

Freeing Our Streets from the Blight of Protest Crime - Met Announces Placard Amnesty 26 May 2006

A citywide placard amnesty will be held between 29 May and 5 July, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Ian Blair, announced today.

The amnesty will target those who carry placards and critical slogans. A public campaign supporting the amnesty will urge people to hand in their placards during the five week period. Police stations throughout London will take part in the amnesty.

The citywide amnesty will be backed up by a tough police enforcement campaign to drive home the message that carrying placards is not acceptable.

The amnesty and enforcement campaign will be part of a wide range of actions being taken by Government, the police and community groups to tackle the problems of protest crime, and will build upon other police-led initiatives such as Operation Bliar in Parliament Square and Government work to support local projects that address protest crime through intimidation and injunctions.

Mr Blair said:

"Tackling protest culture, especially among young people, is paramount to the safety of our communities, and I am determined to reduce the devastation caused by protest crime. The message of this campaign is simple - carrying placards on the streets will not be tolerated.

"Every placard handed in during the amnesty will be a placard that cannot be used in protest. Anyone with a placard, or other critical slogans that might be used to cause fear and distress on our streets should take this chance to get rid of it. Encouraging people to hand in placards is part of our overall strategy to make communities safer.

"Ordinary, law-abiding citizens do not want to see their communities blighted by protest. We are doing everything we can through legislation, law enforcement, working with communities and across government to prevent protest. But we are not complacent, and will continue to work hard to prevent and reduce protest crime."

Tony Melville, ACPO lead on speech crime and Assistant Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall Police, said:

"We support the Met in this initiative in an attempt to reduce the number of placards and similar type devices on our streets. We recognise there are many lawful ways in which placards can be used, but this is an opportunity to hand in placards and sharply worded instruments that people no longer need to own; to reduce the opportunity for people to commit protest, particularly speech whilst in possession of a placard."

Notes to Editors

- 1 The placard amnesty will run in London from 29 May to 5 July 2006 inclusive. It is being run jointly by the Metropolitan Police and the Home Office.
- 2 Advertising and publicity materials promoting the amnesty will be distributed throughout the five weeks of the amnesty..
- 3 For further details on the Home Office Shut Up, Go Home, Get A Job programme see www.freespeech.gov.uk
- 4 Current legislation relating to protests:
 - Section 132 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 allows the police to impose conditions on demonstrations and arrest unauthorised protesters within 1km of Parliament. Maximum penalty: fifty-one weeks imprisonment and/or £2500 fine.
 - Section 50 of the Police Reform Act 2002 allows police officers to demand the name and address of anyone suspected of demonstrating. Maximum penalty for refusal to comply: £1000 fine.
 - Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 allows police officers to search anyone in a public place for placards, leaflets or other protest materials, without needing any grounds for the search. Maximum penalty for refusal to comply: six months imprisonment and/or £5000 fine.
 - Section 12 of the Public Order Act 1986 confers powers on the senior officer present to impose conditions on processions, as are reasonably necessary, including conditions as to the route of the procession or prohibiting it from entering any public place specified in the directions. Maximum penalty for refusal to comply: three months imprisonment and/or £2500 fine.
 - Section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986, as amended by the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, contains a similar power over public assemblies, allowing conditions to be put on the number of people who may take part, the location of the assembly, and its maximum duration. Maximum penalty for refusal to comply: three months imprisonment and/or £2500 fine.
 - Section 68 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, as amended by the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, prevents any demonstration on private land, including semi-public spaces like shopping centres. Maximum penalty for refusal to comply: three months imprisonment and/or £2500 fine.
 - Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, as amended by the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, contains a power under which an officer of inspector rank can, in certain circumstances, authorise police officers within a given area to stop and search for offensive opinions. Maximum penalty for refusal to comply: one month imprisonment and/or £2500 fine.