



CENSORING PALESTINE, FROM SCHOOLS TO WORKPLACES

||| CAGE INTERNATIONAL

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Summary	5
Significant/Notable Cases	8
Case A	8
Case B	8
Case C	8
Case D	9
Case E	9
Themes of Repression	10
Authoritarianism v. Activism	10
Anti-Apartheid or Anti-Semitic?	10
Teachers, Bosses, Governors, Seniors being Pro-Israel/Anti-Palestine	11
Institutions, Policies, Culpability: The inequity of application	11
Islamophobia, Racism & Discrimination	11
The Escalation of Repression in the UK	12

Introduction

Israel has illegally occupied historic Palestinian territory for at least 75 years as part of a settler colonial project based on suppression of the indigenous people. This has been documented by the Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations Human Rights Council amongst numerous other international bodies.

On 7th October 2023, 'Operation Al-Aqsa Flood' was launched. In retaliation, Israel began an intensive campaign to massacre the Palestinians and 'erase all of Gaza from the face of the earth' in the process, according to Israel's Former Public Diplomacy Minister, Atbaryan. This involved simultaneously blocking fuel and humanitarian aid from entering, whilst indiscriminately bombing the 25-mile by 5-mile land of Gaza.

Between 7 October and 14 December, the ruthless bombing of Gaza has led to at least 18608 dead Palestinians. In addition around 49500 Palestinians have been injured. [Al Jazeera, Palestinian Ministry of Health, Government Media Office in Gaza, Israeli Army, Palestine Red Crescent Society]

Between 7 October and 14 December, approximately 54000 residential buildings were destroyed, 300 educational institutions were damaged, 26 out of the 35 hospitals in Gaza were left non-functioning, 87 ambulances were immobilised and 167 mosques and churches were flattened. As a result this has prevented access to healthcare and has left over 1 million Palestinians displaced [OCHA, Palestinian Health Ministry Gaza].

So what does an hour in Gaza look like? 15 people killed of which 6 are children. 35 people were injured. 42 bombs were dropped. 12 buildings are destroyed. All within 60 minutes.

Global Solidarity

Across the world and in the UK, millions have mobilised on the streets to protest against the genocidal bombing of Israel in Gaza. Many schoolchildren have attended school with

Palestine pin badges or 'Free Palestine' stickers, as have employees in their workplaces, students in their universities and even doctors and nurses within the NHS.

In addition millions have taken to X.com (formerly Twitter), among other social media websites to raise their voices for Palestine and the ethnic cleansing it is facing. Instead of accommodating such humanitarian expressions of concern employers, schools and universities have taken retaliatory measures against their students and employees.

Propaganda and Misinformation

For many, their motivation is triggered by the relentless misinformation and propaganda coordinated by the Israeli state or a deeper understanding of the devastating impact of the policies of an apartheid state, intent on a genocide. The false allegations debunked by investigative journalist including those at Haaretz, an Israeli media outlet included :

- babies and children were hung on a clothesline in a row
- a baby was found burned in an oven
- 40 babies had been beheaded
- 20 burned bodies of teenagers were found in Kfar Aza and 20 others in Be'eri

[Israel-Palestine war: Israeli personnel gave false information about 7 October attack crimes - report | Middle East Eye](#)

Full spectrum attack on civil liberties

In the UK the public hysteria whipped up by such misinformation and propaganda echoed without question by the mainstream media, commentators and politicians has led to a suppression of any signs of pro-Palestinian support. Between October 9 2023 - December 14 2023, we dealt with **214** cases - **118** school (primary school, secondary school, college) cases, **35** workplace cases, **35** protest/miscellaneous cases, **13** university cases and **13** mosque cases.

