

TESTIMONIES

UNECE Aarhus Convention side event on Environmental Defenders

Introduction

Across all the Aarhus Parties, environmental defenders are under threat from multiple fronts. During this side-event you will hear some firsthand testimonies, but there are many more stories that there will not be time to tell. In this document, we have collected some of these stories which continue to demonstrate the very real impacts environmental defenders are facing.

BeLIFE Report: Young environmental defenders across the EU



"It feels like we are burning out in silence, unseen and unsupported."

"It is difficult to talk about support when there is active repression"

"I was terrified for the future and realized that despair would paralyse me unless I turned it into action"

"Laws are being passed that actively target young activists and NGOs"

"Even speaking out carries legal consequences in my country"

"People are afraid to take part in climate activism due to fear of police violence. They don't know their rights, and that leads to silence"

"We are included in panels and youth events but excluded from real decisions."

"In theory we are protected, but authorities don't enforce it"

In Autumn 2024, a consultation was launched as part of the BE LIFE project, with the aim to better understand what risks environmental and climate defenders, especially youth environmental and climate defenders, face in Europe, and what resources they are most in need of. The result – the report *"What are Europe's Environmental Defenders Facing?"* (2025) compiles data from a wide spectrum of environmental and climate defenders from EU Member States.

Chris Packham CBE

I am a naturalist, television presenter, writer, photographer, conservationist, campaigner, and filmmaker.¹ I believe we should fiercely protect the right to peacefully protest. We have lost 70% of the world's wildlife in my lifetime. The Stockholm Resilience Centre reports that in 2025 we have now exceeded seven of the nine planetary boundaries.² In his only interview before the COP30 Climate Summit this month, the Secretary General of the UN António Guterres acknowledged it is now inevitable that humanity will overshoot the target in the Paris climate agreement, with devastating consequences for the world.³ In the midst of a triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution it is gravely concerning that the right to peacefully protest is being restricted or curtailed.



The UK has a tradition and respect for peaceful protest and non-violent civil disobedience. Until a few years ago, it was virtually unheard of for peaceful activists convicted of protest-related offences to receive custodial sentences. But we have been repeatedly identified by Michel Forst – whose appointment as Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention was welcomed by the UK⁴ – as having recently implemented laws which unfairly restrict protests, particularly environmental protests. This includes draconian provisions introduced under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (PCSCA) 2022 for the criminal offence of “public nuisance” (punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment) and the Public Order Act 2023. Because of this new legislation, the UK’s civic freedom was downgraded by Civicus from “narrowed” to “obstructed”.⁵ It is shocking to me that in all of Western Europe, the UK is the only country to have a ranking of “obstructed”.

¹ I have been active and vocal about wildlife and conservation issues all my life. Since the 1980s I have presented many programmes and series about wildlife and the environment including, from 2009 to date, the iconic “nature watch” series. In recent years, I have also organised numerous public events to raise awareness about the parlous state of our planet, including the People’s Walk for Wildlife in London (attended by 10,000 people), NoNewOil.com, in which I invited MPs to speak to climate scientists outside the House of Commons and “Restore Nature Now”, outside the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I believe that part of the portfolio of protest practices is taking viable legal challenges to question potentially damaging environmental policies. I’ve taken legal action in my own name twice – the firstly challenging the approval of the HS2 rail scheme (a net contributor to carbon emissions) and a second in 2023 challenging the Government’s decision to abandon a raft of policies designed to ensure it can meet its commitments under the Climate Change Act 2008

² Then seven planetary boundaries exceeded include: climate change, biosphere integrity, land system change, freshwater change, biogeochemical flows, ocean acidification and novel entities (with only atmospheric aerosol loading and stratospheric ozone depletion operating within a safe operating space) – see [here](#)

³ See [here](#)

⁴ [Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

⁵ See the [uk - Civicus Monitor](#)

In 2024, the Special Rapporteur said: *"The right to peaceful protest is a basic human right. It is also an essential part of a healthy democracy. Protests, which aim to express dissent and to draw attention to a particular issue, are by their nature disruptive. The fact that they cause disruption or involve civil disobedience do not mean they are not peaceful. As the UN Human Rights Committee has made clear, States have a duty to facilitate the right to protest, and private entities and broader society may be expected to accept some level of disruption as a result of the exercise of this right".*

But having decisively won the 2024 election, the current Labour Government has introduced yet more anti-protest measures. The current Crime and Policing Bill further expands police powers to impose restrictions on protest and to criminalise concealing identity at protests. The Government has also announced an intention to impose restrictions on repeated protests on the basis of 'cumulative disruption', and to further expand powers to ban protests outright.

