

London Arrests Raise Protest Rights Concerns

August 10, 2025

— Categories: Human Rights



Download IPFS

Metropolitan Police have come under scrutiny for the arrest of dozens of campaigners during a protest in Parliament Square, London, concerning UK terrorism laws and the treatment of peaceful demonstrators.

The arrests took place during a gathering organised by the activist group Palestine Action. Attendees had assembled to call for an end to UK involvement in overseas conflicts and to voice opposition to certain foreign military actions.

Sacha Deshmukh, Chief Executive of Amnesty International UK, criticised the arrests, describing them as “deeply concerning” and warning that such actions could undermine fundamental freedoms.

According to Amnesty, the protest was peaceful, with no evidence of violence or incitement. The organisation argued that treating peaceful demonstrators as terrorism suspects risked setting a dangerous precedent for the policing of protests in the UK.

“Peaceful protest is a fundamental right,” Mr Deshmukh stated. He added that protest activity should not be criminalised unless it incites violence, hatred, or discrimination, in line with international human rights standards.

Ahead of the protest, Amnesty International sent a letter to Sir Mark Rowley, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, urging restraint and warning against arresting individuals solely for holding banners or expressing political views.

The letter argued that slogans such as “I Oppose Genocide” or “I Support Palestine Action” should not be treated as evidence of terrorism-related activity, provided they are not linked to incitement. Amnesty maintained that the current application of terrorism laws risks infringing on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, which the UK is bound to uphold under international law.

UK terrorism legislation has long faced criticism from legal experts and civil rights organisations for its broad and sometimes vague definitions. Human rights advocates warn that this legal framework allows for the detention of individuals engaged in lawful protest, blurring the line between national security enforcement and suppression of political dissent.

In this instance, Amnesty contends that the police response was disproportionate and that the arrests could be in breach of the UK’s obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Home Office has defended the UK’s counterterrorism framework, stating that it is

designed to protect the public and that operational decisions during protests are a matter for the police. It has not yet issued a specific comment on the Parliament Square arrests.

The incident has reignited debate about the balance between public safety and civil liberties. Advocates for tighter police powers argue they are necessary to prevent extremist threats, while civil rights groups warn that expanding powers without clear safeguards could erode democratic freedoms.

The Metropolitan Police have yet to confirm whether those arrested will face charges. Human rights organisations have indicated they will continue to monitor the situation and challenge any measures they consider incompatible with the UK's legal and international obligations.