

# Starmer government demands Birmingham police reverse ban on Maccabi Tel Aviv Zionist hooligans attending Aston Villa match

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Britain's Labour government has mounted an unprecedented campaign to reverse a police ban on hooligans from Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv football team from attending a match against Aston Villa in Birmingham, England.

With the match due to go ahead on November 6, last week Birmingham City Council's Safety Advisory Group (SAG) decided to ban Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters from attending. Aston Villa were advised of the decision on October 16. The decision was backed by West Midlands' Police (WMP) who stated that the ban "will help mitigate risks to public safety".

Birmingham is the second largest city in the UK. It has a large Muslim population, who have played a major role in protests and marches held regularly in the city and nationally over the past two years against Israel's genocide of the Palestinians.

Given the violent record of the Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters, of which a substantial element are "ultra" hooligans notorious for their close ties to the Israeli state and armed forces, any other decision but to impose a ban would have been perverse.

In its October 16 statement, WMP said, "While the Safety Certificate is issued by Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police supports the decision to prohibit away supporters from attending... we have classified the upcoming Aston Villa vs Maccabi Tel-Aviv fixture as high risk."

It noted, "This decision is based on current intelligence and previous incidents, including violent clashes and hate crime offences that occurred during the 2024 Europa League match between Ajax and Maccabi Tel Aviv in Amsterdam."

In their attempt to reverse the ban, a government spokesperson said of this risk assessment, "No one should be stopped from watching a football game simply because of who they are." This is staggering. Regarding the fascistic hooligans who follow Maccabi Tel Aviv, and who specifically target Muslims—it very much does matter *who they are*.

rampage in Amsterdam, last November. Maccabi's hooligans terrorised the local Muslim population and opponents of the genocide, tearing up Palestinian flags, hitting taxis driven by Arabic drivers with crowbars, and chanting pro-genocide slogans. These included, "There are no schools in Gaza because there are no children left," "F\*ck Palestine," "IDF [Israel Defense Forces] f\*ck the Arabs," and "Death to Arabs! We will win."

This followed an attack and the hospitalisation the previous March of a man carrying a Palestinian flag, by group of Maccabi thugs, prior to a game against Olympiacos in Athens.

Similar songs were repeated in the Romanian capital Bucharest when hooligans from another Israeli team, Beitar Jerusalem, were allowed to visit in July this year.

Amid howls of outrage from the government, the opposition Conservative Party and the media over the supposed antisemitic character of the ban, the fears of those warning of the implications of allowing Maccabi's thugs onto Birmingham's streets were dramatically vindicated.

On Sunday evening, police in Tel Aviv were forced to call off—before the game began—a local derby match between Maccabi and rivals Hapoel after fans rioted outside and inside their shared Bloomfield Stadium. Police announced there were 12 injuries to people caused by smoke grenades and pyrotechnic devices thrown by thugs. Stating "this is not a soccer game, this is a breach of order and serious violence," with three officers injured, police called the match off declaring "risks to human life".

Local authorities in Britain are required by law to deploy a Safety Advisory Group to advise event organizers on public safety. These include police, in an external role, the fire service, ambulance services, and other experts. In Birmingham's case the public safety of over one million people is covered by the Safety Advisory Group.

Management at Aston Villa, with tens of thousands of fans regularly attending domestic games and European fixtures,

were already concerned over the implications of hosting Maccabi Tel Aviv. Many of the club's fans are Muslims, as will be a substantial number of its employees including stewards.

The BBC reported Saturday that on October 3, Aston Villa management told its stewards that "regarding the upcoming fixture against Maccabi Tel Aviv... we appreciate that some of you may have concerns about attending work". Those set to steward the game would "be able to submit a one-off absence request."

The decision by the SAG and the police was immediately seized on by the government, prompted by various Zionist groups, to decry "antisemitism". Prime Minister Keir Starmer declared his opposition in an X posting, citing a BBC News report, even before the WMP's statement was issued.

Starmer declared, "We will not tolerate antisemitism on our streets. The role of the police is to ensure all football fans can enjoy the game, without fear of violence or intimidation."

Downing Street said it was "working to reverse" the ban "at pace across government". A spokesman said, "The government is working with policing and other partners to do everything in our power to ensure this game can safely go ahead, with all fans present. We are exploring what additional resources and support are required so all fans can attend."

Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar declared "I call on the UK authorities to reverse this cowardly decision!" The UK Zionist group the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism threatened legal action.

The right-wing media flooded their pages with demands for the lifting of the ban. The *Telegraph's* editorial, "If police chiefs can't police, they must resign", declared, "Our forces have effectively conceded that they are unable to guarantee the safety of Jewish fans in a British city".

Claiming that the Maccabi thugs were the victims, it denounced the massive protests against Israel's genocide declaring that the "continuing run of virulently anti-Semitic protests in our nation's cities, and their ability to draw large crowds, made it likely that troublemakers would travel into the city specifically to seek out confrontation."

The *Daily Express* published a banner front-page headline citing Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch saying, "there are parts of Britain where Jews cannot go", and calling the ban "a national disgrace".

Zarah Sultana MP, who resigned from the Labour Party earlier this year to co-lead a new left party with Jeremy Corbyn, posted on X her support for the ban, adding, "Next UEFA must ban all Israeli teams. We cannot have normalisation with genocide and apartheid".

In a *Daily Express* move, *Express* Christian Calgie posted on X, "Cannot wait until my taxes no longer fund Zarah's salary." Responding to another post from a user who said they couldn't "wait until my taxes fund deporting Zarahs [sic]", Calgie said: "Even better."

Calgie took down his post after a massive backlash against his calls for an elected Member of Parliament to be deported, declaring that he was "taking a break from X to prioritise my mental health." No apology was forthcoming from the *Express*.

Ayoub Khan, MP for Birmingham Perry Barr, who shifted from the Liberal Democrats to support Corbyn's Independent group of MP's over Gaza, has threatened legal action over allegations of antisemitism levelled against him for supporting the ban.

The provocative decision by the Starmer government to try and reverse a decision that could lead to large-scale disorder and see lives threatened in a major British city is the latest manifestation of its support for Israel's genocide of the Palestinians and onslaught on the democratic rights of its opponents.

Throughout the genocide, firstly the Sunak government and then Starmer's regularly cited the "operational independence" of the police when severe restrictions, drawn up in collaboration with Downing Street, were imposed on protests against the Gaza genocide.

Immediately prior to declaring his opposition to the ban, Starmer visited the London HQ of Zionist group the Community Security Trust (CST). There he announced that the CST would receive a further £10 million in government funding, on top of £72 million being handed over covering 2024-28. Starmer took the opportunity to condemn a popular chant of the anti-genocide marchers, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!" as "clearly antisemitic" which "we need to deal with... much more robustly, in my view".

Bans on chants are being considered together with draconian new legal guidelines on the "cumulative impact" of protests, both aimed at the now over 30 national demonstrations against genocide and mass slaughter held in London, and thousands more demos in other cities. The government is already seeking to ban protests entirely or ensure they are so heavily restricted as to be ineffective.



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