■ We have seen a 455% increase in the number of cases we dealt with regarding Palestine since our last report in May 2021. That report showed that all 47 cases in that year were centred on Palestine repression in national schools, whereas the 214 cases in 2023 cover a broader spectrum. It has been accompanied by harsher penalties being imposed on any acts of solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

■ In the 47 cases dealt with in 2021 school responses ranged from verbal reprimands and suspension of some students, exclusions or PREVENT referrals. This report features 118 new cases in schools alone. The response has include a similar pattern of PREVENT referrals, suspensions and exclusions, however most of these cases were in schools that had systemised policing of any pro-Palestine memorabilia/ clothing by any pupil or teacher in school, as well as some schools adopting the Israeli narrative in so call “politically impartial” PSHE classes or assemblies or broadcasting emails and letters to parents of children in a bid to shut down Palestine solidarity and the freedom of expression of pupils.

■ The 35 workplace cases included employees having their pro-Palestine clothing policed, suspensions, as well as some immediate terminations.

■ The 13 university cases featured students being excluded, suspended and/or being ‘investigated’ by the University and only allowed to attend lectures digitally.

■ The 13 mosque cases involved police and charity commission investigations.

■ The 35 protest/miscellaneous cases involved some protestors being arrested and charged under the Terrorism Act 2000 after having their homes raided, Many of the individuals were subject to public alerts with their faces plastered across social media which were then picked up mainstream media with alarming headlines and disclosure of personal details

It is clear that Palestine solidarity in protest and advocacy has been suppressed in a full spectrum attack which is coordinated by right wing interests, mainstream media, politicians and lobby groups. The hostile environment created by the state has led to harsh penalties being adopted by the police, schools, universities, central and local government as well as employers.

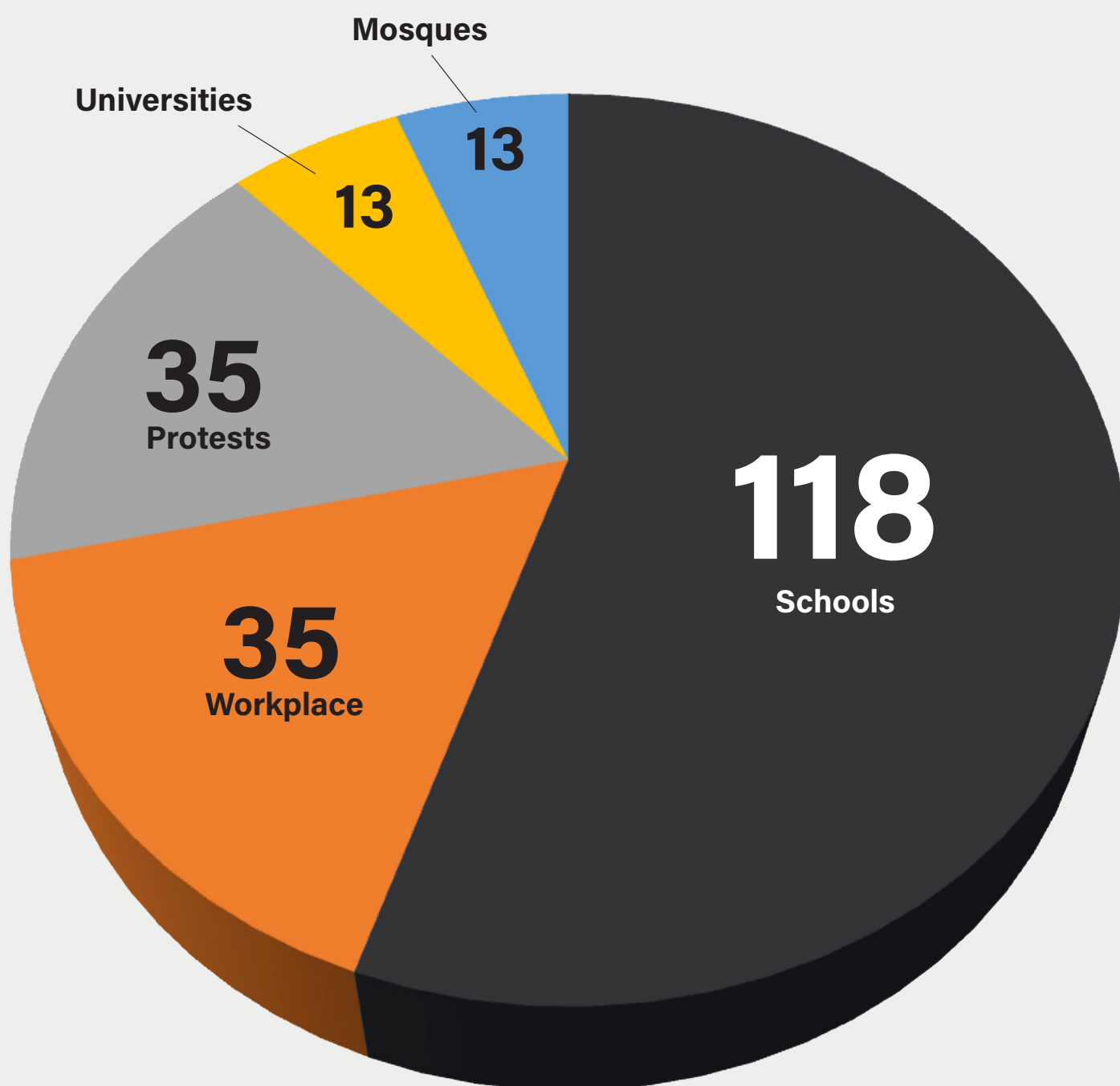
Irrespective of the increase in repression, solidarity with Palestine has persisted and grown over time with direct action, protests and solidarity campaigns across all of society.

