

Open Letter by Jewish public figures challenges Starmer government: “Proscribe genocide, not protest”

Tony Robson
8 August 2025

Around 300 Jewish public figures have delivered a scathing indictment of the Labour government’s complicity in Israeli war crimes and its authoritarian crackdown on protest at home. Their open letter begins with the powerful declaration, “Proscribe genocide, not protest.”

Addressed to Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, the letter is a response to the unprecedented move on July 5 to proscribe Palestine Action (PA) as a terrorist organisation. The Terrorism Act (2000) makes it a criminal offence for a person to belong to, invite support for, recklessly express support for, or arrange a meeting in support of a proscribed organisation—carrying a maximum sentence of 14 years imprisonment.

The letter denounces the ban as “illegitimate and unethical” and declares, “Opposing the brutality of genocide, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing taking place in Gaza and the West Bank, including taking direct action, is not antisemitic. Nor is it terrorism.”

The leading signatories include human rights lawyer Sir Geoffrey Bindman KC, filmmaker Mike Leigh and writers Gillian Slovo and Michael Rosen. Coming from prominent Jewish legal and cultural figures it represents a devastating public rebuttal to the Starmer government’s smearing opposition to the Gaza genocide as “antisemitic”.

The signatories state: “We are Jews who oppose the genocide by Israel against the Palestinian people, the reality of which is agonisingly on show every day on radio, television and social media.”

Their letter draws historical parallels between the mass murder by the Nazis against Jewish people and the atrocities being committed by the Israeli state against the Palestinians: “We oppose genocide as human beings. We

oppose it because we are Jews who have learnt from our history to be vigilant against injustice and stand up for justice for all people, everywhere.” They add, “For us, ‘Never again’ does not mean only crimes against Jews, let alone criticism of Israel, but never again by anyone to anyone.”

The letter refutes attempts to deny that a genocide is taking place: “The International Court of Justice identified Israel’s behaviour in Gaza as possible genocide. It is now widely recognised as actual genocide. Dozens and dozens of analyses by respected human-rights organisations and genocide scholars throughout the world have all now reached the same conclusion.”

It cites three examples:

- B’Tselem’s “Our Genocide” publication in July 2025.
- Amnesty International’s conclusion (December 2024) that Israel is committing genocide.
- Israeli historian Omer Bartov’s statement in *The New York Times* (15 July 2025), “I’m a Genocide Scholar. I Know It When I See It”.

The letter notes the Labour government is in violation of its binding obligations under international law: “We also note the ICJ’s insistence that once it had identified the risk of genocide by Israel, the obligation on other states was to ensure they were not complicit, to halt genocide if it had happened, and to prevent it if it looked likely to happen.”

Instead of halting arms sales and ending diplomatic cover for Israel, the Starmer government has criminalised those attempting to fulfil this obligation. This includes over 200 people arrested since the proscription of Palestine Action last month, some simply for holding signs that read “Free Palestine” or “Israel is committing genocide,” or for carrying the Palestinian flag.

The open letter says this is part of a broader

authoritarian trajectory: “The actions of the UK government expand on a disturbing trend of attempts by successive governments to restrict peaceful protests intended to save lives... It has made the UK among the most repressive countries in Europe according to UN representatives, especially since the proscription of Palestine Action.”

The letter refutes “assurances” given by Minister of State for the Home Office Dan Jarvis that the proscription of PA would not “impinge on peaceful protest.”:

“In reality, we have seen some extraordinary police action, including an arrest involving *Private Eye* where a protester merely carried a poster image of a satirical cartoon previously published without challenge in the magazine, and in Kent, where police threatened to arrest a protester for holding a Palestinian flag.

“We note the Kent police response, justifying an intervention of theirs, said in words quoted in Haroon Siddique’s *Guardian* report: ‘Under the Terrorism Act it is a criminal offence to carry or display items that may arouse reasonable suspicion that an individual is a member or supporter of a proscribed organisation such as Palestine Action.’ The offending ‘items’ in that instance were a Palestinian flag, the utterance ‘Free Palestine,’ and a poster saying, ‘Israel is committing genocide.’”

The letter concludes by rejecting the crocodile tears shed by the Starmer government in the past weeks as the mass starvation methods have intensified against Gazans:

“It is time to end the government’s handwringing over the level of slaughter and suffering in Gaza and the West Bank, mixed with tacit support to the Israeli state. The United Kingdom is not powerless in the face of Israel’s breaches of international law and we call on the government to take the tough diplomatic, political and economic action to help end genocide, occupation, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing.”

The Starmer government’s response was to refuse to even acknowledge the letter. When a delegation from Jewish Bloc for Palestine attempted to deliver it to the Prime Minister on Tuesday at his residence in 10 Downing Street, they were blocked by the police.

A video posted by Skwawkbox of the rally in Whitehall, carrying the banner “Holocaust survivor descendants against Gaza genocide”, showed the two-person delegation confronted with locked gates and a phalanx of police standing behind like guards of a fortress.

This is in line with the crackdown the Starmer government has mounted in response to a planned protest against the proscription of PA in central London this

Saturday organised by Defend Our Juries.

As the WSWs has reported, in the days leading up to the demonstration, London’s Metropolitan Police has threatened mass arrests, with press reports of prison cells being cleared and officers drafted in from other forces. The Defend Our Juries website was taken offline following an implied legal threat against its hosting company, cutting off public access to protest rights information.

The government announced on August 7 that ten campaigners have already been charged under the Terrorism Act since the ban against PA. Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy has told protestors to “stay away”, branding such action as support for a “proscribed terror organisation that wishes harm on the British people”.

A Zoom meeting yesterday evening hosted by Defend Our Juries and planning for the upcoming protest was shut down just before it was due to start. Skwawkbox reported the email from the Zoom “Trust and Safety Team”, which informed the organisers: “Zoom has received a request from the Metropolitan Police Service, Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit, London UK seeking to restrict access to users to a meeting scheduled by your account, specifically meeting number 88143893690.”

The letter published by Jewish public figures speaks to the sentiments of millions who refuse to be cowed by the authoritarianism of the Starmer government. But the criminal actions they indict cannot be stopped simply through the application of mass pressure.

The bitter experience of nearly two years confirms that the genocide against the Palestinians can only be stopped as part of a broader fight against war, including the three-year NATO proxy war in Ukraine against Russia and the ongoing redivision of the Middle East, including a threatened military assault against Iran, all ultimately targeting China.

The defence of basic democratic rights and opposition to war and the gutting of social spending requires the building of a socialist movement, based on a mobilisation of the international working class and directed at the root of the problem: capitalism, its nation state system and the oligarchy which rules over it.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)