# Belfast rap trio Kneecap faces legal backlash over Hezbollah flag display in London



The recent legal troubles of Kneecap, the Belfast-based Irish-language rap trio, have ignited significant controversy, not only within their native Northern Ireland but also across the UK and beyond. Member Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, who performs under the stage name Mo Chara, has been charged under the Terrorism Act 2000 for allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag during a performance in November 2024 at the Kentish Town Forum in London. This act has drawn the scrutiny of the Metropolitan Police, which categorizes Hezbollah as a proscribed organisation, highlighting the charged political climate surrounding the band’s activities and messages.

Ó hAnnaidh faces a potential penalty of up to six months in prison or a fine if convicted. The allegations stem from a video recorded by an audience member, which purportedly shows the band endorsing both Hezbollah and Hamas, prompting a police investigation. This incident is compounded by a broader narrative casting Kneecap as a polarising force within contemporary music. Known for its combination of provocative lyrics and an embrace of Irish republican symbolism, the group has used its platform to express strong anti-Israel sentiments, particularly in light of the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The band’s performances at notable events, including Coachella, have been controversial; during one set, they displayed slogans like “F\*\*\* Israel. Free Palestine,” leading to heightened tensions and calls from various politicians for the band to be removed from future festivals, including Glastonbury.

While Kneecap argues that their artistic expression is rooted in cultural heritage and social commentary, they have faced backlash from both the public and political figures. British Interior Minister Yvette Cooper condemned the remarks made by band members in previous performances, particularly comments that seemed to glorify violence against politicians, such as “The only good Tory is a dead Tory. Kill your local MP.” This statement was made amidst rising concerns over political extremism in the UK, especially following the tragic murders of two Members of Parliament in recent years.

Kneecap asserts that their message has been misrepresented, insisting they do not support Hamas or Hezbollah and asserting their condemnation of all attacks on civilians. In a statement reflecting their sentiments, Ó hAnnaidh expressed his desire to be on the right side of history regarding Palestinian suffering, stating, “I don’t want to be 80, 90 years of age and my grandkids asking me about the Palestinian genocide? Me sitting there being like fuck, I didn’t do enough.” Such rhetoric underscores the band’s intent to engage with complex socio-political issues through their music.

Following their rise to prominence—sparked in part by their semi-autobiographical film which debuted at the Sundance Film Festival—Kneecap has garnered a significant following. However, this success has been marred by allegations of promoting terrorism and inciting violence, leading to public outcry and concert cancellations. Nearly forty bands, including established groups like The Pogues and Massive Attack, have rallied in defence of Kneecap, advocating for their right to freedom of expression and rejecting attempts to silence them. This movement highlights the contentious debate around the limits of artistic freedom in a democratic society, particularly when such expressions intersect with sensitive political issues.

Despite the ongoing investigation and growing scrutiny, Kneecap continues to promote their messaging unapologetically, asserting their identity as cultural representatives of the Irish language and Irish republican sentiment. While they navigate these turbulent waters, the outcome of Ó hAnnaidh’s court appearance on June 18 might influence not only the band’s future but also the broader dialogue surrounding music, politics, and censorship in contemporary society.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4
2. Paragraphs 2, 5
3. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3
4. Paragraph 3
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraph 3
7. Paragraph 2