Summary

Out of the 214 cases we have handled, 118 have been centred on Palestine repression in schools, 35 on workplace repression, 35 on repression in protests, 13 on repression in universities and 13 on repression in mosques.

The 118 cases in schools account for over half of our casework, and span across nurseries, primary schools, high schools and sixth forms. The repression here was aimed at targeting students, student parents, schoolteachers and teaching assistants.

209 of the 214 cases involved Muslims.



GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF CASES



TYPES OF REPRESSION

SCHOOLS

- Enforcing removal of Palestine memorabilia or clothing
- Holding students in isolation rooms
- Suspensions
- Disciplinary parent-teacher meetings
- Penalising students based on school points-systems
- Exclusions
- Disallowing mention of Palestine
- Educating children that Palestine resistance factions are all terrorists
- MASH referral
- PREVENT referral

WORKPLACE

- Enforcing criminal investigations
- HR investigations
- Disciplinary hearings
- Suspensions
- Terminations
- Penalised for social media posts

UNIVERSITIES

- Enforcing criminal investigations
- Suspensions
- Threat of deportation for an international student
- Exclusion

MOSQUE CASES

- Charity Commission referrals
- Gross misquotations and/or mistranslations of Imams in media outlets (defamation)
- Questioning from local police community officers
- Met Police referrals

Significant/Notable Cases

The following cases provide details of interactions between pupils and teachers, which raise thematic trends that will be discussed in the following section.

CASE A

In Leicester, a mother of three children faced harassment on the Nextdoor app after she made a post on the app, stating 'all I want is the truth' attached with examples of media scandals and lies from pro-IDF media outlets. This post led to hate comments. One individual explicitly called her a 'terrorist' for this post and leaked her full address on the app. The individual who leaked the address has social media profiles with pro-Israel, Zionist, and anti-Palestine content and worked in a senior position in the local NHS, potentially allowing them access to her address. Her address was removed from the app and the individual aforementioned gave a formal apology through the police.

CASE C

In Liverpool, an experienced and long standing dual-national surgeon had engaged in social media activity about Palestine for years. However, after the killing of 2 doctor friends in Gaza, he shared a post of a crossed out Israeli flag with a caption entitled 'Death to Israel'. This led to a flood of critical social media messages that were abusive and threatened to report him to his employers, so he deleted it within hours. After working a 24 hour shift on 26 October 2023, 2 days after the post, he was summoned to a meeting. The Doctor was informed that he had been suspended pending an investigation for a 'hate crime'. Some days later he was arrested for a 'hate crime', held for 10 hours but eventually released on bail.

