

29 Arrested in London Over Protest Backing Banned Group Palestine Action

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Twenty-nine people were arrested in central London on Saturday as police responded to a demonstration expressing support for the recently banned group Palestine Action, now classified under the Terrorism Act 2000.

The Metropolitan Police confirmed the arrests took place in Parliament Square, where a small number of individuals gathered with placards stating, “I oppose genocide, I support Palestine Action.” The force said that expressing support for the proscribed group is now considered a criminal offence under the law, with penalties including up to 14 years in prison.

Palestine Action was officially proscribed after a High Court decision on Friday allowed the government’s ban to proceed. A legal bid brought by the group’s representatives to halt the proscription was rejected by Mr Justice Chamberlain, who ruled the public interest outweighed the legal arguments presented. The designation took effect on Saturday.

Police surrounded the demonstrators, who had assembled near the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, and proceeded to detain participants. One woman was seen being led away in handcuffs. The arrests were made on suspicion of terrorism-related offences, a result of the group’s classification as an illegal organisation.

The protest had been publicised in advance. The group Defend Our Juries sent a letter to Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley, notifying him of their intention to hold the demonstration. Following the arrests, the group issued a statement saying: “It’s a relief to know that Counter Terrorism police have nothing better to do.”

Palestine Action’s proscription followed a high-profile incident at RAF Brize Norton last month, in which the group claimed responsibility for damaging two military aircraft. The government estimated the damage at £7 million. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper described the act as

“disgraceful” and cited the group’s “long history of unacceptable criminal damage” in her decision to ban it.

In court, Raza Husain KC, acting on behalf of co-founder Huda Ammori, criticised the ban as an “authoritarian abuse” of state power. However, the court found the legal challenge insufficient to delay or overturn the order.

The protest and arrests occur amid ongoing global scrutiny of the war in Gaza, sparked by Hamas’s 7 October 2023 attacks on Israel. More than 57,000 deaths have since been reported in Gaza, while Israel continues to reject accusations of genocide, which are under review by the International Court of Justice.