# Just Stop Oil activists describe ‘cushy treatment’ in custody despite legal crackdown



Just Stop Oil activists have claimed that their experiences in custody have been far from punitive, featuring what they describe as "cushy treatment" from prison guards. This revelation comes just days after eight members of the group were fortunate enough to evade jail time following a series of disruptive protests at Heathrow Airport. The activists have reported instances where prison officers expressed sympathetic views towards their cause of combating climate change, even offering encouragement for their actions.

Speaking on the Novara Media podcast, George Simonson, one of the activists who participated in protests last summer that resulted in significant traffic disruptions, detailed his experiences while incarcerated at HMP The Mount in Hertfordshire. He noted that prison staff often showed an unusual level of respect, saying, “The guards treat us with more respect and it’s been easier for me to get certain privileges than other people.” Simonson explained that, in conversations with guards, he was met with sentiments of approval towards his commitment to environmental activism, suggesting a level of support from those meant to maintain order within the prison system.

The situation illustrates a complex relationship between activism and the penal system. While Simonson and his compatriots have faced legal repercussions for their actions—attempting to blockade Heathrow using angle grinders and glue—the judge overseeing their case acknowledged their lack of intention to cause substantial harm. Judge Hannah Duncan indicated that while the defendants had indeed engaged in potentially disruptive behaviour, they did not breach the airport's perimeter fence, which played a significant role in their sentencing outcome. Eight of the defendants received either custodial or suspended sentences, with only one remaining in custody due to unrelated charges.

The response to Just Stop Oil’s protests is not just confined to the courtroom; it also raises broader questions about civil liberties in the UK. Critics have pointed out that the stiff penalties faced by activists, particularly under new legislation designed to restrict public protest, have sparked significant debate about the right to free expression and assembly. UN Special Rapporteur Michel Forst has publicly condemned the severe sentences handed to activists, arguing that they are “not acceptable in a democracy.” Such statements highlight the increasing scrutiny of the UK’s legal framework surrounding activism, especially in light of global discussions about environmental justice.

Moreover, the disparity in sentencing for non-violent protests compared to violent crimes continues to perplex legal observers. Comparisons have been drawn between the harsh treatment of environmental activists like those from Just Stop Oil and leniency often afforded to offenders of lesser societal impact. This situation has led to calls for a reassessment of how protest-related cases are handled within the justice system, focusing on the proportionality of penalties in alignment with human rights standards.

The evolving narrative of Just Stop Oil is emblematic of a larger trend in environmental activism, raising critical discussions regarding the tactics employed by activists and the responses from law enforcement and the judiciary. As societal attitudes towards climate change continue to shift, the legal repercussions faced by those demanding action are increasingly facing public scrutiny, focused on striking a balance between maintaining public order and upholding the rights of activists.

As these discussions unfold, it remains to be seen how the interplay between activism, law enforcement, and judicial responses will shape the future landscape of protest and civil rights in the UK.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3
2. Paragraph 4
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 6
5. Paragraph 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/just-stop-oil-activists-boast-35242907> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/07/just-stop-oil-protesters-jail-sentences-shortened-after-appeal> - This article reports on the Court of Appeal's decision to reduce the prison sentences of six Just Stop Oil activists, including co-founder Roger Hallam. The court deemed Hallam's original five-year sentence 'manifestly excessive,' reducing it to four years. Other activists' sentences were also shortened. The judgment emphasizes the need to consider the activists' conscientious motivations and their rights to freedom of expression and assembly under the European Convention on Human Rights. The article highlights the broader implications for peaceful protest and civil liberties in the UK.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/19/not-acceptable-in-a-democracy-un-expert-condemns-sentences-given-to-just-stop-oil-activists> - UN Special Rapporteur Michel Forst criticized the lengthy prison sentences handed to five Just Stop Oil activists, stating they are 'not acceptable in a democracy.' The activists were sentenced for planning non-violent protests on the M25 motorway. Forst's condemnation adds to the growing international concern over the UK's approach to environmental activism and the right to protest. The article discusses the broader implications for civil liberties and the treatment of environmental defenders in the UK.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/article/2024/jul/19/just-stop-oil-jail-terms-questions-harsh-treatment-protesters> - This article examines the harsh prison sentences given to Just Stop Oil activists for non-violent protests, raising questions about the proportionality and fairness of such sentences. It compares these sentences to those for violent crimes, highlighting disparities. The piece also discusses the broader context of the UK's legal approach to protest and civil disobedience, questioning whether the current sentencing practices align with democratic principles and human rights standards.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/15/just-stop-oil-activist-is-first-to-be-jailed-under-new-uk-protest-law> - The article reports on the first Just Stop Oil activist to be jailed under the new UK protest law, which bans acts that disrupt key national infrastructure. The activist, a father of three, was sentenced to six months in prison for participating in a slow march protest on a London road. The piece discusses the implications of the new law on the right to protest and the treatment of environmental activists in the UK.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/19/not-acceptable-in-a-democracy-un-expert-condemns-sentences-given-to-just-stop-oil-activists> - UN Special Rapporteur Michel Forst criticized the lengthy prison sentences handed to five Just Stop Oil activists, stating they are 'not acceptable in a democracy.' The activists were sentenced for planning non-violent protests on the M25 motorway. Forst's condemnation adds to the growing international concern over the UK's approach to environmental activism and the right to protest. The article discusses the broader implications for civil liberties and the treatment of environmental defenders in the UK.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/article/2024/jul/19/just-stop-oil-jail-terms-questions-harsh-treatment-protesters> - This article examines the harsh prison sentences given to Just Stop Oil activists for non-violent protests, raising questions about the proportionality and fairness of such sentences. It compares these sentences to those for violent crimes, highlighting disparities. The piece also discusses the broader context of the UK's legal approach to protest and civil disobedience, questioning whether the current sentencing practices align with democratic principles and human rights standards.