In 2023, I presented a Channel 4 Documentary entitled "Is it time to break the law?", in which I explored if it is ethically acceptable to break the law to protest against government policies on climate change. I have reached the point where I now consider it the ethically responsible thing to do. I support activists who break the law, so long as their actions do not cause physical harm or lasting environmental damage.

In February 2024, I testified at the crown court trial of Just Stop Oil supporter, Cressie Gethin, a Cambridge University music student who scaled a gantry on the M25 to protest about climate change. On the day of the protest, I was due to be filming a BBC TV programme about autism, but I was delayed for 4-5 hours on the M25 as a result of it. Knowing I was going to be late for filming initially caused me concern, but when I reflected on the motives of the protestors, I changed my thinking. I thought about whether the action was productive, what it was doing, to reflect on the fact that I was unable to use the Rail Network. The Rail Network, in the extreme heat, was issuing warnings not to use trains. I reflected on the fact that I was sweating – it was the day after the UK had recorded its highest temperature of 40°C AND just two days before the Government's second 'Net Zero' plan was declared illegal. When asked by the judge if I was seriously inconvenienced, I compared my situation to people in unbearable conditions in other parts of the world or the serious disruption I may inconvenience in future due to climate change – and concluded that I was not. I made it clear that I think it was necessary for those protesters at that point to use peaceful means to raise an alarm.

Cressie and five other protestors were jailed for their roles in various climate demonstrations (including co-founder of Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion Roger Hallam). She was sentenced to four years in jail, but had her sentence reduced to 30 months by the Court of Appeal following claims that all 16 sentences were "manifestly excessive" and failed to consider the protestors' "conscientious motivation". I think Cressie and her co-defendants are incredibly brave. They are paying the highest price for actions motivated wholly in the public interest.

Earlier this year, I threatened legal action against the Government with fellow environmentalist Gaie Delap, another climate protester jailed for protesting on the M25. Our letter argued that section 78 of the PCSCA 2022 (the section that criminalises "public nuisance") is so broad that it risks

criminalising entirely peaceful environmental protests and fails to offer sufficient protection for the rights to freedom of speech and assembly under Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). We also argued that while existing guidance for prosecutors and judges provides a “reasonable excuse” defence to public nuisance offences, it failed to make express provision for respecting rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

Against this backdrop, it is entirely unclear to me how I can protest without the risk of arrest, conviction or imprisonment. I don’t know whether I can hold a placard, where I could hold that placard and what I could write on that placard. A process whereby institutions and corporations can issue hidden injunctions which apply to any un-named person are effectively like ‘protest land mines’. This means I have no idea where I might be entirely surprised to be arrested if I was protesting.

In response to our letter, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said it was updating its Guidance, but the new document (issued in October 2025) still fails to clarify that the CPS must consider whether the protestors actions were proportionate when deciding whether to prosecute a case. This is critical because if proportionality was assessed at the early stage it’s entirely possible that a decision not to even proceed with a prosecution could be taken.

The result of serious crackdowns in the law and confusion about what’s unlawful is that many previous or potential peaceful protestors have been scared from the streets. This is not in my opinion in any way democratic. We have witnessed the systemic and escalating persecution of protesters and similarly draconian mistreatment in the courts. Defendants have been refused the ability to state why they were protesting and juries have been denied the right to acquit them based upon their conscience. Sentences have been outrageously long. If we are to stand any chance of reversing the current planetary collision course we must be able to tell the truth through protest.

