



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

‘BLACK PROTEST LEGAL SUPPORT’ PRESS RELEASE ON THE LONDON BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS

On 3, 6 and 7 June 2020, Black Protest Legal Support Legal Observers attended the Black Lives Matter protests taking place across Hyde Park, Parliament Square and the US Embassy.

We remain extremely concerned by the level of police aggression we witnessed. On all three days there was an overwhelming police presence, including mounted police and riot police, despite the protests being of a peaceful nature.

On 6 June 2020:

- At around 5.40pm outside the US Embassy, police officers started forcefully pushing peaceful protesters and our Legal Observers to clear the road. A 12-year-old girl was pushed by a police officer during the incident.
- Just before 6.00pm in Downing Street mounted officers charged on horseback at protesters without warning. At least one protester was injured when a police horse became separated from its rider.
- On the evening of 6 June 2020, the police kettled hundreds of protesters at Downing Street. If protesters wished to leave, police stated they would have to give their name, address, date of birth and be filmed from head-to-toe. Those who refused to provide this information were sent back into the kettle. Some who queried the legal basis of the kettle were reprimanded by officers.
- The police stated the legal power for demanding personal details was under s.50 of the Police Reform Act 2002. We are extremely alarmed by this, given that s.50 cannot and must not be used as a blanket power. To legally apply s.50, an officer needs to have a reasonable belief that an individual has committed an act/acts that would amount to anti-social behaviour.
- Despite police not being able to comment on what actions all of the protesters had taken part in that constituted ‘anti-social behaviour’, the police still insisted that everyone in the kettle must give over their personal details in order to leave. This has been challenged in the courts. The High Court in *Mengesha v Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis* [2013] EWHC 1695 (Admin) determined that this was unlawful.
- The police also did not allow our five volunteer Legal Observers that were in the kettle to leave, despite their independent status.
- Thanks to our five Legal Observers present, many protesters did not provide the police with their details. However, the police did still required everyone leaving the kettle, including our Legal Observers, to be filmed from head-to-toe. It is not clear under what power the police did this. There are also reports that at least one black protester was arrested for refusing to provide his details to the police.

On 7 June 2020:

- There were extreme levels of police violence on Westminster Bridge from around 9.30pm until 11.30pm. Officers hit peaceful protesters with batons. Reports that a pregnant woman was manhandled and dragged across the police cordon. Legal Observers witnessed officers use excessive force to pull

a man off his bike whilst he was facing in the opposite direction and dragged him on the floor away from the crowd. A small group of protesters were charged at by three rows of riot police to drive them off Westminster Bridge.

- One of our Legal Observers was threatened with violence by three police officers when taking notes in front of the cordon. Officers purposefully hid their badge numbers and challenged Legal Observers when noting them down.
- In the evening, the police kettled protesters with our Legal Observers in Downing Street. Officers again unlawfully applied s.50 to require people to provide their name, address and date of birth as a 'price' for leaving.
- The majority of the protesters in the kettle were under 18. They were not allowed to leave until 1.41am. When these vulnerable children were pointed out to the police, we were extremely concerned to see that they were arrested. Everyone, including our Legal Observers, was escorted out individually and made to face what we suspect was a facial recognition camera.

Throughout all three days, we witnessed police physically and verbally intimidate peaceful protesters. Our Legal Observers received similar treatment by the police, particularly those of us who are black or non-black people of colour. One of our Legal Observers was pushed by an officer and sustained an injury.

Further, we are deeply troubled by the police's decision to kettle peaceful protesters, including children, during a public health emergency.

Black Protest Legal Support encourages any protesters impacted by these and other issues to contact us, so we can provide appropriate legal assistance.

We will continue working to monitor police behaviour at these and future Black Lives Matter protests, to ensure those attending are safe and supported.

- ENDS -

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Black Protest Legal Support is a group of black and brown lawyers, founded and led by Ife Thompson. We act as Legal Observers, gather evidence of arrests and counter police intimidation of Black Lives Matter activists. We have a hub of 250+ volunteer barristers and solicitors who can provide free legal representation to those arrested or impacted by police violence at protests.

For further information, please contact:

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Black Protest Legal Support is grateful to the support of groups such as Liberty, JCWI, the Haldane Society, Green and Black Cross, London Campaign Against Police & State Violence, the Monitoring Group, the Northern Police Monitoring Project and others.

We also work closely with law firms including ITN Solicitors, Commons Legal, MTC Solicitors, Hodge Jones and Allen and Bindmans LLP.