



GREENPEACE: FROM AMCHITKA TO KWAJALEIN – 30 YEARS OF CAMPAIGNING TO ELIMINATE NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Greenpeace's campaign to stop a Star Wars missile system evolves from a thirty-year history campaigning for nuclear disarmament.

In fact, the nuclear weapons threat is what prompted the international organization to be founded in 1971. Determined to stop a U.S. nuclear bomb test, a small group of Canadian and American activists chartered a small boat, the *Phyllis Cormack*, and sailed straight into the test site near Amchitka, Alaska, just as the U.S. Defense Department were poised to explode the bomb. Although the action was not successful and the test went ahead as scheduled, Greenpeace's action sparked an international outcry leading the Defense Department to close its Alaskan test site for "political and other reasons".

Since that first action, Greenpeace's disarmament campaign has challenged the testing and proliferation of nuclear weapons in every corner of the globe.

- In 1982 the Greenpeace ship *Sirius* was towed out of Leningrad after Greenpeace members released thousands of balloons and distributed leaflets calling for the Soviet Union to stop nuclear testing.
- In 1987 Greenpeace launched its "nuclear free seas" campaign with demonstrations around the world against nuclear-armed and nuclear powered warships. In 1991 Britain, Russia and the United States withdrew all nuclear weapons from onboard surface ships.
- In 1983, Greenpeace's hot air balloon *Trinity* flew over the Berlin Wall into East Germany carrying calls for nuclear disarmament.
- In July 1989 off the coast of Florida Greenpeace stopped a U.S. Navy test of a Trident missile.
- In 1995 Greenpeace closed down the Aldermaston British nuclear weapons production plant for an estimated two weeks.
- In 1996 Executive Directors from Greenpeace offices around the world were arrested in Tiananmen Square protesting China's nuclear weapons testing program.
- In 1998 Greenpeace flew a hot air balloon over the Taj Mahal to protest at the resumption of nuclear testing by India and Pakistan.

But it has been in the South Pacific, with its flagship vessel the *Rainbow Warrior*, where Greenpeace's campaign against nuclear weapons has been most active and most known. The focus has been French nuclear weapons testing. Between 1972 and 1974, Greenpeace made a series of voyages to Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls where the French were conducting atmospheric nuclear tests. On one occasion French gendarmes stormed the Greenpeace ship "*Vega*" and beat crewmember David McTaggart. Outrage over this incident pressured the French to announce all further tests would be conducted underground.

In July 1985, when Greenpeace announced that it would challenge a resumption of French nuclear testing, French secret service agents bombed the *Rainbow Warrior* while it was docked in Auckland Harbour, killing one crewmember, Portuguese photographer Fernando Pereira. Undaunted, Greenpeace returned to the region and the nuclear disarmament campaign.

In 1992 the *Rainbow Warrior II* returned to Moruroa atoll where it was seized by French forces. Again in 1995, as the French were about to execute another series of tests at Moruroa the ship was boarded by French Navy commandos who smashed equipment and took the ship and crew into custody. After more international protests, led by Greenpeace, France finally conducted its last nuclear test in January, 1996.

Greenpeace is equally committed to stopping President George W. Bush's plan for an expensive and unworkable Star Wars missile system, which if built, will ignite a new nuclear arms race.

“As Greenpeace challenged nuclear testing, Greenpeace is now challenging the Star Wars missile system. Such a system will only prompt other countries with nuclear weapons to modernize and expand their arsenals,” says Greenpeace disarmament specialist William Peden. “ For the huge price they are paying defense contractors, Americans will end up with a system that doesn't work but has shot down the entire nuclear disarmament process.”

In July 2000, to voice its concern about Star Wars' growing threat the Greenpeace vessel *Arctic Sunrise* sailed into the exclusion zone in waters off Vandenberg Air Force, in California, where a Minuteman Intercontinental Ballistic missile was to be fired in a key test for the system. Simultaneously on land Greenpeace activists occupied the base itself up until one hour before the scheduled blast. And in the South Pacific on Kwajalein atoll where the “kill vehicle” was launched, two Greenpeace activists managed to get within metres of the missile silo just moments before the scheduled launch.

With the announcement that the Greenpeace flagship *Rainbow Warrior* will sail to Kwajalein atoll to protest against US Star Wars plans, Greenpeace is signaling it is committed to a strong, and if necessary lengthy campaign, to stop the dangerous program.