I agree with the findings of the Special Rapporteur that the repression of peaceful environmental protest within the UK is inconsistent with the UK’s obligations under Article 3(8) of the Aarhus Convention. I am troubled by recent press reports that the UK is considering of pulling out of Aarhus –this would be dangerously detrimental to our rights to access environmental justice. Indeed, in my view, the Government should be strengthening access to the Aarhus provisions in the UK.

3 November 2025

Tina Rothery

My name is Tina Rothery. I am a grandmother, and co-founder of The Nanas, an accessible environmental movement group comprised mainly of older women. The Nanas were founded as a “welcome mat into activism”, to resist the fracking industry in the UK. Before getting involved in the anti-fracking movement, I had not done much campaigning before. But in 2011, leaflets were coming through my door in Blackpool about shale gas. At first, I half-believed the words in the leaflet about how ‘brilliant’ it was and it ‘bringing jobs etc’. But then I did some research, and read about places in America, Australia, Canada, Argentina etc where there was illness, fewer jobs than promised, accidents/mishaps, difficulty obtaining housing insurance etc.



Soon after, I co-founded the Nanas. Us Nanas were about connection with people who perhaps didn't ordinarily consider the environment or protest or anything like that, as a thing they'd be involved in. Yet I noticed that when we did any media about our opposition to fracking, and it said “Tina Rothery - Nana”, instead of “climate campaigner” or “eco-warrior”, that people listened, as if they felt it might have something to do with them after all. We succeeded, I believe, in carving out a space for gentler activism, and a place where laughter and good company were as important as stopping a fracking site. This meant our reach and diversity was increased. But campaigning against fracking was not easy.

Fracking was forced on the people of Lancashire against their will. We Nanas spent years lobbying our politicians, informing our Councillors, signing petitions, hosting/attending public meetings, objecting to planning etc. Time consuming and at times it felt futile. For example, the local authority Lancashire County Council rejected Cuadrilla's application for planning permission to frack at Preston New Road in 2015. But this decision was overruled by central government, in opposition to the views of local people. So we Nanas decided we had to turn more to protest to get our message across.

We tried not to be arrested, but we knew that arrests were common, given what was happening at other fracking sites. Nana actions were non-threatening, slow-moving, and inconvenient to site operations, but not confrontational in any way. New joiners to the Nanas were especially worried about being arrested. So we created ‘Wednesday Women’, where we walked together from Maple Farm up the hill. On Wednesday mornings, 9-12:30, there was an unwritten but observed respect for our ‘Call for Calm’. We created this day for ourselves. It was the only time each week where it seemed humanity prevailed for a few hours.

At other times, we perhaps got less aggression from security forces etc than other protestors, but that's not saying much. On one occasion, Nanas sat in front of the Preston New Road fracking site gates (a daily position we took, so nothing unusual about it) and formed three knitting circles, 6 Nanas in each. We had woven the wool through knitted wristbands, around our chair legs and to each-other; we called it a 'Yarn-On' (our gentle, funny nod to 'lock-ons'). It was frightening, however, to see five wagons of police arrive, with ten officers in each wagon. I sat next to a dedicated environmental campaigner in her late 70s who usually runs stalls and raffles for bees. She (like many of us), would often comply once the police pressure got too much, and move on. But not on this day. I watched her face, and could see just how much strength it took for her to not just agree to move, and to not just be a typical 'good citizen'. We each remained in place, and the police had to trim away all the wool and carry us off. It was a horrid experience to go through. There were news headlines about 50 police officers removing knitting OAPs (Old Age Pensioners).⁶

Many Nanas were genuinely shocked by police behaviour: from rudeness and ignorance to brutality. Some could not carry on as a result, and we lost their presence at the roadside protests. Many of the police officers seemed inexperienced, and there were clear examples of excessive force being used. For example, I saw an officer shove a small, older female to prevent her getting near a vehicle exiting the fracking site. His shove sent her across into the open lane of traffic with oncoming vehicles. Thankfully the car screeched to a stop in time.

Some officers were very cruel and brutal to women at the roadside. One woman had a discl shoulder was dislocated. She was a jewellery maker and so could no longer continue with her art. A wartime reenactment dancer had to give up her passion after a knee injury. A highly qualified electrician had a severe rota cuff injury. The police were told about her injury, but they ignored this and still rough-handled her. Another woman was badly bruised by the police, so that she withdrew not only from protest but from much else as well, and became reclusive.

