

UK Police Arrest 466 at Protest Supporting Banned Palestine Action Group

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The Metropolitan Police arrested 466 people in London during a protest supporting Palestine Action, a group recently banned by the UK government under anti-terrorism laws. This marked the largest number of arrests made by the force in a single day over the past decade.

Protesters were detained for showing support for a proscribed organisation, according to the police. Additionally, eight arrests were made for other offences, including five for assaults on officers, though no serious injuries were reported.

Palestine Action was outlawed in July after some of its members trespassed on a Royal Air Force base and damaged military aircraft during a series of protests. The group accuses the British government of complicity in alleged Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

The co-founder of Palestine Action, Huda Ammori, recently won permission to challenge the ban in court. Critics of the government's decision, including the United Nations, Amnesty International, and Greenpeace, have condemned the move as an overreach of legal authority and a threat to free speech.

Under the UK's Terrorism Act 2000, membership or support for a proscribed organisation is a criminal offence. The maximum sentence for such an offence is 14 years' imprisonment. The law states that expressing an opinion supportive of a proscribed group is punishable by up to 14 years in prison on indictment or up to six months on summary conviction.

The Met Police stated on the social media platform X that anyone who came to Parliament Square holding placards supporting Palestine Action was arrested or was in the process of being arrested.

One protester, psychotherapist Craig Bell, 39, described the ban as "absolutely ridiculous." He argued that Palestine Action was being unfairly labelled as a terrorist organisation compared to groups that "are killing civilians and taking lives."

At the demonstration, many protesters wore black and white scarves and waved Palestinian flags. They chanted slogans such as "Hands off Gaza" and "I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action." The crowd also shouted "shame on you" at the police.

The protest was organised by Defend Our Juries, a group that opposes the ban. They stated that "unprecedented numbers" of people risked arrest and imprisonment to defend what they described as "this country's ancient liberties." The organisation confirmed plans for further protests in September.

Since the ban on Palestine Action came into force on 5 July, police forces across the UK have made numerous arrests for supporting the group. Charges have been brought against

several individuals in both England and Wales, while seven people have been charged in Scotland, which has a separate legal system.

Volker Türk, the United Nations human rights chief, criticised the ban as “disproportionate and unnecessary.” He stated it appeared to contravene the UK’s obligations under international human rights law.

Amnesty International UK’s chief executive, Sacha Deshmukh, also urged the police to exercise restraint when dealing with protesters. He argued that the detainees were not inciting violence and that treating peaceful demonstrators as terrorists was “entirely disproportionate.”

A UK court is expected to hear a legal challenge against the government’s decision to proscribe Palestine Action in November.