



Palestine activist jailed as ‘terrorist’ speaks out

## Description

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‘Other than hexing the man, I really wasn’t surprised’

This is how Leona Kamio, known as Ellie, describes what was going through her mind when a judge announced she would be sentenced as a terrorist alongside three co-defendants earlier this month.

Kamio, a 30-year-old nursery teacher, had been convicted of criminal damage in connection with a Palestine Action raid on an Israeli arms firm in Filton, Bristol, in August 2024.

The jury that tried her had not been informed that any convictions could later carry a ‘terrorism connection’, she tells *Declassified* from Bronzefield prison in her first interview since being convicted.

During that trial, the defendants were also not allowed to explain why they targeted Elbit Systems or even say the word ‘genocide’, stripping the action of all context.

Kamio and her three co-defendants, Charlotte Head, Fatema Zainab Rajwani, and Samuel Corner, have now been sentenced to a combined total of more than 25 years in prison. Two others, Zoe Rogers and Jordan Devlin, were found not guilty.

In the morning before the sentencing hearing, Kamio felt that the judge, Mr Justice Johnson, already ‘had pre-written a crazy sentence’.

The ‘terrorism connection’, says Kamio, means the activists will serve at least two-thirds of their prison sentences, though it is ‘likely we’ll have to sit out the whole five-year term’.

In prison, she adds, ‘they’ve introduced a vetting process for us, which means we are only allowed to have contact with 20 people on the outside. That includes phone calls, visits, email and post’.

The goal of this, Kamio says, "is to make us feel isolated and cut off from the world".

The four activists will also be "heavily surveilled in both prison and on release where we will have to be on notification to the police for 15 years and remain on a terrorist register".

Does she feel let down by the British criminal justice system?

"On a surface level, yes", Kamio says. "As a person who had never had any interaction with the law or known anyone who had, and thinking it would be fair, I felt let down".

But, she added, "having been incarcerated now for almost two years across different prisons in the country and having met so many people inside those prisons, I would actually say that the criminal system is working exactly as it was intended to: to protect people in power".

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## â??The drones must be silentâ??

The sentencing hearing at Woolwich Crown Court saw the prosecution [submit](#) evidence at the â??59th minute of the 11th hourâ?? regarding damage costs associated with the raid.

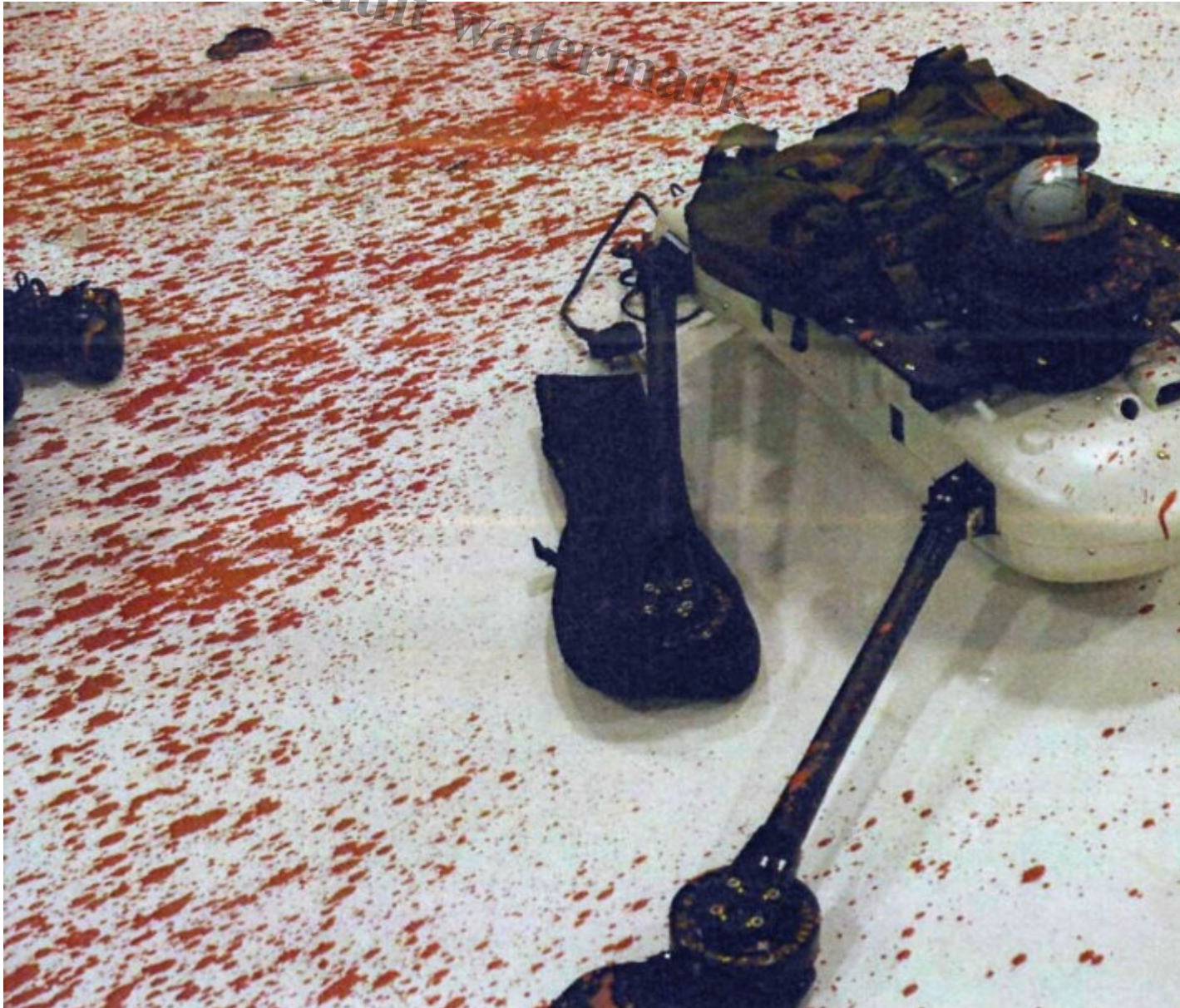
That evidence, based on an insurance report, said the raid had caused more than Â£1.2m of damage, including to 40 military assets such as military drones and unnamed â??drone systemsâ??.