I recall seeing a Christian Minister seated to deliver a Bible reading when the police tried to remove his microphone and separate him from his seat. He hung on to both and continued to preach as they carried his seat away (with him on it). I remember too seeing Quakers seated in silence in all weathers, dragged unceremoniously by the police and dumped away from the gates to the fracking site.

Opposing fracking could also carry big cost risks. At one stage, I faced a legal bill of £55,000⁷ for camping on a field to protest against shale gas extraction. No damage had been done to the field, and the protest was entirely peaceful. All we Nanas were doing was trying to protect our children and grandchildren's futures.

Ultimately, history, has proved we were right to distrust the assurances of the fracking industry and many politicians that fracking was safe. In 2019, Cuadrilla's fracking project triggered an earthquake at Preston New Road, of 2.9ML, which caused damage to local peoples' homes. A moratorium on

⁶ [Lancashire police remove knitting OAPs from fracking site protest | Daily Mail Online](#)

⁷ [Anti-fracking activist refuses to pay £55,000 legal bill in Cuadrilla dispute | Environmental activism | The Guardian](#)

fracking followed. And that wouldn't have happened without sustained resistance to fracking from so many people and groups.

However, over the last few years, a whole raft of anti-protest laws have been introduced, and more are planned by the current Government. There are new protest offences, and harsher sentences for peaceful protest. This is really frightening. Had these laws been in place at the time we Nanas were most actively protesting against fracking, many of us would not have felt able to do what we did back then. The potential consequences would have made it too much risk for many e.g. jobs at risk if perceived to be a 'criminal', costs involved in court cases etc.

Gaie Delap

Growing awareness of the existential threat of our Climate Crisis

My name is Gaie Delap. I'm 78 years old, a Quaker, a grandmother and a committed climate activist. I'm dyslexic and find formal paperwork challenging.



When I was a child, after long car journey, it was my job to scrape a thick crust of crushed insects from the headlights of our family car. Now there are none. In my own garden I've observed the steady decline in number and variety of birds and insects over 45 years.

These welcome visitors are now rarely seen. Pictures of devastating fires, floods, hurricanes and extreme weather events increasingly fill our screens. I became increasingly concerned and joined Extinction Rebellion.

In August 2021 I read a synopsis of the IPCC report and the Dasgupta Report. I listened to the warnings of Antonio Guterres and Sir David King. The crisis was real and alarming, but the 124 new oil and gas licenses in the North Sea were being made available to extraction companies. It was business as usual.

Taking nonviolent direct action

The Quaker faith and Just Stop Oil share significant values - Tell the truth, act according to your conscience, or, as Quakers say, "Act as led by your heart." Non-violence is central to both.

In November 2022, I joined Just Stop Oil (JSO). JSO were demanding that no new oil or gas licenses be issued. Their aim was to highlight the lack of serious action by the government, industrialists and investors to work towards a fossil free future.

On November 9th I climbed a motorway gantry on the M25 and unfurled a small banner with the Just Stop Oil demand. It was part of a four day, peaceful, action designed to close the M25, the ring road which surrounds London.

Why did I do it?

Because my heart was breaking. Breaking for the futures of my grandchildren and all future generations. Breaking for the havoc being wreaked upon the global South. Breaking for the continued destruction of this beautiful planet.

My father would say when I was a child, "sometimes it's a crime not to be in prison". I didn't understand what he meant then. I do now.

There is a quiet power in peaceful protest. I felt it as I waited to be arrested, watching two kestrels flying over the now silent motorway.

Arrest

The police stopped the traffic, claiming we were a distraction and danger to motorists. In fact, we were wearing climbing harnesses, clipped on at all times, and all our possessions were tethered so presented no risk to cars below.

I do sincerely regret the inconvenience I caused to travellers on that day. I also regret the circumstances that led me to take that action in the profound hope that the general public would realise the urgency of the Climate Crisis, the failure of the Government to act, and the greed of the Fossil Fuel company bosses.

