



Jon Boutcher QPM
Chief Constable
Police Service of Northern Ireland
Police Headquarters
65 Knock Road
Belfast BT6 6LE

11 August 2025

Dear Chief Constable

Re: Policing of Palestine protests

I am writing regarding the policing of protest related to the proscription of Palestine Action and the violations of international human rights law that this has involved. I write following the arrest of a woman on Saturday 9th August at a Refugees Welcome rally in Belfast which I addressed.

Since Palestine Action was proscribed on 5th July 2025, there have been a series of protests by groups and individuals opposed to that decision. These protests have occurred in various locations including in Northern Ireland, where protesters have displayed signs or worn t-shirts with messages such as, 'I Oppose Genocide. I Support Palestine Action' or similar.

These protests have been entirely peaceful. Nevertheless, as you will know, very large numbers of these protesters have been arrested for offences under Sections 12 and 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000 across the UK, including now in Northern Ireland. The arrest of otherwise peaceful protesters solely for expressing the statement 'I Oppose Genocide. I Support Palestine Action' is a violation of the UK's international obligations to protect the rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Further arrests on this basis would violate international human rights law. As such, we urge you to instruct your officers to comply with the UK's international obligations and act with restraint in their response to any such protests that occur, by not arresting protesters who display messages that state they oppose genocide and support Palestine Action.

Under the international human rights framework to which the UK is a party, state interference with expression and peaceful assembly must be lawful, and a necessary and proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.¹ In this context, protest speech can only be criminalised if it incites violence or advocates hatred or discrimination.² Expression of support for a proscribed organisation could only meet this threshold, if that expression were likely to induce its audience to partake in violence, and to do so imminently.³ As part of this assessment, the particular facts of the expression, the proscription and the nature of the organisation in question must also be taken into account. In this instance, it cannot be justified to treat expression of support for Palestine Action as inherently and uniformly incitement.⁴ The relevant ECtHR caselaw has found that placards are protected speech unless they directly and

¹ Articles 10 & 11, European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; Articles 19 & 21, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

² See, *Perinçek v. Switzerland*, European Court of Human Rights [GC], no. 27510/08, ECHR 2015 para 206; UN General Assembly, 'Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence' (A/HRC/22/17/Add.4) para 29

³ *Erkizia Almandoz v. Spain*, European Court of Human Rights no. 5869/17, 22 June 2021, para 40

⁴ UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 37: Article 21: right of peaceful assembly, (CCPR/C/GC/37) para 51: "Generally, the use of flags, uniforms, signs and banners is to be regarded as a legitimate form of expression that should not be restricted, even if such symbols are reminders of a painful past. In exceptional cases, where such symbols are directly and predominantly associated with incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, appropriate restrictions should apply."



expressly constitute incitement;⁵ and Defend our Juries themselves, who have organised most of the protests in the UK, have been clear that they do not celebrate or encourage violence.⁶

The High Court in England & Wales has recently granted permission for Palestine Action to pursue judicial review proceedings against their proscription. In doing so the High Court has ruled that it is at least arguable that the proscription of Palestine Action was unlawful. The legal foundation for the section 12 and 13 offences under which arrests have taken place up to now is therefore in doubt, and subject to what the court referred to as a 'serious issue to be tried'.⁷ In these circumstances, continuing to implement arrests would be a reckless use of police power, and inevitably risk breaching the test of legality.

People are understandably and justifiably outraged by the ongoing genocide being committed by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza. They are entitled under international human rights law to peacefully express themselves. There is no reasonable basis for peaceful protesters to be regarded as inciting violence. It is therefore disproportionate, and a clear violation of the UK's human rights obligations, to be arresting and treating them as terrorists.

We urge you to ensure the PSNI's approach to such protests is in compliance with the international human rights standards to which the UK has signed up.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Corrigan
Northern Ireland Programme Director

⁵ See eg *Silgir v. Turkey*, no. 60389/10, 3 May 2022; *Agit Demir v. Turkey*, no. 36475/10, 27 February 2018

⁶ See eg https://docs.google.com/document/d/1i8_mrhdM3EtVnvK0uBxFWyJrt8NcR8JorlOBJTS97nQ/edit?tab=t.0 (Accessed 2 August 2025)

⁷ *Huda Ammori v SSHD* [2025] EWHC 2013 (Admin) paras 3 & 70