



**FSU**  
FREE SPEECH UNION

THE FREE SPEECH UNION  
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Commissioner Cressida Dick CBE  
Metropolitan Police  
New Scotland Yard  
8 – 10 Broadway  
London SW1H 0BG

31<sup>st</sup> July 2021

Dear Ms Dick,

### **Attack on Ms Hatun Tash**

I am writing to you in my capacity as General Secretary of the Free Speech Union, a non-partisan, mass membership public interest body that stands up for the speech rights of its members and campaigns for free speech more widely.

This letter concerns the knife attack on Ms Hatun Tash at Speaker's Corner on 25 July 2021. Ms Tash is a member of the Free Speech Union. We would like reassurance, in light of what seems to have been an attempt to inflict serious injury on Ms Tash, that the Metropolitan Police will protect her rights to life, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression.

On 2 June 2021, we wrote to you about Ms Tash's arrest by the Met on 23 May 2021. We asked for assurance that, in the event of Ms Tash being threatened with or suffering violent assault, the Met would take action against those using violence, and would refrain from arresting Ms Tash for exercising her rights to freedom of religion and expression.

Inspector [REDACTED] replied to our letter on 25 June with the following:

Ms Tash has received advice about potential threats to her safety at Speakers Corner and elsewhere. She has had threats made against her, and suffered a minor assault, the suspect of which is known and is currently under investigation by Royal Parks officers. There has also been a third party allegation made of Ms Tash being a victim of an offence on the day of her arrest that is currently under investigation by Royal Parks officers.

A number of questions arise from Inspector [REDACTED] email and subsequent events:

1. Did Royal Parks officers continue its investigations against the persons suspected of offences, including assault, against Ms Tash? Were arrests made?
2. Did Royal Parks officers update Ms Tash on the progress of investigations, and on any further threats to her safety?

3. Do officers believe that the knife attack on 25 July was carried out by a person who was already under investigation?
4. What further steps will officers take to ensure that Ms Tash can exercise her rights to freedom of religion and expression without risk to her personal safety?

As you will be aware, Ms Tash's situation engages a range of obligations on the police. Under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the police have a positive obligation to take operational measures to protect an individual whose life is at risk from the criminal acts of another individual (*Osman v. the United Kingdom*, App. No. 87/1997/871/1083 (1998) [115]).

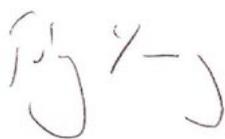
The Supreme Court has also held, in *Metropolitan Police Commissioner v DSD and another* [2018] UKSC 11, that police can be liable under Article 3 of the Convention for failure to investigate allegations of serious violent crime.

We hope that the recent knife attack on Ms Tash, in light of the legal obligations on the Metropolitan Police and its officers, will effect a sea-change in its approach to her. It is time to accept that Ms Tash is not a threat or a criminal, but a citizen in danger whose only option is to rely on the police to protect her fundamental rights. We fear that failure to grasp this reality will result in an avoidable tragedy.

We believe also that Ms Tash's case engages a question of pressing public interest – to what extent does the Met accept that it is under a positive obligation to protect Ms Tash's rights to freedom of religion and expression? In the case of *Fáber v. Hungary*, App. No. 40721/08 (2012), the European Court of Human Rights held that Article 10, interpreted in light of the Article 11 right to protest, imposes on the state a positive obligation to protect the right to demonstrate, even if this involves operational measures by police to prevent the outbreak of violence between opposing parties.

We accept that policing the capital with necessarily limited resources is a difficult job. As such, we recognise that there is a practical limit to the protection the police can offer to Ms Tash. However we believe that the duty in *Fáber v. Hungary* is clearly engaged in this case. The Met must therefore make clear to Ms Tash, if it hasn't already, the steps it proposes to take in order to facilitate her right to speak in Hyde Park. In addition, the Met should make clear to the public, in general terms, how it proposes to carry out its positive duty to protect freedom of speech against intimidatory violence from those seeking to silence others.

Yours sincerely,



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cc: Inspector [REDACTED]