The traffic was held up for approximately two hours. I was taken to Fleet Police Station and charged with causing a Public Nuisance (Obstruction under s.78 (1)(b) (ii) of the Police, Crime and Courts Act 2022 and released the following morning.

Following my arrest, I was bailed from 10 November 2022 until sentencing on 1st August 2024. Some people on the same action are now waiting 4 years to be sentenced. In this period, I was called to at least six court appearances. I was also charged with breaching a 'without notice basis' injunction brought by National Highways at the High Court in London. I was not sanctioned because it was accepted that I had no knowledge of the injunction before my action. However, all defendants were told that the substantial bill for legal fees related to the injunction case could still be claimed from them.

Bail

My bail conditions were to be tagged while on Home Detention Curfew, and to be at my home from 7pm to 7am until I was sentenced. I must not attend any demonstrations, political gatherings or meetings. I must not leave the country. I must seek permission from my Probation Officer to be away from home overnight.

In August 2020 I had suffered a Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) so it was not possible to fit a tag to my leg. I needed to have a tag on my wrist. Both are supplied by the Electronic Monitoring Service (EMS) who are contracted by the Ministry of Justice. EMS recorded that I had refused a tag. This was untrue. They had not supplied a suitable wrist tag.

A week later I was summonsed to Court in Maidstone and charged with breaching my bail conditions. The Judge accepted there were medical reasons for not being given an ankle tag. He dismissed the charge and put me on a Doorstep Condition whereby I was bound to be at home every night from 7pm to 7am (the same restrictions but without an electronic monitoring device). I respected this condition for 630 days. This number is significant. Prisoners on a tag and a twelve hour curfew can have their sentences reduced. Two days on a tag equals a day less in custody. Though EMS failed to fit a tag on several occasions, I always adhered to my conditions. But I was only given any dispensation for "Allowed days" (14) off my sentence on this first occasion

Split charges and Sentencing

I was expecting a single charge of causing a Public Nuisance (obstruction) under s.78 (1)(b)(ii) of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and intended to plead not guilty. But my fellow defendants and I were unexpectedly charged by the judge with a second indictment – that of causing a Public Nuisance (serious harm), under s.78 (1)(b)(i) PCSCA 2022.

Technically, the Judge had split the charge into two counts. The new (serious harm) charge related to an accident between a lorry and a police motorcyclist at different gantry several miles away. No Witness Statement or Road Traffic Accident Report was supplied, despite several requests. The judge opined that the police motor cyclist would not have been on the M25 had there not been activists on the gantries and by association claimed we were responsible for the accident (surely a logical fallacy).

Lawyers representing other defendants were not happy about the lack of evidence, or its examination, but recommended a change of plea. We decided to plead guilty to the obstruction charge. We understood the serious harm charge had potentially higher consequences and had been told this would be dropped if we pleaded guilty to the obstruction charge. The serious harm charge lies on file.

As a result of pleading guilty, I did not have the chance to present any defence before a jury. Not being able to read a prepared statement to a jury upset and frustrated me. I had wanted to explain my motivation for climbing onto the gantry.

Along with five other Earth Defenders, I was sentenced to 20 months in prison at Basildon Crown Court, on August 1st, 2024. This was 21 months after my offence. The judge had ignored my age and health, caring responsibilities, pre-sentencing reports and personal statement. The judge said: "In most cases, with age comes wisdom, but not in your case Gaie".

The sentence required me to spend 17 weeks in Peterborough prison, six further weeks on a tag and another year with licence conditions until 17th March 2026.

Peterborough Prison's poor healthcare and conditions

Two weeks before entering Peterborough Prison, I had a Transitory Ischemic Attack (TIA), or mini stroke. This was treated in a Bristol Hospital. I was discharged requiring three different medications. I entered prison with only one.

Healthcare in this privately run prison was a nightmare. It took over two months to get the medication I needed. Necessary blood samples were taken but lost. The weeks I waited to get the correct essential medication were long and frightening. The Pharmacy frequently supplied the wrong medication, they ran out of painkillers, even plasters. I witnessed a woman with a colostomy bag being offered a black plastic bag, of the kind used for dog waste and incontinence pads weren't always available for people who needed them.

