# Pro-Palestine activists face criminal damage charges amid rising UK protest tensions



Two pro-Palestine campaigners face prosecution on charges of criminal damage following separate incidents in Belfast linked to their activism. Sue Pentel, aged 72, a member of the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Jews for Palestine, was arrested alongside Martine McCullough, 56, outside Barclays Bank in the city centre. The pair, involved in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, are alleged to have applied stickers to an ATM. Their arrest sparked public outcry and resulted in a protest outside Musgrave Police Station, where they were taken for questioning before being released, pending a report to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS).

Assistant Chief Constable Ryan Henderson defended the police action, noting that he reviewed body-cam footage following an emergency call from a local business. He asserted that the police acted with "courtesy and professionalism," while also underlining the delicate balance required between preserving freedom of speech and assembly and maintaining public order. Acknowledging these rights as fundamental, Henderson remarked that their exercise must consider the rights of others and the broader implications for public safety and normal life.

In a related context, two other BDS activists are currently challenging similar charges stemming from incidents at a west Belfast Sainsbury’s, where they allegedly placed stickers on Israeli-manufactured SodaStream products. Respondents Eoin Rua Davey and Martin Rafferty have sought to elevate their cases to the Crown Court, which would allow the matters to be heard by a jury rather than by a district judge. Their legal strategy includes a request for a reference for a 'case stated' to the Court of Appeal, potentially setting a precedent for how such cases are handled in the future.

The activists' actions come amidst heightened tensions in the UK regarding pro-Palestinian protests. Amnesty International’s regional director, Patrick Corrigan, commented on the broader implications of such activism, specifically regarding Israel's actions in Gaza, which he described as “crimes under international law.” He argued that peaceful protests, including actions as innocuous as stickering, are pivotal to democratic expression and should be supported rather than punished. Corrigan highlighted a long-standing societal acceptance that protest entails some level of disruption, representing a cost of living in a free society.

Moreover, these incidents in Belfast reflect a wider trend across the UK, where pro-Palestinian activists increasingly target financial and corporate entities believed to have ties with Israel. Examples of such actions include protests that resulted in the closure of Allianz's Belfast office, as well as a planned disruption of the London Stock Exchange by the Palestine Action group. These events underscore the fraught landscape of contemporary activism, where legal ramifications for disruptive protests are becoming more pronounced.

The situation raises critical questions about the boundaries of lawful protest and the responsibilities of law enforcement in upholding fundamental rights while also protecting public order. The outcomes of these ongoing cases in Belfast could set important precedents for the treatment of similar actions across the UK, as activists continue to navigate the contested terrain of political expression and civil disobedience.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/separate-pro-palestine-campaigners-facing-criminal-damage-charges-over-west-belfast-supermarket-incidents-UH3CNY5KJFG6ZDRRO5OGYRNBGU/), [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/separate-pro-palestine-campaigners-facing-criminal-damage-charges-over-west-belfast-supermarket-incidents-UH3CNY5KJFG6ZDRRO5OGYRNBGU/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/separate-pro-palestine-campaigners-facing-criminal-damage-charges-over-west-belfast-supermarket-incidents-UH3CNY5KJFG6ZDRRO5OGYRNBGU/), [[6]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/northern-ireland/allianz-forced-to-close-belfast-office-targeted-by-pro-palestine-group-over-firms-links-with-israel/a599496825.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/six-arrested-over-alleged-pro-palestine-activists-plot-to-disrupt-stock-exchange-GUS2VANHF5NIZOZ2LGMGWS577Y/), [[4]](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-police-conduct-end-genocide-protest-and-subsequent-arrests-are-seriously), [[5]](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-police-conduct-end-genocide-protest-and-subsequent-arrests-are-seriously)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/northern-ireland/allianz-forced-to-close-belfast-office-targeted-by-pro-palestine-group-over-firms-links-with-israel/a599496825.html), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/aug/06/uk-police-arrest-two-pro-palestine-activists-under-organised-laws)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/separate-pro-palestine-campaigners-facing-criminal-damage-charges-over-west-belfast-supermarket-incidents-UH3CNY5KJFG6ZDRRO5OGYRNBGU/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/separate-pro-palestine-campaigners-facing-criminal-damage-charges-over-west-belfast-supermarket-incidents-UH3CNY5KJFG6ZDRRO5OGYRNBGU/> - Two pro-Palestine activists, Sue Pentel and Martine McCullough, were arrested in Belfast city centre for allegedly placing BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) stickers on an ATM outside Barclays Bank. Their arrests, on suspicion of criminal damage, sparked criticism and a protest outside Musgrave PSNI station. The PSNI defended the arrests, stating they acted professionally following an emergency call from a city centre business. The right to freedom of speech and assembly was acknowledged, but balanced against the need to uphold public rights and prevent crime.
3. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/six-arrested-over-alleged-pro-palestine-activists-plot-to-disrupt-stock-exchange-GUS2VANHF5NIZOZ2LGMGWS577Y/> - Six individuals were arrested in connection with an alleged plot to disrupt the London Stock Exchange, following a tip-off from the Daily Express. The Palestine Action group was reportedly planning to target the Stock Exchange, causing damage and preventing its opening for trading. The Metropolitan Police initiated an investigation based on this information, with the arrests highlighting the ongoing tensions surrounding pro-Palestinian activism and its impact on financial institutions.
4. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-police-conduct-end-genocide-protest-and-subsequent-arrests-are-seriously> - Amnesty International expressed serious concern over the Metropolitan Police's handling of the 'End the Genocide' protest in London, where dozens of demonstrators were arrested. The protest, held the day before a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, saw thousands gather to express solidarity with Palestinians. Amnesty questioned the legality of the police's actions and the basis for the arrests, emphasizing the importance of protecting the right to peaceful protest.
5. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-police-conduct-end-genocide-protest-and-subsequent-arrests-are-seriously> - Amnesty International expressed serious concern over the Metropolitan Police's handling of the 'End the Genocide' protest in London, where dozens of demonstrators were arrested. The protest, held the day before a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, saw thousands gather to express solidarity with Palestinians. Amnesty questioned the legality of the police's actions and the basis for the arrests, emphasizing the importance of protecting the right to peaceful protest.
6. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/northern-ireland/allianz-forced-to-close-belfast-office-targeted-by-pro-palestine-group-over-firms-links-with-israel/a599496825.html> - Allianz's Belfast office was forced to close after being targeted by pro-Palestine activists protesting the firm's alleged links with Israel. The activists, associated with the group Palestine Action, had previously targeted Barclays Bank branches over similar concerns. The protest led to the closure of the office, highlighting the ongoing tensions between pro-Palestinian activists and businesses perceived to have ties with Israel.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/aug/06/uk-police-arrest-two-pro-palestine-activists-under-organised-laws> - Two pro-Palestine activists were arrested under organised crime laws in connection with a direct action protest at an arms factory in Sandwich, Kent. The arrests marked the first known use of section 45 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 against protesters in the UK. The activists were accused of being part of an organised crime group, raising concerns about the application of such laws to protest activities.