CASE B

In London, one primary school led to several cases. The headteacher of the school decided to hold an assembly on 'courage' for the children. He had created his own PowerPoint Presentation, and without consulting peers or the schools board, he presented it. The presentation began by showcasing what made an army 'courageous' through the lens of the Ukraine-Russia war. He then proceeded to present slides of the 'Gaza-Israel' war and stated that Hamas the 'terrorist group' had attacked Israel and thus 'created the war', after which he made clear that no student could bring politics into the school. He proceeded to explain how difficult life was for Israelis who had to 'go through lots of checkpoints'. Throughout the presentation he made mention of the Holocaust, how important Remembrance Day was and that the slogan 'from the River to the Sea' was 'hurtful to Jews'. The assembly was made public on social media and went viral, the headteacher was disciplined by the school but has taken leave and deleted the presentation to prevent it being formally reviewed.

CASE D

In the Midlands, a prominent Imam at the end of his Friday sermon made a short supplication within which he sought assistance from God for the Gazans through short selected supplications from the Qur'an and authentic collection of Hadith. Shortly after, it was clipped, edited, loosely translated from Arabic to English, and posted online by a prominent islamophobe which led to him being reported to the Metropolitan police. Thereafter, the mosque was informed that a police investigation into the complaints would be undertaken.

CASE E

In London, a University student published a statement social media page of a student group she headed stating that 'Palestinian people have every right to resist against the same colonial power that has taken everything away from them.' She accepts that in error a meme was also posted to the Instagram story for approximately five minutes which had a picture of Hitler saying 'when you become the thing you hate most.' The University suspended her on the basis that she "may have committed a criminal offence". She was later arrested on 19 October although police interview lasted only 15 minutes. As a result of our intervention we understand the police will drop the criminal case.

Themes of Repression

Authoritarianism v. Activism

Getting out to protest, this is something real and, I would say, something patriotic. Part of the new authoritarianism is to get people to prefer fiction and inaction to reality and action. - Timothy D. Snyder

The May 2021 report found that the 'abuse of authority' was a thematic trend. This report finds that the abuse of authority has become more pronounced and embedded into the fabric of British society. Notably it is encouraged and demanded by inflammatory comments by politicians and mainstream media commentators .

There has been a wholesale assault on the Freedom of Expression guaranteed under Article 10 of the ECHR, when it comes to pro-Palestinian solidarity actions.

Anti-Apartheid or Anti-Semitic?

In several cases the suppression of Palestinian solidarity is done under the guise of prohibiting anti semitism on the basis that any assertion that Israel is an apartheid state or engaged in war crimes or genocide on Gaza is indicative of anti-Jewish prejudice. It is a tactic used to shut down debate about the right to self-determination of Palestinian people enshrined in international law, or to highlight the oppressive policies of the Israeli state as evidenced in numerous academic studies . .

In several cities across the UK, there have been schools that have indiscriminately told pupils to remove pin-badges or stickers that have 'free Palestine' written on them, as it could 'upset' other pupils, and in some cases teachers said it couldn't 'upset' other teachers or some of the general public who support Israel.

Outside the school gates of one primary school in East London, parents were accosted by a group of Zionists who accused them of wanting to 'behead babies' simply because they wore symbols of Palestinian solidarity. Due to the

intense repression of those who stand for a 'free Palestine' in schools nationwide, many parents were intimidated because they did not want to be accused of 'antisemitism' or 'terrorism.'

In the headquarters of a major media outlet, an employee was ordered by his manager to change his 'Gaza' t-shirt immediately. He went back home and came back to work in his only other t-shirt he had available, which was green, black, red and white, the colours of the Palestinian flag. He was reprimanded again and told that the company policy did not allow 'political t-shirts' despite the fact that the staff had worn Ukraine t-shirts with full management support. The employee was told that he could be offending people and to avoid doing so, he should not wear clothing in solidarity with Palestine.