It was not uncommon to wait an hour for the correct meds. I was asked to do a pregnancy test, but I refused! It takes weeks to see a doctor and when you do, you must wait ten days to see a doctor again. The nighttime medical provision was woeful. A young woman died of a suspected Spice overdose in the wing next to mine. Staff had ignored her calls.

Self-harming and repeated suicide attempts were commonplace.

I witnessed seven security officers man-handling a young woman with learning difficulties. She objected strongly to being locked down at 6.30pm. Her pitiful screams and cries, and loud banging on her door were a nightly occurrence. She, like many of the women there, should not have been in prison. Most of the inmates were mothers, many had mental health or addiction issues, some were illiterate or had very low literacy levels. Most needed help not punishment. 40% were there on recall, often for very trivial reasons.

Due to the frequent staff shortages, services were often unavailable. On one occasion the Pharmacy was closed for three days, leaving many prisoners extremely vulnerable.

Developing a chronic condition

I developed a large, painful swelling on my neck. I had a high temperature, sore throat and bad earache. I felt increasingly unwell and could not get up. I was tightly hand-cuffed and taken by two Prison officers to the local Hospital. I asked several times for the cuffs to be loosened but they refused. As a consequence, I lost all sensation in my right thumb and first finger, which lasted for several months. I was discharged from hospital with a course of antibiotics that I was not allowed to take. My meds were not dispensed by the prison until the following afternoon. I continued to feel very ill for two more weeks until a prison doctor doubled the strength of my antibiotics.

Release and re-arrest

I was released from Prison on 17th November 2024.

EMS visited me at my home, equipped – yet again - to fit a leg tag, no notice having been taken of fact that I was unable to wear an ankle tag for medical reasons. The next day they still weren't able to find or fit a correct wrist tag.

Because I was not tagged I was deemed to be "Unlawfully at large". On December 5th 2024, my Probation Officer rang me to say there was a warrant out for my arrest, and that I should present myself to a police station. As I had committed no crime or infringement, I did not do so. I rang back to speak with my Probation Officer again but she was off work, sick. I was extremely fearful. The thought of returning to prison filled me with horror. I had no paperwork and no support. I did not know how long I was to be inside. After experiences to do with my health in Peterborough I was frightened about going back into prison.

On December 20th I was re-arrested with no warning and given ten minutes to pack. I was admitted to Eastwood Park prison, where I spent 42 days, missing Christmas with my family. I also had 20 extra days added to my sentence. Being recalled was unjust and unjustifiable. I felt that I'd suffered a moral injury and this feeling persists.

I was released on 31st January, when a suitable tag was finally found.

Conclusion and legacies

Several issues are clear to me. The EMS is not fit for purpose. The staff are poorly trained and badly equipped. The organisation is inefficiently administered. Communication between staff is poor, leading to mistakes and misunderstandings. Tick-box forms do not allow for complex situations.

There are no guidelines for dealing with pro-social actions where the defendant has nothing to gain, but is acting from a moral conviction. This results in extreme inconsistencies within the judiciary, the police, prison and probation services and the Crown Prosecution Service. For example, when judges allow environmental defenders to present mitigating statements to a jury this usually results in an acquittal. Unfortunately, I was not allowed this opportunity.

Now, when I see a large white envelope on my doorstep or hear a loud, unexpected knock on my front door, my anxiety is triggered. I often have dystopian dreams, half-remembered, but leaving me with feelings of being trapped, of being unsafe and abandoned.

I also have unanswered questions. Why did no-one alert me to the fact that by not having a tag, or other form of electronic monitoring, I would forfeit significant credit against in my sentence? Having adhered to my Doorstep Conditions for 630 days, why was I suddenly a danger to society, needing to be recalled to prison for 42 extra days? Why was a suitable wrist tag suddenly produced like a rabbit from a hat?

I can accept the deprivation of my liberty as a consequence of my actions but why should such poor treatment and healthcare be acceptable when the prison service has a duty of care to people in custody.

I would like to end with a quote from Sir Ben Okri, whose book 'Tiger Works' I found in the prison library: "Can't you hear the future weeping? Our love must save the world". Yes, I can hear the world weeping and yes, I will continue to love and protect the world in any way I can.

