

Met Police apologises for using phrase 'openly Jewish' as antisemitism campaigner accuses force of 'victim-blaming'

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The Met has said an officer's use of the term was "hugely regrettable", but added that a video shared by the Campaign Against Antisemitism will "further dent the confidence of many Jewish Londoners".



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Jewish man prevented from crossing Gaza march

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The Metropolitan Police has apologised after an officer prevented an antisemitism campaigner from crossing a road near a pro-Palestinian march because they were "openly Jewish".

A video showed an officer using the term while speaking to Gideon Falter, chief executive of the Campaign Against Antisemitism, who was wearing a kippah skull cap near the demonstration in the Aldwych area of London on the afternoon of Saturday 13 April.

Issuing an apology on behalf of the Met on Saturday, assistant commissioner Matt Twist said the officer's use of the phrase was "hugely regrettable" but added that the issues surrounding the ongoing protests are "complex, contentious and polarising".

In a statement which included the apology, the assistant commissioner added: "In recent weeks we've seen a new trend emerge, with those opposed to the main protests appearing along the route to express their views.

"The fact that those who do this often film themselves while doing so suggests they must know that their presence is provocative, that they're inviting a response and that they're increasing the likelihood of an altercation.

"They are also making it much more likely officers will intervene.

"They don't do so to stifle free speech or to limit the right to protest, but to keep opposing groups apart, to prevent disorder and keep the public - including all those taking part in or opposing the protest - safe."

Mr Twist added that the video, which was shared by the Campaign Against Antisemitism, will "further dent the confidence of many Jewish Londoners".

'Victim-blaming'

Mr Falter has responded to Mr Twist's remarks by accusing the force of "victim-blaming".

In a statement posted on the X social media platform, he wrote: "What has dented Jewish Londoners' confidence in the Met is not us making this video public, but the actions of the Met's officers telling me that I cannot be in the area whilst openly Jewish.

"The assistant commissioner appears to be saying that we should have taken this on the chin and kept the video under wraps.

"Not only that, but whilst apologising for the behaviour of his officers, he then doubles down on their language by saying that the presence of people like me - Jews - is 'provocative'."

Mr Falter added that it is his right and "the right of every Jew" to walk freely around London.

He continued: "If police threaten us with arrest for doing so or consider our presence to be a provocation, then the Met has decided wholesale to curtail the rights of Jews in order to appease lawless mobs.

"On Saturday 27th April, I and hopefully others will again walk in our home city, again being 'quite openly Jewish'. We must not be intimidated by protesters or prevented by police from exercising our rights."

A government source said: "These reports are concerning and unacceptable. British Jews should be free to walk about their lives freely without intimidation or restriction, and the police have a vital role in making sure that is a reality.

"As we have shown with the largest ever funding package for security, we won't hesitate to take action to support and protect our Jewish communities."

Further police apology

The Met Police have since deleted their Tweet and issued an apology for any offence caused.

Their statement reads: "The use of the term "openly Jewish" by one of our officers is hugely regrettable. We know it will have caused offence to many. We reiterate our apology.

"We have reflected on the strength of the response to our previous statement. In an effort to make a point about the policing of protest we have caused further offence. This was never our intention. We have removed that statement and we apologise."

How did the row start?

Mr Falter said he was walking in the capital after attending a synagogue and was not there to counter-protest as he walked past the demonstration last Saturday.

The video clip shows one police officer saying to him: "You are quite openly Jewish, this is a pro-Palestinian march, I'm not accusing you of anything but I'm worried about the reaction to your presence."

In the clip another officer said to him: "There's a unit of people here now.

"You will be escorted out of this area so you can go about your business, go where you want freely or if you choose to remain here because you are causing a breach of peace with all these other people, you will be arrested."

The officer said that Mr Falter's presence was "antagonising".

The antisemitism campaigner said after the incident: "Despite being told repeatedly that London is safe for Jews when these marches are taking place, my interactions with police officers last Saturday show that the Met believes that being openly Jewish will antagonise the anti-Israel marchers and that Jews need protection, which the police cannot guarantee.

"Instead of addressing that threat of antisemitic violence, the Met's policy instead seems to be that law-abiding Jewish Londoners should not be in the parts of London where these marches are taking place. In other words, that they are no-go zones for Jews."

Tens of thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters had gathered in London last Saturday to call for a ceasefire and to urge the government to stop all arms sales to Israel.

Crowds waved Palestinian flags, chanted "free Palestine" and held signs calling for a "ceasefire now".