In a top UK university in London, a postgraduate student posted an informative image that compared the state of Israel to the Nazi regime, he was told by his peers that this could be deemed offensive so he removed it. University staff called him in for a meeting and asked for an apology for the post as a complaint had been received stating that he was 'pro-Hamas'. Despite an apology and clarification that he condemned the group the University demanded that he make a public statement to rectify the situation, which he did. Then a few days later the University decided to suspend him from the campus.

In London, two protestors holding leaflets stating 'End the Siege of Gaza! Victory to the Intifada!' in a major march for Palestine took part in a sit-in protest at a train station, which led to their arrest for a 'hate crime'. They were taken into custody and held for several hours, had their homes raided and then released on bail conditions.

In Manchester, a high school that had allowed public expressions of support for Ukraine stopped a female pupil from sticking a Palestine flag on a noticeboard that already had an array of word flags on it. She was immediately reprimanded, told her actions were offensive and excluded for the day.

Teachers, Bosses, Governors, Seniors being Pro-Israel/Anti-Palestine

In the May 2021 report, there were a number of cases that involved teachers expressing support for either Palestine or Israel. In view of the public outcry against the genocide in Gaza more teachers have expressed solidarity with Palestine. Whether through wearing Palestine memorabilia or arguing for a 'free Palestine' in the staffroom.

However, instead of permitting free debate at school and educating pupils about the history of occupation of historic Palestine, such discussions have been prohibited under the pretext that educational institutions must remain politically impartial. This practice of prohibiting discussion has now extended to the workplaces and Universities.

Institutions, Policies, Culpability: The inequity of application

Many workplaces and educational institutions have applied double standards in relation to the response to the Ukraine conflict and the war being waged by Israel against the population in Gaza. Many of the schools that have punished and instructed the removal of Palestine memorabilia but did not apply the same standards for the Ukraine-Russia war, when students were allowed and encouraged to wear Ukraine memorabilia, as well as to make arts & crafts for Ukraine. In 2022, Politico published an article studying the anxieties experienced by Russian students in universities who felt silenced and a sense of 'Russophobia' during the Ukraine-Russia conflict as a result of the incessant support for Ukraine whilst disabling freedom of expression of Russian voices. Unlike with the Ukrainian conflict there are no remembrance days for Palestine, or one minute's silence or school wide activities in support of Ukrainian sovereignty.

Islamophobia, Racism & Discrimination

209 out of the 214 cases involved Muslim clients and all cases of the inevitable referrals to PREVENT and allegations of "terrorism" all related to Muslim clients.

The casework experience evidences the normalisation of Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian hate since 7 October. The implication that all those who support the Palestinian cause also support terrorism is pernicious and offensive. This baseless association has been weaponized to increase police powers, restrict freedom of speech, and fuel a climate of fear for many Muslims. Human Rights Watch also highlights the harmful effects of European governments' responses to the hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza, including growing reports of Islamophobia and discrimination against people perceived to be Arab, Palestinian, or Muslim.

A New Arab feature article endorses the above points about normalisation of Islamophobia across Europe, and further argues that anti-Muslim racism is rooted in the dehumanization of its victims to justify US foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly its support for Israel's system of apartheid and military occupation. This dehumanization has led to the portrayal of the Palestinian movement as rooted in fanaticism and violence, rather than a struggle for freedom from oppression. The Conversation also points out that Islamophobia has led to generalised stereotypes of Muslims and Palestinians as being prone to violence and terrorism. When these racist narratives are espoused by politicians, they falsely equate the support of Palestinian people with support for terrorism, instilling fear and moral panic about the Muslim presence.

In conclusion, the repression faced by our clients for their solidarity with Palestine is a reflection of the systemic Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination that seeks to silence their voices and label them as 'terrorists'. This is a grave violation of their rights and a stark reminder of the urgent need to challenge and dismantle these harmful narratives and practices.

