



16 May 2021

BLACK PROTEST LEGAL SUPPORT (“BPLS”)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: CW - POLICE VIOLENCE, BRUTALITY & RACISM

BPLS condemns the continued levels of extreme police violence and aggression towards Free Palestine protesters in London yesterday evening, including a number of protesters and our Legal Observers being injured by riot police.

On 15 May 2021, around 200,000 people joined together in London to express their solidarity with those in Palestine and in Colombia being subject to racial state violence. However, our Legal Observers reported that when the crowd had dissipated and a smaller number of largely Muslim and/or racialised protesters remained, the police acted with immense hostility and brutality on the ground.

After 7.00pm, around 50 riot police entered the area near the Israeli Embassy. Wearing full riot gear, Met police officers routinely deployed force against protesters in a way that racialised communities are all too familiar with.

Police began blading protesters with their shields and wielding batons against those on the ground. Officers also punched, hit and kicked protesters. Our Legal Observers witnessed a small boy, aged around 10 or under, being hit in the face with a baton, and multiple other protesters sustaining facial, head and other injuries as a result of being beaten by police. Some were bleeding significantly and required urgent medical attention, with one being taken to hospital by a member of the public due to an immense head trauma.

There were pervasive physical and verbal intimidation tactics used, including riot police charging at protesters unprovoked. When a group of protesters sat in the road, a number of them were suddenly and aggressively grabbed by multiple officers, often from the neck, and dragged behind police lines. Arrests were also violent, with protesters being pinned to the ground by 5-6 officers at a time.

When our Legal Observers approached arrested or injured protesters to provide support, the police continued to use force and aggression. Most of our Legal Observers were also assaulted by police batons and shields, with a number of them sustaining injuries.

The police continue to act with impunity and heavy violence against racialised protesters, with a number of those injured yesterday being under 18. Throughout the day, the police engaged in intimidatory tactics towards protesters, culminating in their violent tactics of dispersal in the evening. We stand in solidarity with all those assaulted or subject to trauma, as we continue to legally support those arrested and/or brutalised.

We are further appalled, although not surprised, by headlines in mainstream media today which suggest that it was protesters who were violent. Not only does this entirely contradict what our Legal Observers saw on the ground, but embeds the same racist narratives we see time and time again used against Black, Brown and racialised protesters.

It is also unconscionable that many media outlets have used language alleging “missiles” were thrown at the police in London, when we know Palestinian people are dying every day as a result of actual Israeli missiles destroying their lives and homes.

What we saw on the ground yesterday is part of a long pattern of racist policing, where officers behave with heightened violence and aggression towards racialised demonstrators. We note that the media’s ongoing silence on this police brutality enables officers to act with continuing impunity.

We highlight that the police’s approach to Free Palestine protesters is not only racist, but patently Islamophobic. We note in particular the way Black and Brown men, particularly Muslim men, were positioned by police as inherent threats and subject to brute force. Officers have been heard by our Legal Observers making derogatory comments about Muslims. We have also received reports today that one person providing arrestee support outside a police station was stopped and searched under terrorism legislation.

In the context of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill attempting to give the police more powers and posing wider threats to the right to protest, it is now more important than ever to defend Black, Brown and racialised people’s ability to take to the streets without fear of violence and state retaliation.

BPLS will continue to hold the police to account, to monitor them on the ground, and to support Black, Brown and racialised protesters. The police are relentless in their violence against and oppression of our communities. Only by standing together, in material and global solidarity, can we protect each other.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Black Protest Legal Support is a non-profit organisation, led by Black and Brown lawyers, who act as Legal Observers and provide free legal support to protesters. We have a network of over 250 volunteer barristers and solicitors, who provide pro bono legal advice or representation to protesters. We also have a network of over 100 volunteer Legal Observers, across London, Manchester, Bristol and Birmingham.

For further information, please contact: blackprotestlegal@protonmail.com