

Protest outside Woolwich Crown Court demands release of Palestine Action's Filton 18

Michael Barnes, Ajanta Silva, Thomas Scripps
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The “Filton 18” members of Palestine Action appeared in Woolwich Crown Court today, a high-security courtroom and the state’s preferred venue for terrorism cases. They are being prosecuted in connection with an action last August at Israeli arms manufacturer Elbit Systems’ Filton site near Bristol, where protesters damaged property to impede the supply of war crimes in Gaza.

This week, Labour Home Secretary Yvette Cooper will be moving an order through Parliament outlawing Palestine Action altogether by adding it to the list of the government’s proscribed organisations—equating it with terrorist organisations like ISIS. Even expressing support for the organisation or its members would be made a criminal offence, with a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison.

Restrictions in place at this stage of the case mean the details of today’s proceedings in Woolwich cannot be reported. The hearing continues tomorrow, with full trial dates set for November 2025, May 2026 and June 2026.

Over 1,000 people protested outside the court. Banners read, “We Will Not Comply,” “Palestine Action, Heroism Not Terrorism,” “Free the Filton 18. The Real Terror is Government Abuse. Activism is not a Crime,” and “We are all Palestine Action.”

Among the featured speakers at the rally was Clare Hinchcliffe, mother of Zoë Rogers, one of the Filton 18, and Anne Farooque, mother of Zahra Farooque, another of the defendants. Members of the Socialist Equality Party spoke with both.

Clare told the SEP, “We’re seeing the government using the Filton 18 who acted with Palestine Action as a means of repressing and chilling protests...

“We know this is coming from our government’s relationship with Israel. There’s evidence of conversations between Keir Starmer and the Elbit Systems UK company...

“Brave people who are prepared to uphold international humanitarian law by breaking into arms factories and destroying those vile weapons, they are being treated as terrorists. This has got to stop because if it’s my daughter now, if it’s the Filton 18 now, if it’s Palestine Action next week, it’s going to be everyone.”

Anne explained of her daughter, “She’s in prison because of the government putting a terrorism connection to their case without any reason, as they have been charged only with criminal damage and breaking into the factory... We have been raided by the state to arrest her last November, and we have been handcuffed, including my son who is only 16 years old...

“We are in a democracy where you’re supposed to have the right of protest. The democracy is supposed to elect representatives of the people who are going to act on their behalf.

“And you see march after march of thousands and hundreds of thousands of people every week asking the government to act on what is happening in Gaza, about the genocide, to stop selling weapons to Israelis, to do an embargo, to at least be vocal and to act on behalf of the citizens.

“And in the opposite action from the government, they crack down on their own citizens.”

Jemma explained that the case against the Filton 18 is an “attack on our democracy and we need to stand up against it. They speak for all of us and most importantly

they speak for the Palestinians who are being bombed by weapons provided by our government... We can't allow our government to contribute to this war and the genocide of Palestinians."

Pascale "felt the need to be here today because I feel like I need to do more. I've been going on marches a lot and I see the work that people within Palestine Action have been doing, and I think they're very brave." The band Kneecap were also being "made examples of, the same with the Filton 18. They're wanting to crack down on these people because these people are loud and their voices have reached the masses."

Diane explained, "I'm here as a health worker and an individual and a climate activist. I'm going to meet other health workers who are coming, who are all horrified at the genocide going on in Palestine and horrified at the genocide in Sudan that is going on as well.

"To have our government complicit, and a Labour government at that, in selling arms, hosting Elbit and other arms factories who provide weapons to [attack] Palestine... it's more than horrific. It's like stamping us all, all humanity into the ground."



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