# Police raid on Quaker meeting house sparks outcry over rights to protest in UK



When a group of six young women convened at a Quaker meeting house in central London, they likely anticipated a thoughtful discussion on pressing issues such as the climate crisis and the ongoing conflict in Gaza. Nestled in a building steeped in a history of social activism, they gathered over cups of jasmine tea and vegan snacks. Instead, their evening was shattered by a dramatic police raid, raising profound questions about civil liberties, the right to protest, and the role of policing in the UK.

As the group discussed historical protests, including the pivotal Children’s March in Birmingham, the atmosphere of camaraderie was suddenly interrupted by the overwhelming presence of the Metropolitan Police. Officers, some armed with tasers, swiftly executed what the police described as an “intelligence-led” operation. They arrested the women on allegations of conspiracy to cause a public nuisance, a charge that many argue undermines the essence of peaceful assembly and discussion. One member, 18-year-old Zahra Ali, was subjected to a 17-hour detention, during which her rights seemed all but neglected. Despite having organised the meeting in a public space and widely advertised it, the police opted for a show of force rather than a more diplomatic approach to inquiry.

This incident highlights what many perceive as an increasing trend in the UK: the criminalisation of dissent, particularly against the backdrop of heightened tensions surrounding climate activism and international conflict. Youth Demand, the group in question, has a history of direct action and collective expression, having staged several protests, including during the London Marathon. Their past actions, which include unconventional protests such as a “dirty protest” at Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's home, have positioned them at the forefront of a generational clash of ideals regarding climate justice and civil engagement.

Criticism of the raid has come from various quarters, including political figures and religious groups who see the heavy-handed tactics of the police as a direct assault on democratic freedoms. Paul Parker, recording clerk for Quakers in Britain, stated that the use of police force in a place of worship is unprecedented and deeply troubling. He noted that historically, Quakers have been known for their commitment to peace and social justice, emphasising that the incident reflects larger issues pertaining to free speech and protest rights in the UK.

The implications of this raid extend beyond mere legislative infringement; they signal a possible shift in the public’s expectation of law enforcement’s role in civic life. Lia-Anjali Lazarus, one of the attendees, described her experience as “traumatic,” emphasizing the profound psychological effects of such an encounter with the police. "It's hard not to feel like a criminal when you’re blatantly treated as one," she remarked, underscoring the chilling effect such encounters can have on young activists.

This incident is part of a broader narrative of increasing police action against peaceful protests in the UK. Over the past few years, activists across various movements, including those advocating for climate action, have faced escalating police scrutiny and aggressive tactics. The recent detention of high-profile climate activist Greta Thunberg during a protest further exemplifies this troubling pattern. Authorities have increasingly employed controversial legislation aimed at curbing dissent, leading to a climate of fear among those engaged in advocacy.

The political implications are significant as well. Prominent figures such as Carla Denyer, co-leader of the Green Party, have expressed alarm over what these actions represent for the right to protest in the country. Denyer noted the Government’s inconsistency in promising protections for faith groups while simultaneously allowing police actions that violate these very safe spaces. “When the government are after the Quakers, you know you’re in trouble,” she commented, referring to the historical context of Quakers often being at the crossroads of civil rights movements.

A spokesperson for the Metropolitan Police defended their actions, asserting a duty to prevent activities that could disrupt public life. However, critics argue that such justifications merely set a precedent for ongoing repression of peaceful assembly and discussion. They contend that the police’s interpretation of intelligence often lacks nuance and disregards the context in which protests occur.

As the youth activists contemplate the implications of their experience, they, along with a growing chorus of voices, call for a reassessment of how protests are policed and whether existing laws adequately protect the right to peaceful demonstration. The raid in the Quaker meeting house goes beyond the immediate outrage; it reflects a critical moment in the ongoing dialogue about democracy, civil liberties, and the future of activism in the UK.

### Reference Map

1. [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/10/police-raid-london-quaker-meeting-house-very-worrying)
2. [[2]](https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-condemn-police-raid-on-westminster-meeting-house)
3. [[3]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/17/police-detain-climate-activist-greta-thunberg-at-london-protest)
4. [[4]](https://www.newarab.com/news/uk-police-raid-quaker-meeting-arrest-six-over-gaza-protest-plan)
5. [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-downing-street-government-gaza-british-museum-b1194450.html)
6. [[6]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/heavy-criticism-of-met-police-at-rally-after-arrests-of-youth-demand-supporters-FGIJUGTDYJNLFPUVYKZ24JVZ2E/)
7. [[7]](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-climate-and-pro-palestine-protesters-report-unprecedented-crackdown)

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

## Bibliography

* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/10/police-raid-london-quaker-meeting-house-very-worrying> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-condemn-police-raid-on-westminster-meeting-house> - Quakers in Britain strongly condemned the police raid on Westminster Meeting House, where six young women were arrested during a meeting discussing the climate crisis and Gaza. The police, some equipped with tasers, forcibly entered the building without warning, arrested the attendees, and seized their phones and laptops. This incident highlights concerns over the criminalization of protest and the suppression of free speech in the UK. Paul Parker, recording clerk for Quakers in Britain, emphasized the violation of their place of worship and the broader implications for democracy.
* <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/17/police-detain-climate-activist-greta-thunberg-at-london-protest> - Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg was detained by UK police during a protest outside a London hotel hosting an oil and gas industry conference. Thunberg, along with other protesters, chanted slogans and blocked access to the venue. The police detained several individuals on suspicion of obstructing a highway and disrupting public order. Thunberg criticized the fossil fuel industry's influence on climate politics and called for more direct action to address the climate crisis.
* <https://www.newarab.com/news/uk-police-raid-quaker-meeting-arrest-six-over-gaza-protest-plan> - UK police raided a Quaker meeting in Westminster, arresting six women associated with the Youth Demand protest organization. The group, advocating for a two-way arms embargo on Israel, was planning a protest in April. The police's aggressive approach, including the use of tasers, and the seizure of personal items, raised concerns about the suppression of peaceful protest and the criminalization of dissent in the UK. The Quakers condemned the raid as a violation of their place of worship and a threat to democratic freedoms.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-downing-street-government-gaza-british-museum-b1194450.html> - Around 1,000 protesters marched through central London, demanding an end to fossil fuels and the UK's complicity in the Gaza conflict. The protest, organized by over 60 groups including Greenpeace and Amnesty International, highlighted the interconnectedness of the climate crisis and the situation in Gaza. Demonstrators rallied outside the British Museum and marched to Downing Street, calling for policy changes and an end to the UK's support for Israel's actions in Gaza.
* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/heavy-criticism-of-met-police-at-rally-after-arrests-of-youth-demand-supporters-FGIJUGTDYJNLFPUVYKZ24JVZ2E/> - The Metropolitan Police faced heavy criticism after arresting six Youth Demand supporters at a pro-Palestinian rally in London. The arrests occurred during a welcome talk at the Quaker Meeting House in Westminster, where the group was discussing plans to 'shut down London' in April. The police's actions, including the use of force and seizure of personal items, sparked debates about the suppression of peaceful protest and the criminalization of dissent in the UK.
* <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-climate-and-pro-palestine-protesters-report-unprecedented-crackdown> - Climate and pro-Palestinian activists in the UK are facing an unprecedented wave of criminalization, with some detained under 'restricted status for women' and charged with non-terror-related offenses. The use of terrorism legislation against activists has raised concerns about the erosion of civil liberties and the suppression of peaceful protest. The situation has left activists uncertain about their rights and the extent of police powers, highlighting the challenges faced by dissenting voices in the UK.