

UK counter-terror police arrest five key organizers of protests against Palestine Action ban

Robert Stevens
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In a pre-emptive strike against an upcoming protest in London against the proscription of Palestine Action (PA), counter-terrorism officers have arrested five organisers of the Defend Our Juries (DOJ) legal defence campaign.

A series of nationwide raids were mounted early on Tuesday morning before the organisation was due to hold a press conference. Those arrested included Tim Crosland, a DOJ co-founder and former government lawyer, and Paddy Friend, a law student and DOJ spokesperson. The Metropolitan Police said those arrested were two men aged 26 and 55, a 61-year-old woman in London, a 48-year-old woman in Kendal, Cumbria, and a 39-year-old man in Barnsley, South Yorkshire.

In response to the government's proscription of the Palestine Action group on July 5, Defend Our Juries have led "Lift the Ban" protests in London's Parliament Square which have resulted in mass arrests—including over 530 on one day alone—for holding a sign reading: "I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action."

Defend Our Juries is set to hold another protest in London on Saturday at which more than 1,000 people are committed to attend.

The five were arrested under Section 12 of the Terrorism Act that prohibits support for a proscribed organisation and carries a maximum prison term of 14 years. Chief Superintendent Helen Flanagan, head of operations for the Met's Counter Terrorism Command, said of the arrests, "Palestine Action is clearly proscribed as a terrorist group, and those showing support for this particular group, or encouraging others to do so can expect to be arrested, investigated and prosecuted."

DOJ said that "key spokespeople" were arrested in the raids "for addressing Open Calls during which legal information on the risks of opposing Labour's absurd ban on Palestine Action have been shared."

A spokesperson called attention the targeted nature of the police operation: "Locking up our key spokespeople just hours before they were due to hold a press conference announcing more peaceful Lift the Ban protests constitutes an unprecedented assault on free speech.

"The counter-terrorism police are clearly targeting people they perceive as organisers, and the key spokespeople arrested were told they were being arrested for hosting public Zoom calls.

"No one has been arrested for joining the Zoom calls—only the hosts—and we will be holding another Zoom call tonight ahead of our action on Saturday."

Defend Our Juries posted footage on X of Friend's arrest. In the video, a police officer is heard informing the young man he is "under arrest on suspicion of committing the offence of Section 12, Subsection 3 of the Terrorism Act 2000. You are alleged with addressing an online Zoom meeting between the 10th of July 2025 and the 21st of August 2025 for the purpose of encouraging support for and furthering the activities of proscribed organisation Palestine Action."

Amnesty International called for "the immediate and unconditional release" of the five. Kerry Moscogiuri, Director of Campaigns and Communications at Amnesty International UK, said, "The mass peaceful demonstrations they have organised over recent weeks are protected by international human rights law—and to think they run the risk of being imprisoned for up to 14 years is a terrifying example of the UK authorities' willingness to use authoritarian practices to silence dissent.

"Criminalising speech or protest is only permitted when it incites violence, hatred or discrimination. To be clear: expressing support for Palestine Action does not meet this threshold. In fact, arresting and prosecuting people in this context, is a violation of the UK's obligations under

human rights law.”

The Tuesday press conference, which was then postponed to Wednesday, was due to be attended by Huda Ammori, the co-founder of Palestine Action, and award winning author Sally Rooney.

Last month, the High Court ruled that Ammori can challenge the lawfulness of Home Secretary Yvette Cooper’s order banning Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation. The High Court will carry out a judicial review of the legality of the proscription. This is not certain to go ahead as a Court of Appeal judge, on August 21, approved an application by the government for permission to appeal the plans for judicial review.

The arrest of key DOJ figures was the latest crackdown aimed at criminalising opposition to the destruction of Gaza and took place as Israeli tanks rolled into Gaza City, the last portion of Gaza not yet totally demolished and home to a million refugees.

More than 700 people have been arrested for holding signs in less than two months since the proscription was enforced after PA members spray painted military aircraft at the Royal Air Force Base at Brize Norton.

On August 26, the Metropolitan Police announced that the Crown Prosecution Service had authorised the charging of 64 people with showing support for Palestine Action in relation to protests in central London on July 5 and 12. Three others were charged at the start of August in relation to the July 5 protest.

Met Police Commander Dominic Murphy, clearly addressing the planned DOJ protest on September 6, said, “The notion that by coming out and showing support toward a proscribed terrorist group will overwhelm us is completely misguided.

“The reality for those who have carried out this action is that they are now facing serious charges under the Terrorism Act. If convicted of such an offence, it can have a severe impact on your life or career,” he added.

“My message to anyone thinking about carrying out similar action in the coming weeks is to reconsider.”

Police have also arrested award-winning screenwriter Paul Laverty in Edinburgh on allegations of “showing support for a proscribed organisation”. Laverty, 68, was the screenwriter for several films by director Ken Loach and has twice won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

On August 25, Laverty was attending a protest at St Leonard’s police station in support Moira McFarlane, a member of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign. McFarlane was due to be charged under Section 13 of the

Terrorism Act, which carries a maximum sentence of six months in prison, for wearing a T-shirt with the slogan: “Genocide in Palestine, time to take Action”. McFarlane was arrested a fortnight earlier at her home by plainclothes police.

At the rally, Laverty read out the names of Labour cabinet ministers, accusing them of collaborating in genocide. At least 12 police officers then appeared, singling out, chasing and arresting Laverty, who was wearing a T-shirt with the same wording as McFarlane.

Other repressive legislation, including the Public Order Act, is being utilized. Civil rights group Big Brother Watch reported Wednesday that the Met has deployed new stop and search powers almost 50 times since they were introduced in Section 11 of the Public Order Act 2023. The majority of this total, 40, were people attending a Gaza protest by Youth Demand in July last year.

In an attempt to behead anti-genocide protests in London which millions have attended in more than 30 mass demonstrations over the past two years, the Met has questioned or arrested and charged key figures among its organisers including former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, Stop the War Coalition chief steward Chris Nineham and Palestine Solidarity Campaign leader Ben Jamal.

The stepping up of the persecution with the arrests of leading Defend Our Juries personnel exposes the fraudulent assurances from the Starmer government that, in proscribing Palestine Action, they would not target protests in support of the Palestinians. The intensification of the crackdown is proceeding despite the ruling in the High Court by Judge Chamberlain, in the successful action brought by Huda Ammori, that it would not be an offence to campaign for the de-proscription of Palestine Action.



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