

## PRESS RELEASE

# Policing of Palestine Action protests in disarray as police decide not to arrest sign-holders for terrorism in Totnes and Edinburgh



### [Action photos and videos](#)

- **Journalist George Monbiot joins protests but is not arrested**
- **UN Human Rights Chief says the proscription violates international law**
- **around 500 people are expected to take part in a mass sign-holding on 9 August**

In a further indication of the chaos and confusion that the proscription order has plunged the police into, eight sign holders in Totnes and three in Edinburgh Today (Saturday 26 July) sat for sixty minutes without being arrested under the Terrorism Act after they joined a nationwide wave

of protest as part of the Defend Our Juries' campaign, Lift The Ban, opposing the Home Secretary's classification of the direct action group Palestine Action, as a 'terrorist' organisation.

The protesters were all sat peacefully holding the same signs reading: **"I Oppose Genocide. I Support Palestine Action"** that more than 200 people have previously been arrested for holding since the proscription order came into force on 5 July this year.

In Totnes protesters were joined by dozens more holding signs with their own wording, as well as people holding trades union flags and hundreds of supporters singing "Lift the ban, now, for Gaza" and applauding speeches calling for the Home Secretary to Lift The Ban.



The proscription of Palestine Action has resulted in a **chaotic policing response** which has included an arrest for holding up a Private Eye cartoon and over a dozen peaceful sign-holders having their houses broken into and raided. In Kent a woman was threatened with arrest under the Terrorism Act, simply for holding a Palestinian flag and a sign saying "Free Gaza".

A spokesperson for Defend Our Juries said:

**"The chorus of disapproval for Yvette Cooper's barmy order grows louder by the day. Devon and Cornwall police were alerted to the demonstration in Totnes on**



**Thursday, giving them plenty of time to prepare. But unlike some of their colleagues they have exercised discretion to leave peaceful protestors be, the people defending our ancient liberties in a small, rural town. The real crime is not the protest, it's the horrific genocide they are protesting against."**

Yesterday UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk said the proscription of Palestine Action was a violation of international law. The high ranking official joins the widespread condemnation of the ban from five UN special rapporteurs, Home Office staff, human rights organisations, the former first minister of Scotland, and numerous artists and musicians.

**The award-winning author and journalist George Monbiot** joined the protest in Totnes but chose to hold a different sign that said: **"Palestine Action are protesters not terrorists"**. Local police decided not to waste their valuable resources and reputation on arresting him either.

**Monbiot said:** "The proscription of Palestine Action is the most illiberal thing any Home Secretary has done for at least 30 years. The result is an Orwellian situation, in which people gently calling for peace are arrested under the Terrorism Act, while the government actively assists Israeli state terror, as it perpetrates genocide in Gaza. This is an assault on free speech, on logic and on human decency."

**In a letter to police ahead of the demo, the Totnes residents urged them to take action to stop the government's complicity in genocide:** "In continuing to support the Israeli government in its genocide, including through the ongoing export of parts for F-35 fighter jets, the British government is committing crimes under the Genocide Act 1969, which is binding in UK law.

"As a senior law enforcement officer we urge you to apply your force's resources to investigate and prevent the exceptionally grave crimes that are taking place, instead of using your powers to silence those who draw attention to these crimes, whether with cardboard or red paint."

Similar sign-holding protests are scheduled to take place today in Derry for a third week where, so far, the local police have made no arrests. On Wednesday Derry City & Strabane District Council became the first elected politicians to openly defy the ban and call for it to be lifted.

Today's protests come ahead of **a peaceful mass action in London on 9 August at which around 500 people are expected to hold the same signs.**

In a 'permissions hearing' for a judicial review of the proscription in the High Court on Monday, the government admitted that the **advice it received from MI5 and elsewhere was that - unlike the 80 other groups on the proscribed list - Palestine Action does not advocate for violence against people**, but only for damage to property used to support the Israeli Government's assault on Gaza. The proscription of the group would therefore be "novel and unprecedented."

In the House of Lords earlier this week, **former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Lord Hain** asked: "How have we got to the point where peacefully holding up a placard about the

carnage in Gaza is equated with terrorism by Al Qaeda on 9/11 or Islamic State on countless occasions. And shouldn't the police be concentrating on real terrorism and real crime, not targeting peaceful protesters?"

Speaking to Al Jazeera, the former chief political commentator of The Daily Telegraph, **Peter Osborne, warned that Yvette Cooper's controversial ban of Palestine Action could lead to her resignation:** "If the general populace comes to the conclusion that this is a stunt by the Starmer government ... this legislation won't take, people will regard it as ridiculous ... you'll end up having thousands of people coming out in support of Palestine Action, thousands of people declared terrorists. The law will suddenly look an ass, this government will lose a great deal of political credibility and in due course the Home Secretary might have to resign."

**Former First Minister of Scotland Hamza Yousef,** in a statement circulated on social media earlier this month said: "The UK Government isn't just complicit, it's actively enabling genocide abroad and criminalising resistance to it here at home. They've weaponised anti-terror laws to silence dissent, not against violence, not against extremism, but against people trying to stop war crimes. If speaking out against war crimes makes you a terrorist, then the real danger isn't the protesters, it's a system that protects the killers and punishes those who stay silent. Silencing protest doesn't make the truth go away, it only makes it clearer who's on the wrong side of it."

Today's protests take place as evidence of mass starvation of the Palestinian people in Gaza by the Israeli government has been splashed across the front pages of our national newspapers and TV screens. Over 100 aid agencies signed a joint statement urging governments to take urgent action.

**80-year old Mary Light who was sign-holding in Totnes today said:** "I am a retired nurse. I am horrified to see the utter cruelty unleashed by the Israeli government and army. Parents are having to watch their children die from starvation, children seeing a dearly loved parent lying dead, waiting to be buried in a mass grave. As a nurse, I'm also appalled by the targeted destruction of hospitals and the torture, imprisonment and killing of medical staff. Over 1,400 healthcare workers have died—this is a war on Gaza's healthcare."

**Artist and grandmother Ruth Ben-Tovim who was also sign-holding in Totnes said:** "Resistance is lawful, resisting genocide is not wrong—it is a moral and legal obligation. Palestine Action have been labelled "terrorists" for protest actions including spray-painting military aircraft to highlight UK arms complicity with Israel's genocide. Once "terrorism" means "economic damage" or "embarrassment, freedom of expression ceases to exist. We are just ordinary people, but we can't be bystanders and ignore what is happening. We stand to show solidarity, to make visible the brutal implications of this law, and to oppose our government's role in genocide."

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## **References**

[UK: Palestine Action ban 'disturbing' misuse of UK counter-terrorism legislation, Türk warns](#)

[Letter to Totnes Police. 24 July](#)

[Council backs Palestine Action motion against own legal advice](#)

[Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre says Palestine Action has not publicised or glorified violence against people](#)

[Revealed: How Palestine Action was banned](#)

[Lord Hain Oral Question: Numbers arrested for participating in Palestine Action protests since its proscription](#)

[Peter Osborne speaking to Al Jazeera from 20:22](#)

[Hamza Yousaf statement on Instagram](#)

[Gazans 'wasting away' as mass starvation spreads, humanitarian groups warn](#)