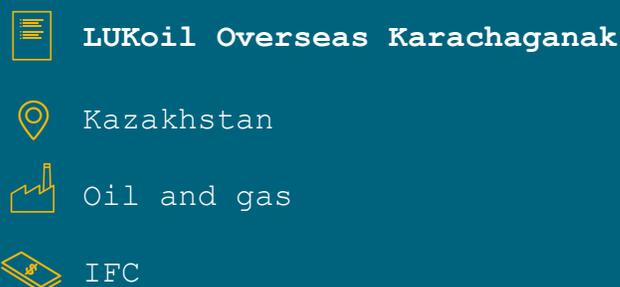


Harassment and intimidation of Svetlana Anosova, village of Berezovka, Crude Accountability staff



In July 2003, Svetlana Anosova, a music teacher at the local school in the village of Berezovka in northwestern Kazakhstan, returned from a trip to Washington D.C.. She had traveled the more than 5,500 miles to meet with representatives from the World Bank as well as the international consortium Karachaganak Petroleum Operating BV (KPO), to tell them that the oil and gas condensate field they supported on the edge of her village was making people sick. It was then that Anosova began facing threats and pressure from local authorities and police.¹ For the next several years, she was under almost constant surveillance, was questioned several times by the representatives of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan and told to stop communicating with the World Bank about the plight of Berezovka.²

Residents of Berezovka had been complaining of air and water pollution as well as negative health impacts since the 1990s, because the government never established an adequate Sanitary Protection Zone (SPZ) between the oil and gas operations and the village. In 2000, when the field underwent redevelopment by KPO, the impacts intensified. Villagers began to experience cardiovascular problems, chronic illnesses, memory loss, skin ailments, and vision loss.³ Svetlana formed a local organization, Zhasyl Dala, to fight for the rights of the villagers. *“Our organization, which included mostly women, was extremely inconvenient for both the authorities and KPO,”* said Anosova. *“We raised questions they did not want to discuss - emissions from the field and an increase in health related incidents in the village.”*

In May 2002, the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation (IFC) facilitated a US\$150 million loan package to the Russian company, LUKoil, to increase crude oil and condensate production in the Karachaganak Oil and Gas Condensate Field, with the aim of spurring economic development and job creation.⁴

In 2004, while conducting a human rights seminar with the residents of Berezovka, staff of the NGO

Crude Accountability, and the community organization Berezovka Initiative Group, were frequently detained and harassed by the local authorities and police. When women from the village tried to participate in a study at a medical clinic in Askai, they were physically and verbally threatened by police who tried to take them to police headquarters for questioning.⁵

On September 1, 2004, Svetlana and other Berezovka residents, with support from Crude Accountability, filed the first of three official complaints to the IFC’s independent accountability mechanism, the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO), citing the negative impacts on the health and well-being of the residents and calling for resettlement of the village.⁶ Two





More than 25 children sickened by mass discharge from Karachaganak Field.



Children suffered seizures and other effects from hydrogen sulfide discharge.

additional complaints raising similar claims followed on April 1, 2007 and May 1, 2008, filed by the NGOs Green Salvation and Crude Accountability and the community organization, Berezovka Initiative Group.⁷

The CAO's compliance report from the first claim found that IFC had violated its own policies, which resulted in the company being forced to monitor and report on its emissions.⁸ Despite this, the illegality of the SPZ and lack of resettlement were left unaddressed.⁹ The final complaint closed in April 2009 after LUKoil paid off its loan from IFC ahead of schedule. Following this, CAO and IFC ended their involvement.¹⁰

Beginning in 2004, civil society groups repeatedly alerted the CAO and IFC about harassment and threats to Svetlana and other villagers.¹¹ In 2007 Crude Accountability approached the World Bank Office of Institutional Integrity with news that the KPO subcontractor in charge of laying pipe at Karachaganak had been found guilty of bribery by the US Securities Exchange Commission.¹² Despite this information, the World Bank refused to sanction the company.

Repeated efforts for resettlement proved fruitless and the harassment, surveillance, and intimidation continued. In 2008, Svetlana was prohibited from teaching her students in the local school. Starting in 2013, Svetlana, the community organizations and NGOs supporting the villagers, and the parents who were pressing for resettlement and compensation, became the targets of a public smear campaign. Anonymous, accusatory videos were published on YouTube and false rumors circulated in the village accusing the advocates of seeking remedy merely to serve their self-interest.¹³

On November 28, 2014, more than 25 children and adults in the village fell severely ill with symptoms of cramps, dizziness, headaches, and nausea, and several fainted, from a mass discharge of hydrogen sulfide from the Karachaganak Field.¹⁴ The following year, authorities and the KPO finally agreed to start the process of relocation of residents to two locations approximately 25km away.¹⁵ Despite the relocation, KPO and government officials continue to dispute the poisoning and refuse to provide necessary healthcare and assistance to the injured children.

During the relocation process harassment continued. Advocacy groups posit that corrupt local authorities who had received large sums of money for the relocation used intimidation in order to discourage inquiry into how the funds were actually being spent. In 2016, an anonymous video "Mask of Democracy of Berezovka" was published online.¹⁶ The video accuses Svetlana of working for secret organizations, spreading misinformation and receiving huge sums of money in return. It characterizes Crude Accountability staff members as CIA agents and "organizers of chaos and unrest."

Today, several children of Berezovka continue to suffer from lasting health problems, including seizures, and community members continue to fight for compensation for the harms they have endured.¹⁷ The harassment of advocates continues. Kate Watters, director of Crude Accountability, notes, "*On our last visit to Berezovka, in May 2016, the local migration police tried to detain us illegally. Surveillance, checking of documents, and repeated questioning have become almost an everyday occurrence during our visits to Berezovka.*"

Endnotes

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- 9 See Letter from Osvaldo L. Gratacós, Vice President of Compliance Advisor Ombudsman, to Gretchen Gordon, Coordinator of the Coalition for Human Rights in Development, "Research into Threats and Attacks Against Human Rights and Environmental Defenders," May 21, 2018, <https://rightsinddevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CAO-response-21May2018.pdf>.
- 10 Appraisal Report, Case of Green Salvation / Residents in the Village of Berezovka III, Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO), October 16, 2009, http://www.cao-ombudsman.org/cases/document-links/documents/CAO_Appraisal_Report_C_I_R7_Y09_F117.pdf.
- 11 In a response to a request for comment, CAO notes that it did discuss with complainants a response to the threats and harassment but that this "may not have helped stop such actions, or to CAO's knowledge, led to actions by IFC." Letter from Osvaldo L. Gratacós, Vice President of Compliance Advisor Ombudsman, to Gretchen Gordon, Coordinator of the Coalition for Human Rights in Development, "Research into Threats and Attacks Against Human Rights and Environmental Defenders," May 21, 2018, <https://rightsinddevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CAO-response-21May2018.pdf>; In a request for comment, IFC stated that that it has no information on the incidents of threats and harassment cited. Letter from James Fergusson, ESG Manager at IFC, to Gretchen Gordon, Coordinator of the Coalition for Human Rights in Development, "Response to Overall Approach to Human Rights, Retaliation & Due Diligence and Comments on Selected Draft Case Studies," May 18, 2018, <https://rightsinddevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/IFC-response-18May2018.pdf>.
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