# British government faces backlash over terrorism charge against Irish artist Mo Chara



Nothing seems to unsettle the British establishment quite like the laughter of those it deems unworthy of a voice. Mo Chara, whose real name is Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, has joined a long list of Irish artists embroiled in controversy, this time facing charges under the UK's Terrorism Act for allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag during a performance in London. This incident, which occurred on November 21, 2024, has ignited a fierce debate about artistic expression and governmental overreach, particularly as the new Labour government strains to maintain control amid rising dissent.

Kneecap, the Irish-language rap trio of which Mo Chara is a part, is notorious for its provocative performances that challenge British authority and fervently advocate for Irish identity. Their art has become a powerful platform for critiquing the establishment, drawing attention to broader global injustices, particularly against the backdrop of escalating violence in Gaza. This latest charge against Mo Chara is not merely about legality; it is a clear attempt by the authorities to silence dissenting voices that disrupt their narrative, further supported by a government keen on stifling any challenge to its failing policies.

Kemi Badenoch, the UK’s Business Secretary under the new Labour administration, finds herself embroiled in controversy for her differing responses to the events surrounding Kneecap and a prominent Tory donor, Frank Hester. While she was swift to condemn Mo Chara’s actions, she seemed to dismiss the gravity of Hester’s reported racist comments about Diane Abbott, the first Black female MP. Hester's remarks, made behind closed doors, are far more egregious than an artist's expression, yet Badenoch prioritizes donor loyalty over accountability. This hypocrisy illustrates the Labour government’s troubling double standards, questioning why a working-class artist faces criminal charges while the sins of wealthy donors are brushed aside.

The backlash against Kneecap has been exacerbated by their performances advocating for Palestinian rights and their impassioned calls against censorship. Their increasingly defiant platform resonates widely, challenging a government that opts for control over dialogue. The plight of a working-class artist threatened with legal action for defiance against state authority starkly exposes the systemic bias within public discourse, further illuminating the current government's failure to represent diverse voices.

Historically, the UK has had a fraught relationship with politically charged Irish art. Artists like Christy Moore and Paul McCartney faced backlash for their critiques of British governance in Ireland, with Moore even detained for songs opposing British policies. This history underscores how art has often served as a formidable tool of protest, leveraging narratives that evoke both emotional and political responses.

Ironically, Kneecap's commitment to unity, as shown by their choice to split grant money—originating from a £14,000 public fund—among youth clubs on both the Catholic Falls Road and the Protestant Shankill, reflects a dedication to reconciliation amidst an increasingly divided society. Such actions not only counter the prevailing narrative of dissent but also suggest that art can cultivate dialogue in troubled communities.

In the light of the current political landscape, Kneecap’s legal troubles have escalated into a much-needed conversation about freedom of speech and the subtle but pervasive mechanisms of power aimed at curtailing dissent. The criminalization of political art reveals a deep-seated anxiety within the establishment—an aversion to the uncomfortable truths that artists like Mo Chara bravely confront.

