

Police Warn of Mass Arrests Over Planned Westminster Protest Backing Banned Group

August 5, 2025

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The Metropolitan Police have warned that participants in a planned protest in Westminster this weekend could face mass arrests if they show support for Palestine Action, a group recently proscribed under terrorism legislation. The warning comes ahead of a rally organised by the campaign group Defend Our Juries, which is encouraging demonstrators to carry placards stating, “I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action.”

Palestine Action was officially banned by the Home Office on 5 July, making it a criminal offence to support or promote the group. The Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, stated the proscription was based on intelligence linking the group's actions to threats to public order and national security. Under UK law, visible signs of support for a proscribed organisation, including slogans, clothing, or placards, can result in arrest and prosecution.

Police officials say they are preparing for a significant turnout in central London, with the rally expected to coincide with other protests, including pro-Palestinian and anti-immigration demonstrations. The force has not ruled out the use of public order powers or pre-emptive arrests to prevent escalation.

A Metropolitan Police spokesperson reiterated that expressing support for a banned organisation, even through peaceful protest, is a criminal act. Officers will be monitoring the rally closely and have stated that those in breach of the law could be arrested on the spot.

The rally organisers have said they are mounting a peaceful challenge to what they consider a breach of free expression and civil rights. Defend Our Juries insists it is not affiliated with Palestine Action and maintains that its campaign seeks to uphold democratic rights, not to provoke confrontation with authorities.

Over 100 people have already been arrested across the UK in recent weeks for actions deemed to breach the ban, including displaying the group's slogans or wearing branded clothing. Police say that these arrests are part of an effort to uphold the proscription and prevent public disorder.

The government, meanwhile, has urged members of the public not to participate in the rally, warning that anyone who appears to endorse or promote Palestine Action risks criminal prosecution under counterterrorism laws.

The protest is scheduled to take place later this week in Westminster, and police say they will be present in significant numbers to enforce the ban.