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Government Faces Scrutiny for Proscribing Protest Group Under Terrorism Act

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The UK government's decision to proscribe Palestine Action under counter-terrorism legislation is facing a legal challenge in the High Court, where lawyers have argued that the move represents an abuse of power and a threat to civil liberties.

Palestine Action, a direct-action group known for targeting facilities linked to military supply chains, has launched a legal bid to overturn its designation as a terrorist organisation. Co-founder Huda Ammori told the court that only a small fraction of the group's more than 385 actions could be considered remotely close to the legal threshold for terrorism. She cited an internal assessment from the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, which reportedly stated that most of the group's activities were disruptive but non-violent.

Legal representatives claim the ban undermines the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, protections enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. Barrister Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh said that the government's action appeared politically motivated, referencing the arrest of individuals simply for holding placards expressing support for Palestine Action.

The government, represented by Sir James Eadie KC, argued that the increasingly aggressive nature of the group's tactics justified its designation. It maintains that Palestine Action poses a serious threat to public safety and should challenge the proscription through the Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission, not the High Court. A final judicial hearing is scheduled in the coming days.

The legal case comes amid growing concern over the use of counter-terror legislation to suppress protest movements. A 74-year-old campaigner from Liverpool was detained for over eight hours after displaying a sign in support of the group. Similar arrests have occurred in Glasgow, prompting legal commentators to warn that authorities may be applying a dangerously broad interpretation of terrorism laws.

This is the first time a UK-based protest group has been banned under such legislation. Civil liberties organisations, including Amnesty International and several United Nations special rapporteurs, have criticised the decision, warning it sets a precedent that could blur the lines between legitimate protest and violent extremism.

Supporters of the ban argue that such action is necessary to uphold public order and discourage unlawful disruption. Critics, however, claim that the government is using security legislation to shut down dissent and delegitimise political opposition.

The High Court's ruling will be closely watched as a potential landmark in how far the UK government can go in policing non-violent protest under national security grounds.