6 November 2025

Michael Salt

I am Michael Salt and I am a local resident of Walleys Quarry, living just one mile away. Walleys Quarry Ltd in Silverdale, Staffordshire, is a landfill site which due to improper management has released hazardous gases into the community for years. Local residents have experienced health problems including itchy eyes, sore throats, headaches, nose bleeds, the worsening of existing medical conditions and decreased life expectancy, particularly due to the high levels of hydrogen sulphide emitted by the site. In addition to the health impacts, it was very unpleasant having the odour of the landfill site in the garden. It took some of the pride out of the community, as we were known for this notorious landfill site. Local people avoided having guests to their house because they didn't want them experiencing the pollution in the air.



I became involved in the Stop the Stink Campaign in October 2019, which has called for the landfill site to be shut down. I work as a nuclear physicist and have a PHD in particle physics. My background led me to take on technical and scientific tasks for Stop the Stink, such as keeping track of the number of breaches that the site made, gathering evidence and putting it into digestible chunks which people could understand. When I started to campaign, I was actually against the use of direct action. I always thought protest was something that people like me didn't do. But, as soon as I realised the full extent of the health impacts that were occurring, I knew I had to get involved and that's when I took a more active role in protesting.

The campaign initially started with people protesting opposite the gates to the landfill site, where no disruption to the business was caused. However, people lost patience with the authorities and the Environment Agency who were failing to take action against the allegations of illegal waste activity by

Walleys Quarry. The protests escalated and when one protester chained themselves to the gate the campaign went from being a few committed individuals to protests of over one-thousand people attending and fostered a very strong sense of community.

In response to the protests, Walleys Quarry and its parent company Red Industries Ltd utilised the civil courts to threaten and silence protestors. Walleys Quarry first tried to obtain an injunction to prevent protests at the landfill site in November 2021. The defendants were only given one week's notice of these proceedings. Only one of the defendants turned up to the virtual hearing and the judge just threw it out on the basis that the defendants were not given adequate time to prepare.

In April 2022, another injunction was served and this time I was one of the twenty-six people named by Walleys Quarry as a defendant. We were again only given around 10 days to prepare and Walleys Quarry sent us all the paperwork in paper form. I had to work through the night using a single flatbed scanner to digitise the bundle of paperwork, just so that we had a means to deliver this information to anyone who was willing to defend us.

In addition to seeking an order to prevent protests at the gate, Walleys Quarry were pursuing costs from the defendants for alleged loss of earnings due to protest activity. Our solicitor told us we were each at risk of owing around £40,000 to Walleys Quarry and were facing the threat of having our assets seized. I was named on the injunction because I had, on one occasion, entered the bellmouth of the site and prevented HGVs from accessing it for what must have been less than an hour. I chose to do this following the announcement in parliament that there had been alleged illegal waste activity at the site. Despite only having taken part in disruptive protests on one occasion, Walleys Quarry knew I was a key campaigner and a danger to the business they were trying to conduct. I believe this is why they targeted me.

The prospect of losing my house and that security for my wife and daughter was absolutely daunting and that led me into a downward spiral. I had a breakdown and suffered suicidal thoughts as a result of it. I thought through my activism that I was helping my community, but this legal action made me feel that I'd failed my family. I had vivid visualisations of me hanging from one of the trees outside of Walley's Quarry with a t-shirt scrawled with 'Red Industries did this to me'. We are more than three years on and I am not fully recovered. I still suffer anxiety and doubt in my own judgement.

We raised £12,000 from our community towards the legal costs of fighting the injunction, which is an impressive sum for our community. However, to stage a fight against an injunction in court you are looking at hundreds of thousands of pounds. All our funds allowed us to obtain was advice from a Kings Council (QC). We eventually agreed to an injunction by consent, which meant that Walleys Quarry dropped the costs part of the claim but were able to obtain an injunction banning protests at the bellmouth of the site, and at their head offices. We took this decision to protect the named defendants from the devastating costs impact, however it was extremely disappointing to concede the injunction banning our protests. Whilst the injunction did permit us to protest on the lay-by opposite or even on the grass either side, as long as we weren't in the entrance, this restricted form of protest felt like glorified cheerleading because it wasn't impactful.