Defence lawyers said they were given no time to review the new evidence and admitting it so late would amount to â??a gross affront to the integrity of the criminal justice systemâ??.

Justice Johnson admitted it anyway.

Why did the prosecution not serve this evidence during the trial?

â??If these weapons were put in front of a jury, it would have given us the opportunity to talk about the disgusting weapons that Fâ??s actually makes and what they do to Palestiniansâ??, Kamio says.



An Elbit drone damaged at the factory in Filton. (Photo: Police handout)

“And the prosecution didn’t want that, because who in their right mind would choose the side of Elbit when they hear about a drone that lures civilians out into the open with the sounds of crying children so they can be shot”, she adds.

After the sentencing was handed down, Kamio recited part of a poem by Palestinian author Marwan Makhoul while being led out of the courtroom, saying: “In order to hear the birds, the drones must be silent”.

Family members in the public gallery looked on crying, while some of them banged on the windows.

“The line I quoted is a reminder of why we did what we did”, Kamio says. “It’s also a reminder that Palestinians and the land of Palestine itself will always be there, will always persevere, that one day the drones will stop. We have to act with that in mind, as if liberation is possible”.

## Political pawns

Three days after Kamio and her co-defendant were sentenced, the Court of Appeal upheld the government’s proscription of Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation.

In that ruling, Lady Chief Justice Baroness Carr tried to set Palestine Action outside of Britain’s “long and honourable history of civil disobedience”, suggesting the group was little like the Suffragettes, who she falsely claimed operated “in the open”.

An alleged threat to “national security” was also emphasised in the ruling, despite the Home Office barely [mentioning](#) that issue in its open evidence for justifying proscription.

Palestine Action’s co-founder Huda Ammori has said she will challenge the ruling at the Supreme Court and, if necessary, at the European Court of Human Rights.

Even before the Filton incident, the UK government was [considering](#) banning Palestine Action, recent disclosure of official documents show.

The Filton raid, some suspect, was consequently categorised as “terrorism” in order to build the case for the proscription of Palestine Action as a whole.

Defence counsel argued that the initial charges against the first Filton activists under the Terrorism Act were changed to a “terrorism connection” under the Sentencing Act in order to prevent the jury from having to contend with the “terrorism” issue altogether.

If the jurors had been instructed to try the defendants on terror charges, the lawyers argued, they may not have arrived at the verdict that they did.

“They needed to secure some [terrorism] arrests and convictions for people taking direct action” before they could proscribe Palestine Action”, says Kamio.

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“We have been used as political pawns in this stitch-up against Palestine Action. If anybody doubts this, then just listen to the two judgments passed down by Judge Johnson and Judge Carr. The language is so similar that they mimic one another. They’re not even trying to hide it”, she adds.

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## â??Good riddanceâ??

A lot has happened in British politics since Kamio and her co-defendants were sentenced as terrorists earlier this month.

UK prime minister Keir Starmer announced his resignation following the by-election victory of Andy Burnham in Makerfield. Burnham now looks poised to become Britainâ??s seventh prime minister in just ten years.

Does Kamio have any parting words for Starmer, whose government has overseen a brutal crackdown on the pro-Palestine movement in Britain?

â??Good riddance, you cosplaying Toryâ?\*, she says. But Kamio is also â??not hopefulâ?\* about the prospects for a Burnham premiership.

â??Thatâ??s why itâ??s fucking hilarious that the terrorism connection in our case was based on the accusation that we were trying to influence the government; we made it very clear that we knew that we could never influence a British government because the establishment just doesnâ??t careâ?\*, she declares. â??So, no, I donâ??t have faith in government, but I do have faith in peopleâ?\*

What is Kamioâ??s message for people on the outside?

â??Whatever you feel reading this â?? outrage, disbelief â?? rather than sitting in despair with it, channel it into doing something meaningfulâ?\*, she declares.

Kamio continues: â??They canâ??t carry on doing something that the majority of Britain doesnâ??t agree with, and the majority of people are pro-Palestine. My barrister said there are often times when the criminal justice system and the law are a bit behind the people, and I think this is true this time, and unfortunately, Iâ??m in the middle of itâ?\*

But, she adds, â??thatâ??s ok â?? because I do have faith that something good has to come out of all thisâ?\*

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