# Just Stop Oil co-founder jailed as public nuisance law targets climate activists



Last week, at Minshull Street crown court in Manchester, Indigo Rumbelow, a co-founder of Just Stop Oil, was sentenced to 30 months in prison for conspiring to cause a public nuisance. This case highlights a troubling trend where laws traditionally aimed at penalising environmental harm caused by corporations are now being deployed against environmental activists. The prosecution argued that Rumbelow’s actions aimed to obstruct public access at Manchester Airport, a claim she openly acknowledged, asserting that her moral obligation to fight climate change justified the disruption.

Rumbelow’s sentence comes amidst a backdrop of increasing tensions surrounding climate activism in the UK. The offence of public nuisance, which has its roots in the Criminal Law Act 1977 and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, was once wielded primarily against companies poisoning air and water. Now, however, it poses significant risks to those advocating for climate action. Critics argue that this legal recontextualisation of public nuisance reflects a broader crackdown on dissent, particularly as protests become more urgent in the face of a climate crisis that many see as an existential threat.

Rumbelow's experience echoes that of other activists from Just Stop Oil who have faced severe penalties for non-violent protests. Recently, the Court of Appeal reviewed the cases of 16 activists who received sentences ranging from 15 months to five years for planning peaceful protests on major roads, including the M25 motorway. These high-profile cases have sparked significant public backlash and raised questions about whether such punitive measures serve the public interest or merely seek to stifle dissent. Many of the 2,000 strong supporters who rallied for these activists on the steps of the High Court described them as "political prisoners", illustrating a widespread belief that the sentences are not only excessive but also a corruption of democratic values.

Rumbelow reflects on the nature of remorse in the context of civil disobedience, arguing that it’s impossible to feel regret for actions taken in the name of a righteous cause. The judge’s insistence on remorse as a precondition for leniency has drawn criticism, particularly given historical precedents where individuals have pleaded not guilty to highlight moral objections against perceived injustices. Cases like the 1670 trial of Quakers Penn and Mead and Nelson Mandela’s Rivonia trial are cited as pivotal moments where dissenters embraced their convictions rather than conforming to legal reprisals.

The current punitive measures against climate activists might deter some; however, many scholars and social commentators argue that they risk igniting a more profound societal divide on the issue of climate action. The justice system is now questioned not only for its role in maintaining public order but for its ability to truly uphold democratic values, especially when such values seem at odds with essential environmental action. In Rumbelow’s view, the necessity of their actions stems from a moral imperative to mitigate harm, a sentiment that continues to resonate among activists committed to sparking meaningful change in the face of governmental inaction.

As Rumbelow serves her sentence in HMP Styal, she remains steadfast in her commitment to civil resistance. Her determination to study past movements and their victories speaks to a wider aspiration among climate protesters: to hold powerful entities accountable for their contributions to the climate crisis. The increasing confrontation between activists and the legal system poses critical questions about the future of civil liberties in the context of climate action, emphasising the need for a societal dialogue on the rights to protest and the urgent necessity of environmental stewardship.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jun/03/climate-protest-jail-sentence-resistance-just-stop-oil), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jun/03/climate-protest-jail-sentence-resistance-just-stop-oil)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jan/30/protest-london-high-court-jailed-climate-activists-appeal-just-stop-oil), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/08b8a4d2-b395-4a81-b4e8-97749bc9fab2)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/74cd5684-eb15-45bc-840e-11ea2169ae44), [[6]](https://www.bigissue.com/news/activism/just-stop-oil-sentences-jail-terms-m25-backlash/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250130-uk-prosecutors-defend-jail-terms-of-environmental-activists)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jun/03/climate-protest-jail-sentence-resistance-just-stop-oil> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jun/03/climate-protest-jail-sentence-resistance-just-stop-oil> - Indigo Rumbelow, co-founder of Just Stop Oil, reflects on her 30-month prison sentence for conspiring to cause a public nuisance by planning to disrupt Manchester Airport. She discusses the use of the public nuisance offence, traditionally applied to corporations causing environmental harm, now being used against environmental protesters. Rumbelow questions the expectation of remorse from activists acting out of conscience and highlights the historical context of civil disobedience, referencing past trials where activists pleaded not guilty to prevent harm. She expresses determination to continue resistance and hold those responsible for environmental damage accountable.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jan/30/protest-london-high-court-jailed-climate-activists-appeal-just-stop-oil> - Hundreds of protesters gathered outside the High Court in London to support 16 Just Stop Oil activists appealing their prison sentences. The activists, serving a combined 41 years, were convicted for planning peaceful protests on the M25 motorway. Supporters held placards declaring them 'political prisoners' and condemned the sentences as a 'corruption of democracy and the rule of law'. The appeals highlight concerns over the suppression of peaceful protest and the right to free expression in the UK.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/08b8a4d2-b395-4a81-b4e8-97749bc9fab2> - The Court of Appeal in London reviewed the prison sentences of 16 Just Stop Oil activists, who received terms ranging from 15 months to five years for non-violent protests. The activists argued that their sentences were excessive and violated international human rights. The case underscores a perceived tightening of legislative and judicial control over climate activism in the UK, with concerns that disproportionate punishments may deter future peaceful protests and undermine fundamental freedoms.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/74cd5684-eb15-45bc-840e-11ea2169ae44> - Six Just Stop Oil activists, including co-founder Roger Hallam, had their prison sentences reduced by the Court of Appeal, which acknowledged the need to consider their right to freedom of expression. The activists had been sentenced to up to five years for planning protests on the M25 motorway. The court's decision reflects ongoing debates over the balance between maintaining public order and upholding the right to protest in the UK.
6. <https://www.bigissue.com/news/activism/just-stop-oil-sentences-jail-terms-m25-backlash/> - The sentencing of Just Stop Oil activists to four and five years in prison for planning M25 protests has sparked widespread criticism. A majority of the public believes the sentences are too harsh, with academics warning that such punishments will do little to deter further protests. The case highlights tensions between environmental activism and legal frameworks, raising questions about the proportionality of responses to non-violent civil disobedience.
7. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250130-uk-prosecutors-defend-jail-terms-of-environmental-activists> - UK prosecutors defended the prison sentences of Just Stop Oil activists, arguing that their actions presented an 'extreme danger' to the public. The activists had received sentences ranging from 15 months to five years for various protests, including blocking the M25 motorway. The case underscores the UK's stringent approach to disruptive protests and the ongoing debate over the balance between public order and the right to protest.