In November 2024, the Environment Agency ordered Walleys Quarry to permanently close and the company entered liquidation. Since another company has taken over the capping of the site, complaints from the community have gone right down. Despite eventually closing, it still feels extremely unjust that a company operating non-compliant and allegedly illegal activity was able to launch this legal action against the local community experiencing the harmful effects whilst the directors of the company face no personal consequences. I will continue to fight for this accountability until justice is served.

Talia Woodin

I want to start by acknowledging the extent to which many communities never have the privilege of being under the illusion that the police or broader criminal justice system are there to protect them. Being someone of relative privilege I regrettably didn't understand this fully until I was exposed to the brutality of the police during my time on the campaign against HS2.

Whether it was breaking bones, forcefully choking people, cutting people's climbing ropes whilst they are at height, or sexually assaulting women and young people; what was more traumatising than witnessing and experiencing this violence was the extent to which the police, as well as private security hired by the state funded HS2 infrastructure project, were able to almost always act with impunity.



The event happened whilst I was living on a protest camp in an ancient woodland outside Uxbridge. Myself and 6 others had spent the morning sitting on a public footbridge which happened to connect two HS2 compounds, when 20 or 30 police officers swarmed the site we were living in and arrested us. We were all cuffed and put in separate unmarked vehicles, with only male police officers who refused to tell us what we were being arrested for or where they were taking us.

When being processed in custody I refused to provide my personal details, which is not a legal requirement. In response the male custody officer responded saying that they would have to strip search me. This was inevitably distressing so I offered to comply and give my details, to which the sergeant said that it was too late and that they were going to strip search me, essentially admitting that it was nothing but an intimidation tactic.

I was taken into a holding cell which had a live CCTV feed to the male sergeant at the desk. I was cuffed behind my back, forced and held face down on the floor by six officers, stripped naked and had my legs forced open.

Four of us were strip searched that day, I was the oldest and only twenty, the youngest was underage and was stripped without the presence of an appropriate adult.

Throughout the 12 hours we were in custody we were denied our basic rights to a phone call and food, and consistently threatened and intimidated into admitting to more substantial crimes which had no basis.

A year later the case was dropped at which point we were able to sue the police for wrongful imprisonment and assault. Now, 5 years later we were able to reach a settlement. As far as I'm aware this was the only case from the campaign that was successful, despite how common it was for protesters, members of the public and even journalists to experience this level of violence.

About a year later I was forcibly stripsearched for the second time, by a different police force, after participating in another peaceful environmental protest. This time apparently for the sake of my 'safety' which was questioned due to the police finding my anti-depressants, despite my behaviour giving them no reason to believe I was a threat to myself or anyone else.

It was deeply traumatising to be degraded like that, but in the time since what has impacted me the most, is the extent to which it seems that state was using the policing and criminalisation of those of us protesting HS2 as a guinea-pig for the more extreme police freedoms which have now been enshrined in law through the Police, Crimes, Sentencing and Courts, and Public Order Bills, as well as more recent crackdowns on Palestine protests.

It's a terrifying reality to live in, knowing the brutality the criminal justice system is capable of. It's not just an attack on our right to protest, but our individual and collective safety.

Mariana Riquito and João da Montanha, Covas do Barroso community, Portugal

Since we began protesting the construction of Europe's largest open pit lithium mining project in Covas do Barroso the threats have been constant. The initial presence of the GNR (military police) – although assiduous and constant – evolved. In fact, faced with the persistence of the people in defending that symbolic piece of land, the GNR began to prove equally persistent and more aggressive. In the early days of the vigil, the harassment was constant: any excuse was used to fine, threaten or intimidate those who came to



defend the hills. An elderly person had their car searched at dusk; others were fined for not wearing seat belts on mountain roads; documentation was requested for dogs walking freely in the hills. The police intimidation strategy was clear.

Savannah (the mining company) attempts to bring down local leaders and representatives. Anything goes to take down these targets — from blackmail and manipulation to threats and intimidation.