



Chief Constables England and Wales
Copied to Police and Crime Commissioners England and Wales

10 October 2023

Dear all,

You will be aware of, and no doubt share my disgust at, the barbaric terrorist attacks we've seen committed against Israel in recent days. Sadly, experience indicates that whenever Israel is attacked, Islamists and other racists, seek to use legitimate Israeli defensive measures as a pretext to stir up hatred against British Jews and increase fear within the Jewish community. In the past, this has included vandalism of Jewish businesses, desecration of memorials and religious sites, physical and verbal abuse of Jews on the streets, convoys driving through Jewish neighbourhoods hurling antisemitic abuse, and proliferation of antisemitism online. There is an obvious risk that this pattern will be repeated during the current conflict.

I am aware that a number of police forces, working in close coordination with the Community Security Trust (CST) and other Jewish communal bodies, have already taken operational measures to strengthen the security of Jewish communities, including through increased patrols in neighbourhoods with large Jewish populations.

I know that increased visibility of patrols, as well as a swift and zero tolerance approach to antisemitism, will provide our Jewish communities with reassurance that the police are taking this threat seriously and will be there to protect them if need be.

As you know, Hamas is a proscribed terrorist organisation in the UK in its entirety. It is therefore a criminal offence for a person in the UK to:

- belong to Hamas;
- invite support for Hamas;
- express support for Hamas whilst being reckless as to whether the expression will encourage support of it;
- arrange a meeting in support of Hamas;
- wear clothing or carry articles in public which arouse reasonable suspicion that an individual is a member or supporter of Hamas; or
- publish an image of an article such as a flag or logo in the same circumstances.

At a time when Hamas terrorists are massacring civilians and taking the most vulnerable (including the elderly, women, and children) hostage, we can all recognise the harrowing effect that displays of their logos and flags can have on communities. I therefore ask that your police forces are alert and ready to respond to any potential offences.

Of course, it is not just explicit pro-Hamas symbols and chants that are cause for concern. I would encourage police to consider whether chants such as "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" should be understood as an expression of a violent desire to see Israel erased from the world, and whether its use in certain contexts may amount to a racially aggravated section 5 public order offence.

I would encourage police to give similar consideration to the presence of symbols such as swastikas at anti-Israel demonstrations. Context is crucial. Behaviours that are legitimate in some circumstances, for example the waving of a Palestinian flag, may not be legitimate such as when intended to glorify acts of terrorism. Nor is it acceptable to drive through Jewish neighbourhoods, or single out Jewish members of the public, to aggressively chant or wave pro-Palestinian symbols at. Where harassment is identified, I would encourage the police to take swift and appropriate enforcement action.

I encourage all Chief Officers to ensure that any protests which could exacerbate community tensions by way of offensive placards, chants, or behaviours that could be construed as incitement or harassment, have a strong police presence to ensure perpetrators are appropriately dealt with, and that communities feel protected. Decisions on arrests are rightly an operational matter for the police, in line with the duty to keep the peace, to protect communities, and to prevent the commission of offences. However, I would urge you to ensure your forces use all available powers to prevent disorder and distress to our communities, and that your officers will act if there are any incidents that stray into criminality.

I have also been absolutely clear that online offending is as serious as offline offending. You will be aware that we have robust legislation in place to deal with terrorist content online, as well as threatening and abusive behaviour or behaviour which is intended or likely to stir up hatred. I urge you to ensure that this continues to be taken into consideration in the upcoming days and that any reports of online offending are dealt with promptly.

I expect online referral units to respond swiftly to any content that breaks the law. In particular, I expect the CT Internet Referral Unit to monitor the situation and respond quickly to any online content that breaches the thresholds for terrorism legislation (TACT), working with tech companies to ensure its removal. I similarly expect the Online Hate Crime Hub to respond to any reports of online content that contravenes hate crime legislation to ensure the perpetrators can be brought to justice.

There can be no place for antisemitism or glorification of terrorism on the streets of Britain. I therefore expect the police to use the full force of the law against displays of support for Hamas, other proscribed terrorist groups or attempts to harass and intimidate British Jews.

Ensuring that there are heavy criminal consequences for any perpetrators is the best way to deter future offending and ensure the confidence and safety of our Jewish communities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Suella Braverman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP