

Mass arrests at protests held across UK supporting banned Palestine Action



Police officers remove a demonstrator from a protest in Parliament Square in support of Palestine Action [Yui Mok/PA via AP]

London, July 20 (RHC)-- Police in the UK have arrested more than 100 people at protests across the country calling for a ban on campaign group Palestine Action to be reversed.

Demonstrations took place on Saturday in Manchester, Edinburgh, Bristol, Truro and London as part of a campaign coordinated by Defend Our Juries, which has already seen dozens arrested.

London's Metropolitan police said 55 people were arrested Saturday in Parliament Square for displaying placards in support of Palestine Action. A further eight arrests were made in a separate march in central London in support of the group.

The Met police said 70 people were arrested at similar demonstrations in Parliament Square over the past two weekends. Greater Manchester Police said it arrested 18 people on suspicion of supporting a proscribed organisation.

Avon and Somerset Police said 17 people were arrested under the Terrorism Act at a demonstration on College Green in Bristol. Devon and Cornwall Police arrested eight people protesting in Truro, Cornwall.

"Just a few weeks ago, being arrested under the Terrorism Act was the stuff of nightmares," said a spokesperson for Defend Our Juries. "Now it's a badge of honour that people are wearing with pride – the mark of resistance to genocide and standing firm for our democratic freedoms."

At the time of reporting, a total of 106 people had been detained on Saturday. Police warned before the protests that those showing support for the proscribed activist group faced arrest.

The protests come ahead of a High Court hearing on Monday in which the cofounder of Palestine Action, Huda Ammori, will ask for the green light to challenge the home secretary's decision to ban the group under "anti-terror" laws.

The ban means that membership of, or support for, the direct action group is now a criminal offence punishable by up to 14 years in prison, under the Terrorism Act 2000, putting the group on a par with armed groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIL (ISIS).

Authorities have beefed up police presence in Westminster in the wake of the rallies.

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Ade Adelekan said those expressing support for Palestine Action "will likely be committing an offence and will very likely be arrested."

Five people appeared in court on Saturday over a Palestine Action protest at an Israeli-linked defence firm's site. Members of the organization, allegedly armed with sledgehammers and whips, are accused of breaking into the Elbit Systems site near Patchway, Bristol, in the early hours of August 6, 2024, "counter-terrorism" police said.

More than 2 million pounds of damage (\$2.68 million) was caused, and police officers and a security guard were assaulted, the Westminster Magistrates' Court heard. Prosecutors claim the alleged offences had a "terrorist connection." The five involved were charged with aggravated burglary, criminal damage and violent disorder.

Palestine Action describes itself as "a pro-Palestinian organisation that disrupts the arms industry in the United Kingdom with direct action."

Since its founding in July 2020, it has carried out hundreds of protests across the UK aimed at disrupting the operations of companies it accuses of profiting from Israeli military assaults, with a particular focus on the Israeli arms manufacturer Elbit Systems.

The group's tactics typically involve breaking into facilities, chaining themselves to machinery, daubing buildings with red paint and destroying equipment.

The UK has seen hundreds of thousands of people peacefully protest on a near-weekly basis, calling for an end to Israel's genocidal war in Gaza in the last 22 months.

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