The Escalation of Repression in the UK

The escalating repression against solidarity for Palestine in the UK is a deeply concerning trend that has been observed in our work at CAGE. In 2021, we reported 47 cases of individuals in schools who were repressed for their solidarity with Palestine. This year, that number has more than tripled to 154 cases, extending beyond schools to workplaces, public spaces and hospitals. This broadening remit is indicative of a systemic issue that is increasingly pervasive in various sectors of society.

Amnesty International has noted restrictions placed on protests defending Palestinian human rights across Europe, including the UK. These restrictions range from criminalising certain chants, Palestinian flags, and signs, to subjecting protesters to police brutality and arrest.

The Tribune reported on the Home Secretary's instructions to Chief Constables across the UK to crack down on expressions of solidarity with Palestine. As the bombardment of Gaza by Israel continues so does oppressive policing and repression through criminalisation.

The Legal Agenda also reported on the outlawing of BDS and the repression of solidarity with Palestine in early 2023, whereby this would then disallow public companies from destocking or formulating a boycott against Israeli goods and services.

In conclusion, the significant increase in cases of repression against solidarity for Palestine in the UK, as well as the broadening of the sectors in which these cases are occurring, is indicative of an escalating trend of repression. This trend is not only deeply concerning but also a clear violation of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. It is crucial that we continue to highlight and challenge this systemic issue in our ongoing efforts to advocate for justice and human rights. At CAGE International, we will continue to strive and support every case of Palestine repression that comes to us, if we have not already reached out.

THE RESISTANCE WILL SUCCEED

The plethora of cases we have seen at CAGE sheds light on the remarkable resilience and commitment of various groups in the UK, including protestors, schoolchildren, teachers, workers, and university students, who have faced disciplinary actions due to their unwavering solidarity with Palestine. The underlying theme between them captures the indomitable spirit of these individuals in the face of adversity.

Amidst the repression, individuals have demonstrated extraordinary courage and determination. Their personal accounts and courage serve as a testament to their unwavering commitment to the cause of solidarity with Palestine. These narratives humanise the experiences, portraying the resilience and strength of those who continue to stand up for justice and human rights, despite the obstacles they face:

In East London, a mother of a primary school child who was instructed to remove his pin-badge for Palestine in class, said: 'I will not allow anybody at all to tell me that my child has no right to stand up for the Palestinians... How can you punish my child for his opinions?' Following a complaint by the mother the school apologised but will not allow any form of Palestine memorabilia to be worn inside the school.

In Central London, the analyst at a major media outlet who was instructed to remove his T-shirt that stated 'Free Gaza' said: 'I am leaving this company... I cannot stay somewhere where there is a double standard and I am treated like an outsider for a T-shirt.'

In Yorkshire, a grieving Palestinian refugee primary school child, who had lost family members in Gaza, was instructed to remove his T-shirt which stated 'Palestinian and proud' by a teacher. A shocked parent remonstrated to the teacher that: 'We aren't going to take this standing down, this is an absolute tragedy, it is against humanity, I cannot believe what this world is coming to.'

As a result of our intervention and advice – some parents complained which resulted in a formal apology by the school.

In Central London, a number of protestors were arrested for holding Arabic placards calling for Muslim armies to intervene in Gaza, and one of them said: 'I will not let them make an example out of me. If I don't speak up, who will? They want to silence us because we are the only ones speaking out for them.'

The protestors are currently on bail and will continue to fight their case, should it reach court, and will aim to highlight that speaking out against injustice is not, and should not be a crime.

This report encapsulates the remarkable stories of individuals in the UK who have faced significant repression due to their unwavering support for Palestine. Despite the challenges and adversities encountered, these individuals have displayed exceptional resilience and are a source of inspiration for others to continue their solidarity with Palestine and resist the hand of repression, censorship and quietism.



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