

Demand the immediate release of UK pro-Palestine hunger strikers threatened with death

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Four young pro-Palestinian political prisoners remain in acute danger of starving to death in jail at the hands of Britain's Labour government as they continue a near two-month hunger strike.

Kamran Ahmed, Heba Muraisi, Teuta Hoxha and Lewie Chiaramello, remain on hunger strike after three others—Amu Gib (49 days), Qesser Zuhrah (48 days) and Jon Cink (38 days)—paused theirs on December 23. Umer Khalid, the other of the eight original hunger strikers ended his action after 13 days.

On Christmas Day, Heba Muraisi completed 53 days without food, Teuta Hoxha 47 days, Kamran Ahmed 46 and Chiaramello 32. Death usually occurs between 60 to 70 days without food but could come sooner depending on the health of the individual and their circumstances.

On Friday, a group of United Nations experts including Gina Romero, the UN special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, intervened to denounce Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer's treatment of the protesters. Their statement declared, "These reports raise serious questions about compliance with international human rights law and standards, including obligations to protect life and prevent cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment."

They added, "Preventable deaths in custody are never acceptable. The state bears full responsibility for the lives and wellbeing of those it detains... Urgent action is required now."

The Labour government is spearheading a global campaign of state repression against opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza.

None of the protesters—who are on remand—has been found guilty of anything. They have all suffered ill treatment and unjustified blocks on communication with the outside world, due to the court's arbitrary and unjust claim that charges against individuals arrested for Palestine Action (PA) protests have a "terrorist connection."

In breach of the standard pre-trial custody limit of six months, all the hunger strikers have been held on remand for over a

year—with Qesser Zuhrah held for 16 months. They are demanding immediate bail, the right to a fair trial, an end to censorship of their communications, the de-proscription of Palestine Action and the closing of all UK sites run by Israel's biggest weapons manufacturer Elbit.

Justice Minister David Lammy has refused all pleas by the group's lawyers and family representative to even meet them. The hunger strikers are on remand ahead of trials as part of the Filton 24 case for alleged involvement in an August 2024 Palestine Action protest of Elbit—in Filton, near Bristol. Some are also accused of involvement in a June 2025 protest at the Brize Norton Royal Air Force base in Oxfordshire, where two military supply planes were daubed with red paint.

Over the past 26 months the criminalisation of opposition to the Gaza genocide has escalated in Britain as the major imperialist powers have allowed Israel a free hand to commit some of the worst war crimes of this century.

Over 2,700 people have been arrested in just four months under the Terrorism Act 2000 for peacefully protesting the banning of Palestine Action. Anti-genocide protests have been subjected to strict conditions, and denounced as "hate marches."

Such measures are replicated in country after country, including campus raids with students being arrested in the United States and elsewhere.

A study issued in October by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)—focussing on the UK, the US, France and Germany—noted that protests in these countries were "powerful indicators of a growing global awareness of ongoing genocide and systematic violations of international law, and of the critical need for citizen action where governments remain complicit or inert."

The FIDH added, "Yet, as this report demonstrates, such expressions of solidarity are being met with widespread repression, not only under authoritarian regimes, but also in liberal democracies that have long claimed to uphold human rights." It noted that all four countries had "weaponised" counter-terrorism legislation to crack down on legitimate protest against Israel's onslaught in Gaza and the occupied

West Bank.

The brutal treatment by Britain's Labour government of the hunger strikers is a step change in this lurch to authoritarianism and dictatorship. The government made clear from the outset that it would not consider *any* of the legitimate democratic demands of the political prisoners. Instead, Starmer, Lammy and Health Secretary Wes Streeting all refused to intervene to prevent the deaths of the hunger strikers.

More than two weeks ago (December 10), lawyers for several of the hunger strikers put the matter sharply in a letter to Lammy: "should this situation be allowed to continue without resolution, there is the real and increasingly likely potential that young British citizens will die in prison, having never even been convicted of an offence."

But not even the repeated hospitalisation of the hunger strikers and the December 22 threat of High Court legal action by lawyers challenging Lammy's refusal to meet their representatives has forced a retreat from Downing Street.

Instead, ministers and MPs deserted Westminster for Parliament's Christmas recess on December 18, not to return until January 5. This is under conditions in which one of the remaining hunger strikers, Kamran Ahmed is—as reported by his sister—is losing up to half a kilogram a day.

Hunger striker Qesser said they are up against a "government who think it's appropriate to 'break for Christmas' while 8 of its citizens starve in their cells, while Gaza starves... all because of the British governments persistent and nauseating commitment to the most unjust Zionist project."

Starmer's barbaric actions mirror those of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, which allowed the starving to death of 10 Irish Republicans—most famously Bobby Sands—during the 1981 hunger strike at Long Kesh prison. The hunger strike was to protest the British government's revocation of Special Category Status for political prisoners of war. Sands was starved to death even as he was elected to the House of Commons, along with two other Republican prisoners (one hunger striker) to the Dáil Éireann.

There is barely any opposition to Labour's historic crime within the Labour Party or parliament more generally. Just 62 MPs, less than a tenth of the 650 in Parliament, have signed an Early Day Motion calling on Lammy "to intervene urgently to ensure their [hunger strikers] treatment is humane and their human rights are upheld." Among these just 31 (7 percent) are numbered among Labour's 404 MPs.

Workers and youth in Britain and internationally must mobilise in opposition to the most concerted attack on democratic rights in history. The basis for this political fightback was explained in an analysis by Socialist Equality Party (UK) National Chairman Chris Marsden this July. The transformation of a party which arose out of the fight for workers' democratic rights to organise and strike against their employers into the spearhead of the worst attack on democratic rights in British history

cannot be attributed to a few bad leaders. Rather Starmer, a former human rights lawyer turned right-wing zealot, and his government are the end product of a fundamental shift within the very foundations of world capitalism...

Capitalism is being driven into an existential crisis by its inherent contradictions, between an interconnected system of production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states based on upholding private ownership of the means of production. To maintain its rule and immense privileges, the bourgeoisie in every imperialist country must wage trade and military war abroad and class war at home to ensure national competitiveness against their rivals.

This agenda is incompatible with the preservation of democratic rights. They are being torn up, spearheaded by the attacks on anti-genocide protests and on migrants.

Starmer's Labour government is proof that Trump's drive towards dictatorship in the United States is only the most advanced expression of a forced march to far-right authoritarianism under way internationally.

Workers and young people in Britain and internationally must demand the immediate release of the hunger strikers and all those held without charge for peaceful protest and the withdrawal of the proscription on Palestine Action.

Bitter experience the world over demonstrates that protests limited to placing pressure on imperialist governments complicit in all the crimes of the fascistic Netanyahu regime are not enough. A new anti-war movement must be built on socialist, internationalist foundations and based on the working class—the great revolutionary force in society—acting independently of every faction of the ruling elite.



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