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UK police must end stop and search without suspicion

The UK government must scrap abusive, discriminatory and unlawful powers that allow the police to stop and search without reasonable suspicion, Amnesty International said today after the European Court of Human Rights ruled that their use was illegal.

The European court has been hearing a case involving two protesters, Kevin Gillan and Pennie Quinton, who were stopped near a protest against an arms fair in London in 2003 by police acting under the 2000 Terrorism Act, which allows senior officers to authorize stop and search procedures without reasonable suspicion.

The Court ruled their right to respect for a private and family life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights had been violated.

“These police powers to stop and search under the Terrorism Act clearly violate people’s right to privacy and family life and the government must act urgently to scrap them,” said Halya Gowan of Amnesty International’s Europe and Central Asia Programme.

The Court also said it was "struck by the statistical and other evidence" showing that these powers disproportionately affected black and Asian people, although the applicants in this case were not from a Black or Asian minority ethnic background.

In the past, Amnesty International expressed serious concern about police powers to stop and search people without suspicion of any wrongdoing.

“These powers also contravene the rights to liberty, freedom of expression and assembly, and freedom from arbitrary detention, all of which the UK is bound to uphold,” said Halya Gowan.