

Photographers Protest Against Police Stop and Search

Written by Guardian.com.uk



More than 2,000 photographers demonstrate against police using terrorism laws to prevent photography in public places.

Thousands of photographers have staged a mass protest against the "malicious" use of anti-terrorism laws to stop them taking pictures in public places.

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Trafalgar Square in central London was lit up by flash bulbs as part of the demonstration against photographers being unfairly targeted by [police](#) after taking photos. They are usually questioned under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000, which allows officers to [stop and search](#) without the need for "suspicion" within designated areas in the UK.

More than 2,000 professional and amateur photographers took part in the protest organised by the group [I'm a Photographer, Not a Terrorist!](#), many carrying placards bearing its name.

Onlookers were handed stop and search cards by organisers outlining their rights.

Freelance photographer and Guardian contributor [Marc Vallee](#), who helped organise the protest with appeals on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), said he was "delighted" by the turnout.

"It's quite obvious that professional photographers across the country are being searched because they are photographers not because they are suspicious," he said.

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"It's a common-law right to take pictures in public places and we are here to show that."

Earlier this month the European court of human rights ruled that the use of counter-terrorism stop and search powers on photographers and peace protesters was not "[sufficiently circumscribed](#)".

The ruling by seven judges criticised the entire process by which section 44 stop and searches are authorised by the home secretary, and highlighted a lack of adequate parliamentary and legal safeguards against abuse.

The judges said that because officers' decisions about whether to stop and search someone in a designated area were based solely on a hunch or professional intuition, the effect was "a clear risk of arbitrariness".

All 43 police forces in England and Wales have received a memorandum warning them that officers were "confused" about stop and search powers.

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"Officers should be reminded that it is not an offence for a member of the public or journalist to take photographs of a public building, and use of cameras by the public does not ordinarily permit use of stop and search powers," said the circular issued last year.

Andy Trotter, chief constable of the British transport police, who drafted the guidance for the Association of Chief Police Officers, said photographers "should be left alone to get on with what they are doing".

The shift in policy was a direct response to negative media reports surrounding photographers, amateur and professional, who said they were being unfairly stopped, usually under section 44.

A succession of high-profile incidents involving the use of the legislation against photographers has embarrassed senior officers, who privately concede that the rank and file are misusing their powers on the ground.

[In December Guardian reporter Paul Lewis was stopped and searched while taking pictures of](#)

[the Gherkin building in London](#) and Grant Smith, an architecture photographer, was apprehended around the corner while photographing Sir Christopher Wren's Christ Church.

Other recent cases include Jeff Overs, a BBC photographer who told the Andrew Marr Show he was stopped under suspicion of terrorism reconnaissance while photographing St Paul's Cathedral, and Andrew White, an amateur photographer questioned by two police community support officers for photographing Christmas lights in Brighton.

Last April two Austrian tourists were forced to delete their shots after being stopped by police in Walthamstow; and Alex Turner, an amateur photographer, was arrested under section 44 after taking images of a fish and chip shop in Kent.