaluation of the potential health and safety risks of the proposals.

Also at risk is the fragile environment at the Corrib field. The laying of the pipeline and the possibility of a leak, place the peat and bog land under threat, as well as posing a risk to wildlife and habitats in surrounding areas. Again, a full and independent Environmental Impact Assessment must be a pre-condition of any planning consent.

This is an extremely important case - both in terms of the questions it raises about Shell's apparent manipulation of the legal system, and in terms of the rights of local people to protect the natural resources in their community. I hope that the Irish government can take action to show that the rights, needs and wishes of its citizens carry more weight than those of Shell and other multinational corporations.

I look forward to hearing your views on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Lucas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.