



13 May 2021

BLACK PROTEST LEGAL SUPPORT (“BPLS”)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CW: POLICE VIOLENCE, RACISM

BPLS condemns the violence and hostility demonstrated by the Metropolitan police towards protestors who attended the ‘Shut Elbit Down’ and the ‘Colombia and Palestine Solidarity’ protests on Tuesday 11 May 2021. We are also alarmed by the lack of support shown for these protestors and the important issues they raise, by media outlets and on social media.

BPLS Legal Observers (“LOs”) attended the ‘Shut Elbit Down’ and ‘Colombia and Palestine Solidarity’ protests and noted a heavy police presence throughout the day.

Three people were arrested at ‘Shut Elbit Down’ and at least one protestor was questioned by police officers about their immigration status. The police cannot stop someone and inquire about their immigration status simply because they are protesting or based on their race – protestors do not have to answer these questions. When one of our LOs told the protestor that they did not have to answer, the LO was told to remain quiet by the officer.

A food delivery driver, from a racialised group, attempting to get to a shop situated next door to the Elbit premises, was asked by officers whether he supports Palestine and threatened with a stop and search. These exchanges exemplify the heavy handed, aggressive and overreaching tactics in play.

BPLS Legal Observers were also present at the “Colombia and Palestine Solidarity” march, where protestors were threatened with arrest under the COVID powers, despite protests being clearly exempt under Exemption 18 of the most recent regulations.

One protestor was arrested extremely violently near Downing Street, with multiple officers pinning them to the floor. We understand this protestor has suffered injuries as a result of the arrest.

As the protestors marched from Downing Street, they were followed closely by seven police vans, with many other officers integrated into the crowd. On arrival at the Israeli Embassy, our LOs witnessed the violent arrests of two individuals, with police officers equipping themselves with riot gear and brandishing their batons. One of the arrested protestors was taken to custody, whilst the other was de-arrested on the spot.



Later in the evening, when the protest reconvened outside the Israeli Embassy having marched to and from West London, police again used unprovoked violence. One protestor was hit so severely over the head by an officer wielding a baton their head was bleeding. Another LO witnessed a protestor being forcefully dragged from behind into a police van, effectively being strangled by the police officer.

The protest ended with four armed police officers protecting the Israeli Embassy and a row of police with riot gear forming a line. The numbers of protestors had reduced significantly by that point.

We are currently aware that of the 5 arrests reported, two protestors were released with No Further Action and one was released under investigation, after being held in custody overnight.

BPLS has major concerns for the safety of these protestors, given that we are all too familiar with the police's hostility, violence and aggression against Black, Brown and Racialised ("BBRG") communities. Our LOs reported that the police violence used when arresting Palestine protestors was some of the worst witnessed this year.

BPLS also notes with concern the media silence, which has allowed police aggression at these protests to go unreported. The reporting of these protests vastly differs from coverage of other recent protests, where police violence has been prevalent and where the majority of protestors have been white.

BPLS condemns the violence and aggression shown by the police. We also continue to stand in solidarity with those resisting racial state violence, including against protestors, occurring now in Palestine and Colombia.

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 protestors. We have a network of over 250 volunteer barristers and solicitors, who provide pro bono legal advice or representation to protestors. 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