

SOAS student charged under counter-terror laws for protesting Gaza genocide appears at Old Bailey

Our reporters
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Around 100 people rallied outside London's Central Criminal Court on Friday for the preliminary hearing of a student charged under the Terrorism Act (2000) for speech opposing Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Sarah, a student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, was arrested in a dawn raid on her home by London's Metropolitan Police in January 2024 after a speech she made on campus in October 2023 for the Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! (FRFI) student society, supporting the Palestinian right to self-determination.

Sarah was charged under the Starmer Labour government more than one year later, on March 5, 2025, with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) wielding Section 12 of the Terrorism Act, for allegedly inviting support for a proscribed organisation.

UK Lawyers for Israel, a Zionist group, lobbied for the charges to be laid. In October 2023, Zionists tagged the Met police in a video of Sarah's speech in which she defended Palestinians' right to resist the illegal occupation, blockade, and military bombardment by Israel of Gaza.

If convicted, she faces up to 14 years in prison. A second SOAS student was arrested on March 5 under the same counter-terror laws.

The SOAS 2 are being targeted as part of an escalating crackdown on the right to protest. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper is pressing into service anti-terror laws introduced by successive Labour and Tory governments aimed at criminalising protest and free speech, this time in defence of the Palestinian people.

Friday's protest was called by the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG) and its student group FRFI. It was joined by organisations including the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network UK. Members of the

Socialist Equality Party took part, distributing a statement issued by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, "Oppose Starmer's campus crackdown on Gaza genocide protest!"

Throughout the morning, while Sarah's case was heard, chants and speeches rang loudly outside the court: "Labour Party shame, shame! All the crimes in your name!", "From the belly of the beast: Hands off the Middle East!" and "While Palestine is occupied: Resistance is justified!"

Delivery trucks and other work vans tooted in support, underscoring widespread popular opposition to the Gaza genocide and against the criminalisation of dissent.

Inside the Old Bailey, Sarah was arraigned and pleaded not guilty to two counts of inviting support for a proscribed organisation, Hamas. Specifically, for having expressed "an opinion or belief that is supportive of a proscribed organisation" and being "reckless as to whether a person to whom the expression is directed will be encouraged to support a proscribed organisation".

The two counts under Section 12 are being applied to a speech Sarah made at SOAS on October 9, 2023 and a post in a WhatsApp group on October 16, 2023.

A trial was set for the week beginning February 23, 2026, and a pre-trial hearing for July 4 this year, to be held before Judge Sarah Munro KC.

The prosecutor in the case is Ben Holt, appointed Junior Treasury Counsel last year, part of a "team of specialist advocates who prosecute many of the most serious and complex cases in the country," according to the CPS website. Holt's professional biography explains he is "frequently instructed" by the Counter Terrorism Division and "regularly advises the Attorney General's Office in relation to Unduly Lenient Sentences."

Sarah's legal team requested that the bail condition

requiring her to relinquish her passport be removed: she has family in France and has had to request her passport back from the police to visit them. They noted that Sarah has made no efforts to evade the legal proceedings against her since being bailed in January of last year, and intends to study for a Master's and a PhD in the UK. Her request was denied.

After the hearing, Sarah addressed supporters outside the court: "My trial date has been set to February 2026 which... feels a long time away but it's going to come really, really soon. I'll have hearings between now and then I want you all to keep on showing up for me, but not just for me, for all the other activists, all the other protesters, all the other groups which are being attacked by the British state."

Sarah spoke with a reporter from the *World Socialist Web Site*. She said, "It's really important for us to fight this. We're both young students who were political, but we never expected that this could happen."

Of her involvement in the campus protests, Sarah said: "For us it's natural, we're young educated people and we can't pretend like we don't know what to do. We do, so we've done it [protest]."

Sarah's relatives are in France, "My family is very supportive. I mean, sometimes the politics they don't necessarily understand, but they can't believe the fact that someone as young as myself with no other convictions, literally just based on what I said, how that could land someone in prison, makes no sense."

Sarah is in the third year of her politics, philosophy and economics (PPE) degree at SOAS and explained, "The students and staff at SOAS have been very, very supportive. Loads of my academic staff have signed the open letter asking for my charges to be dropped."

SOAS management has responded to student protests with a battery of repressive measures, working with private security firms and police to dismantle student encampments and bringing a High Court injunction which prevents students from organising Boycott, Divestments, Sanctions protests on land near SOAS. The injunction names three students.

Speaking of these repressive measures, Sarah said, "I think around the country we're seeing a push for universities to be businesses and students are seen as customers and clients rather than people who are there to get an education. And that clearly shows in the way that people are treated."

"At SOAS we're seeing the restructuring of courses and... people in the SOAS liberated zone who are being

suspended, being excluded; alumni students who have been banned from campus... It's all part of the same struggle so we've got to fight that as well."

She explained, "I think globally what we're seeing is the system is failing us, and people calling themselves communists and socialists have been aware, but we've got a lot of work to do now in terms of organising people and showing them that there is an alternative beyond this."

Sarah responded forthrightly to the charges levelled against her: "The Terrorism Act was introduced by a Labour government, so this is all Labour legislation that we're grappling with. The Terrorism Act is a political act. It was initially built on the Prevention of Terrorism Act which was about suppressing the Irish struggle."

"My response to that is that the Palestinian people have every right to stand up against their occupation, against the genocide of their people, and that international law very clearly says that they have the right to pursue that struggle by whatever means available."

After the court hearing, SEP Assistant National Secretary Thomas Scripps made a statement in support of the SOAS 2, posted on X.

The SEP urges students, workers and all those who defend democratic rights to sign FRFI's petition on change.org. We call on left-wing, anti-war and civil liberties organisations and media outlets to add their name to FRFI's open letter to the CPS demanding the dropping of all charges against Sarah and the ending of its investigations against the other student.

Defending the SOAS 2 means reaching beyond the university campuses to the broadest sections of the working class, linking the fight against state repression to the development of a mass political movement of working people against austerity, militarism and war, in the fight for socialism.



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