Amidst these tensions, Mo Chara’s unwavering stance as an artist highlights a crucial reality: the more the establishment seeks to suppress dissenting voices, the louder they become. In a realm where truth can unsettle, it is increasingly clear that attempts to silence critical perspectives will backfire, galvanizing support not only for artistic freedom but also for the broader political dialogue that the current government seems desperate to avoid.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060308/kneecap-row-kemi-badenoch> - 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 under the UK's 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 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 is scheduled to appear in court on June 18, with police continuing to investigate footage from a separate 2023 concert.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/b88745d2-d29b-4613-8632-fa763eb4f924> - Liam Óg Ó hAnnaidh, known by his stage name Mo Chara and a member of the Belfast-based Irish-language rap trio Kneecap, has been charged with a terrorism offence under the UK's Terrorism Act 2000. The charge pertains to allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag during a concert at London’s O2 Forum in November 2024, an act believed to suggest support for a proscribed organisation. Ó hAnnaidh is scheduled to appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court on June 18. If convicted, he faces up to six months in prison and/or a fine. Kneecap has rejected the allegations, calling the charges a political distraction and an attempt to silence artists critical of global injustices, particularly in Gaza. They emphasised their condemnation of all attacks on civilians and denied support for Hamas or Hezbollah. The group's performances, including a recent appearance at Coachella, have drawn attention for their political stance and symbolism rooted in Irish Republican sentiments. The charge follows an investigation by the Metropolitan Police’s Counter Terrorism Command using audience-filmed footage.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/irish-band-kneecap-say-terrorism-charge-seeks-silence-artists-2025-05-22/> - Irish-language rap group Kneecap has condemned a terrorism-related charge against band member Liam O'Hanna as an attempt to silence politically outspoken artists. O'Hanna, 27, was charged by London's Metropolitan Police for allegedly displaying a Hezbollah flag—representing the Iran-backed militant group banned in the UK—during a performance in November. Kneecap stated the flag was thrown on stage and denied endorsing Hezbollah or Hamas, emphasising their condemnation of all attacks on civilians. The band, known for advocating Irish identity and Irish unity, has been scrutinised recently for pro-Palestinian messaging during their Coachella performance. In April, they also apologised for previously controversial comments perceived as encouraging violence against MPs. O'Hanna is scheduled to appear in court on June 18. Despite mounting criticism, including calls from UK lawmakers for their exclusion, Kneecap is still set to perform at the Glastonbury Festival in June.
5. <https://apnews.com/article/c1d912ef17461821af0cf8c62cd40db3> - UK police are investigating alleged racist and threatening remarks made by Frank Hester, a major Conservative Party donor, about Diane Abbott, Britain’s first female Black MP. He reportedly made the comments in 2019 during a meeting, stating that Abbott 'need[s] to be shot' and looking at her made 'you just want to hate all Black women'. West Yorkshire Police are working to determine if a crime was committed. There has been public outrage and calls for the Conservative Party to return Hester's donations, particularly in light of recent murders of MPs. While Prime Minister Rishi Sunak noted Hester's apology and suggested accepting his remorse, others, including Labour Party chair Anneliese Dodds, demanded the refusal and return of his donations. Business secretary Kemi Badenoch supported keeping the donations due to the apology. The investigation remains ongoing.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/e44ee717-b5fb-432e-885e-bfcd0a1f0bad> - UK police are investigating alleged racist and threatening remarks made by Frank Hester, a major Conservative Party donor, about Diane Abbott, Britain’s first female Black MP. He reportedly made the comments in 2019 during a meeting, stating that Abbott 'need[s] to be shot' and looking at her made 'you just want to hate all Black women'. West Yorkshire Police are working to determine if a crime was committed. There has been public outrage and calls for the Conservative Party to return Hester's donations, particularly in light of recent murders of MPs. While Prime Minister Rishi Sunak noted Hester's apology and suggested accepting his remorse, others, including Labour Party chair Anneliese Dodds, demanded the refusal and return of his donations. Business secretary Kemi Badenoch supported keeping the donations due to the apology. The investigation remains ongoing.
7. <https://news.sky.com/story/tories-have-drawn-a-line-under-frank-hester-race-row-and-should-keep-donations-kemi-badenoch-says-13097440> - The business secretary says, despite calling the Conservative donor's reported comments about Diane Abbott 'racist', the Tories should not give back the £10m he donated last year. Faye Brown Political reporter @fayebrownSky Monday 18 March 2024 09:37, UK Please use Chrome browser for a more accessible video player 'We've drawn a line under Hester's comments' Why you can trust Sky News The government has 'drawn a line' under the Frank Hester race row and shouldn't have to give back the money he donated, Kemi Badenoch has said. The business secretary, who was the first cabinet minister to break ranks and label his reported comments about Diane Abbott as racist last week, suggested she would be comfortable accepting further money from the Tory donor. Speaking to Sky News, she said she decided to condemn the remarks ahead of her colleagues because as the equalities minister and the only black woman in cabinet 'this was something that it was important that I spoke up about'. Asked if she would feel comfortable accepting further donations from Mr Hester, she said: 'I think if somebody has apologised and the comments appear to have been first of all very flippant, said a long time ago, I think it is fine for us to be able to accept and forgive and draw a line under it. 'Obviously, if something else happens in the future that might be something that we reconsider. 'In regards to donations to the party, people keep asking me, 'do you think the money should be kept'? I have been very clear that, yes, I do think so.' Mr Hester, who donated £10m to the Tories last year, is reported to have saidthat left-wing MP Ms Abbott made him 'want to hate all black women' and that she 'should be shot'. Ms Badenoch was the first cabinet minister to break ranks and say the comments were 'racist' - though she added at the time that there should be space for 'forgiveness'. Until this point, ministers had said the comments were 'wrong' but did not go as far as calling them racist. Downing Street had also refused to call the remarks 'racist', insisting instead that they were 'unacceptable'. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak later condemned the remarks as 'racist and wrong', but he has continued to face calls to return the money Mr Hester has donated and confirm whether a further £5m is in the pipeline.