

Oral Statement Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 56th Session Human Rights Council, 26 June 2024 Agenda Item 3, Promotion and protection of human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

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Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) is a not-for-profit campaign, research and advocacy organisation founded and based in the United Kingdom. It was set up in 1997 and works for redress of human rights violations and a better understanding of rights and norms across confessional, ethnic, national, political and other boundaries.

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The current crackdowns on the pro-Palestine movement have reached alarming, and unprecedented, levels of repression everywhere in the Western countries. Bound by a common design, all these countries have adopted an identical approach in quelling pro-Palestine protest: exceptional Islamophobic and racist counter-terrorism powers; illegal bans; brutal harassment; arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders. Often, the repression is animated in part by right-wing officials using this moment as an opportunity to advance their own political agenda of anti-immigrant policies and to advance the same objective of censoring and criminalising critical opinion, shrinking civil society space and reducing the influx of migrants. Social media has become the third arm of national governments' repression. Meta's policies and practices have been silencing voices in support of Palestine and Palestinian human rights on Instagram and Facebook in a wave of heightened censorship and e-surveillance.

There has been estimated that acts of repression against demonstrations or pro-Palestine activists have more than doubled in less than a year. The numbers in Germany make for shocking reading: in the first three months from the outbreak of the Gaza conflict (October and mid-February 2024), at least 133 banned demos have been documented; 2,140 possible criminal cases have been recorded and 380 investigations have been launched by prosecutors. In the first week alone (11 to 20 October 2023), there has been counted over 600 detentions in Berlin; in the first three weeks over 850 arrests were made by Berlin police to be added to those detained at protests, a figure estimated to be in the hundreds. In the UK, according to the Metropolitan Police's accounts, more than 400 arrests had been made over Gaza protests in just over a month (by December 2024). As of January 2024, more than 30 counter-terrorism investigations have been launched into "suspected offences" at protests in London.

Yet, repression of the pro-Palestine movement is not limited to acts of brutal violence during the protests. It also involves cases of censorship and harassment, among all: cases of political repression, mainly through threats of legal action, administrative civil rights complaints, intimidation, censorship of any kind of events involving artists, academics and students; cultural stifling, including instances where access to venues was withdrawn or events were cancelled, instances of smear campaigns, and instances where threats of defunding were made for expressing views on Palestine. In the UK, the organisation CAGE has reported that 130 people have contacted them concerning Palestine censorship in schools, colleges and universities – a 455% increase from their last report in 2021

The barbaric use of counter-terrorism measures handed by the national parties in pursuit of cheap, political point-scoring and economic gain, the divisive and hate-fuelled rhetoric based on double standards, the persistent perpetration of racialised policies, are the ingredients of this siege that silences and isolates critical views' and shrinks the space for civil disobedience, to the detriment of those fundamental rights that Western States hypocritically claim to champion.