SOAS student appears at pre-trial hearing on UK terror charge

Our reporters
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A student from University of London's School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) charged under the Terrorism Act for defending the right of the Palestinian people to resist Israel's illegal occupation appeared at the Old Bailey on Friday.

Sarah, 21, a Philosophy, Politics and Economics student at SOAS, was charged under Section 12 of the Terrorism Act (2000) on March 4, 2025 for allegedly "inviting support for a proscribed organisation" (Hamas) for remarks she made in the first days of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza in October 2023.

A second student was arrested this year on the same basis, but has not been charged.

Today was a pre-trial hearing to confirm the timetable for evidence and legal arguments in a case that is a milestone in efforts to criminalise free speech and the right to protest on university campuses.

The 40-minute hearing was before Judge Richard Marks, the Common Sergeant of London, the second most senior permanent judge of London's Central Criminal Court, appointed by the monarch on the recommendation of the Lord Chancellor.

A full hearing opens on February 23 next year, with a further pre-trial hearing on October 26.

Before the court adjourned, bail for Sarah was renewed by Judge Marks who confirmed current restrictive bail conditions still apply. Sarah is banned from leaving England and Wales, with police holding her passport.

After the hearing, Sarah addressed supporters who rallied outside the Old Bailey: "We're at an unprecedented time in terms of the repression that is facing this movement. And we have to be clear about what it is that we have to do, what our responsibility is right now.

"We need to fight like hell to protect ourselves, to protect Palestine, to continue to defend our rights to free speech, to protest, to assembly, our right to defend Palestine."

Students from the SOAS encampment established last year spoke in support of Sarah. Imran said, "These two students are being targeted under British terrorism laws for speaking out in support of the Palestinian freedom struggle.

"This is part of the broader crackdown on the movement and the fight towards Palestinian liberation here in Britain. The SOAS 2 are not criminals. They are not terrorists. They are students. They are activists… They spoke up and refused to look away while bombs fell, whilst families were shattered, whilst food, a basic human right, was weaponized, whilst blood was shed."

"We are disgusted by the Crown Prosecution Service, who have chosen to treat peaceful protest as a threat to national security. Disgusted by a legal system that turns a blind eye to war crimes they help take place but turns its full force on students at home...

"And we are deeply disappointed, though not surprised, by the cowardice, the silence, the betrayal of Keir Starmer and the Labour Party. Let's be clear. The Labour Party is not a party for working-class people, nor for students, especially when it fails to acknowledge and is complicit in the genocide."

The terrorism charge against Sarah is part of a broader crackdown that includes SOAS having secured a High Court Injunction banning pro-Palestinian student activists from stepping foot on campus, punishable by up to two years imprisonment if breached. Students have been suspended, expelled and excluded from the university for their involvement in the encampment.

After her speech, Sarah called on supporters of the SOAS 2 to march as a delegation from the Old Bailey

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to the Royal Courts of Justice, joining hundreds rallying there against Palestine Action's proscription.

PA's lawyers were seeking a High Court injunction for interim relief, suspending the ban while they appealed for judicial review of the Labour government's order to list PA as a terrorist organisation. Late this afternoon, the High Court rejected PA's application and at one minute after midnight it will become an offence under the Terrorism Act to be a member or supporter of the group.

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