

Open Letter From UK Academics: The Harsh Sentencing of Anti-fracking Campaigners Sets a Dangerous Precedent

By [Andrea Brock](#) and [Prof. Lyla Mehta](#)

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University of Sussex

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Oil and Energy](#),
[Police State & Civil Rights](#)

This letter was originally titled 'Open letter from University of Sussex academics: The harsh sentencing of anti-fracking campaigners sets a dangerous precedent'. Although signers from other organisations have always been welcome, given the overwhelming support, we have officially opened it up to academics from across the country who wish to express their concern.

We the undersigned are writing to express our growing concern about the shrinking space for communities and environmental defenders to engage in civil opposition to fracking developments in the UK.

This week three non-violent campaigners opposing fracking were jailed for 15 to 16 months simply for 'causing a public nuisance' and for not expressing regret. This is the first time since 1932 that environmental defenders have been imprisoned for such long periods of time for staging a protest in the UK. It is also the first time ever that activists have been jailed for anti-fracking actions.

With fracking companies increasingly granted civil injunctions to prevent protest, the scope of protest is becoming more and more restricted, representing a threat to fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Fracking is controversial in the UK. According to government surveys conducted in 2017, only 16% of people support fracking development. Given the grave environmental consequences of hydraulic fracturing and growing concerns about climate change, this is not surprising.

The ruling sets a worrying precedent, curtailing opportunities for the kind of public protests that have historically been effective in instituting the legal and policy changes that defend our environment for our future generations. We need more, not less, space for action to confront unsustainable industrial practices that harm our communities and perpetuate our reliance on fossil fuels.

We join calls for a judicial review of this absurdly harsh sentence, and an inquiry into the declining space for civil society protest that it represents.

Sincerely,

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