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/b88745d2-d29b-4613-8632-fa763eb4f924> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/951643fa3345a152f86b59bbdcbd0a49> - Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, known as Mo Chara, a member of the Irish hip-hop group Kneecap, has been charged by British police under the Terrorism Act for allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag during a performance at London's Kentish Town Forum on November 21, 2024. The charge follows an investigation into videos purportedly showing the band endorsing Hezbollah and Hamas and inciting violence against lawmakers. Kneecap denies these allegations, claiming their remarks were misrepresented by political figures. The group, based in Belfast, is recognized for promoting Irish-language culture but is controversial for its provocative lyrics and political stances. The controversy has led to several concert cancellations and calls from politicians to drop the band from events, including the upcoming Glastonbury Festival. Kneecap garnered wider attention following the release of their gritty self-titled feature film, which premiered at the 2024 Sundance Film Festival and was shortlisted for Academy Awards but did not advance to the final nominations. Ó hAnnaidh is scheduled to appear in court on June 18, and police continue to investigate footage from a separate 2023 concert.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/b88745d2-d29b-4613-8632-fa763eb4f924> - Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, also known as Mo Chara and a member of the Belfast-based Irish-language rap trio Kneecap, has been charged under the UK Terrorism Act 2000 for allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag during a November 2024 concert in London. Hezbollah is classified as a proscribed organisation in the UK, and the charge—announced by the Metropolitan Police—carries a potential penalty of up to six months in prison and/or a fine. The incident follows weeks of controversy surrounding Kneecap, which has used its concerts—including at Coachella—to condemn Israel’s attacks on Gaza. While the band denies support for Hamas or Hezbollah and condemns all civilian attacks, they remain unapologetic in their political messages. The charge is based on footage recorded by an audience member and comes amid growing scrutiny of the band’s provocative style and political activism. Kneecap, known for embracing a “Brits Out” Republican image, has gained fame for their performances and a fictionalised comedy about their origin. The group has yet to formally respond to the charges, though a statement is expected.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/3cc86cf249c366554dee3cf5dd498fdc> - British counterterrorism police are investigating the Irish hip-hop group Kneecap following controversial comments made during concerts. In 2024, a band member allegedly said, “The only good Tory is a dead Tory. Kill your local MP,” and in 2023, shouted "up Hamas, up Hezbollah," referencing groups banned in the U.K. The Metropolitan Police confirmed there are grounds for further inquiry, now led by its Counter Terrorism Command. Kneecap, known for combining satirical songs with Irish republican symbolism, has ignited political tensions and public debate, especially after projecting anti-Israel messages during a Coachella performance. The group apologized to the families of U.K. MPs Jo Cox and David Amess, who were murdered in separate extremist attacks, claiming their comments were taken out of context. Some U.K. lawmakers have called for Kneecap to be removed from upcoming festivals, though notable musicians have defended them, criticizing attempts to silence the group and uphold artistic freedom. Kneecap’s recent rise to international attention follows the success of their semi-autobiographical film “Kneecap,” which screened at the 2024 Sundance Film Festival and received Oscar shortlist recognition.
5. <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-852430> - Dozens of bands defended Kneecap’s “freedom of expression” after the rap group faced criticism for publicly condemning Israel and appearing to support terror groups. This past week has seen a clear, concerted attempt to censor and ultimately deplatform the band Kneecap, reads the statement, signed by nearly 40 bands including The Pogues, Thin Lizzy, Dexys, Pulp and Massive Attack. In a democracy, no political figures or political parties should have the right to dictate who does and does not play at music festivals or gigs that will be enjoyed by thousands of people, the statement said. It urged government officials and music executives to stop seeking to silence Kneecap. The statement by the bands, posted on Instagram on Wednesday, came 10 days into a controversy swirling around the Northern Irish group’s statements:
6. <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-851967> - Irish rap band Kneecap apologized on Tuesday to the families of two murdered British lawmakers after footage emerged of one of the trio appearing to say "Kill your local MP" during a performance in 2023. In the video footage, from a London concert, a band member appears to say: "The only good Tory is a dead Tory. Kill your local MP." Tory refers to the Conservative Party, which was in power in Britain at the time. Kneecap has also faced criticism over pro-Palestinian messages projected on stage at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in California this month, ending with: "F\*\*\* Israel. Free Palestine." A video clip posted on X from a concert in 2024 appears to show a band member saying: "Up Hamas, up Hezbollah." Hamas and Hezbollah are both banned in Britain. Kneecap, whose members have the stage names Mo Chara, Móglaí Bap, and DJ Próvaí, said the clips were a smear campaign. Let us be unequivocal: we do not, and have never, supported Hamas or Hezbollah, they said on X. We condemn all attacks on civilians, always. It is never okay. We know this more than anyone, given our nation's history. The rappers apologized to the families of Jo Cox, a Labour lawmaker fatally stabbed in 2016, and David Amess, a Conservative lawmaker stabbed to death in 2021. We never intended to cause you hurt, they said. Britain's interior minister, Yvette Cooper, said the band's comments in the video clips were a "total disgrace," and that police were examining the footage. It's dangerous to make these sorts of comments, whether it is terrorist organizations or whether it is about the safety of MPs, when we have seen two MPs killed in recent years, she told Times Radio.
7. <https://www.israelhayom.com/2025/04/21/when-coachella-became-a-stage-for-terror-support/> - Kneecap's performance at Coachella included slogans in support of Palestinians currently suffering as a result of Israel's actions in Gaza. The band projected messages such as "F— Israel, Free Palestine" during their set. This performance has been criticized for promoting anti-Israel sentiment and for legitimizing terrorism under the guise of activism. The controversy has led to calls for the band to be removed from upcoming festivals and has sparked debates about freedom of expression and the boundaries of political messaging in music.