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BLANKET BAN ON PROTEST LIFTED FOLLOWING THREAT OF HIGH COURT ACTION

The Metropolitan Police today applied to the Home Secretary for consent to lift a blanket ban on protest marches in four East London boroughs to allow a march against the world's largest arms fair to go ahead on Wednesday 14 September 2011, following a threat to bring legal proceedings challenging the lawfulness of the ban.

Taherali Gulamhussein, a protestor and volunteer with the Network for Police Monitoring, last week instructed Kat Craig of Christian Khan Solicitors to send a Letter before Action challenging the 30-day blanket ban on protests imposed on all marches in five London boroughs, namely Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Islington, Waltham Forest, and Newham.

The decision to vary the ban, which had been applied for by the Metropolitan Police under Section 13 of the Public Order Act 1986, came one minute before a deadline given by Mr Gulamhussein's lawyers to cancel or vary the ban, or be taken to the High Court tomorrow (Tuesday) morning. The ban has now been lifted in all boroughs except Tower Hamlets.

Mr Gulamhussein challenged the ban when he realised that a march he wished to attend, organised by the University of East London Students' Union to the Excel Centre in East London in protest against the arms trade, would be prohibited. He said:

"There appears to be an increasing and worrying tendency by the state to attempt to silence legitimate opposition in the form of peaceful protest."

The ban, which came into force on 2 September 2011, was originally believed to have been put in place following concerns about a march planned by far-right group the English Defence League (EDL) in Tower Hamlets on 3 September 2011. However, activists and lawyers raised concerns when they noted that it extended far beyond the area where the EDL intended to march, and was due to be in force for a period of 30 days.

Kat Craig, who specialises in bringing challenges against the police for interfering with the right to peaceful protest, said:

"The ban was patently disproportionate and excessive. Leaving to one side its initial purported aim, it would have prevented any march in the five boroughs, regardless of why and by whom it had been organised. It was a clear and flagrant infringement of the right to freedom of expression."

In response to the threatened legal action, the Metropolitan Police disclosed that concerns about further public disorder following the shooting by police of Mark Duggan, whose funeral took place last Friday, were one of the reasons the ban was proposed.

Mr Gulamhussein, continued:

"It is deeply concerning that the police and the Home Secretary attempted to use the funeral of an innocent man, who died at the hands of state agents, to prevent legitimate protests taking place. Further, it makes no sense as the ban covered a completely different geographical area. This is yet another example of the lack of transparency we face when dealing with the police, and shows that we must challenge their decisions to ensure accountability."

Mr Gulamhussein is represented by Kat Craig of Christian Khan Solicitors, and Jamie Burton of Doughty Street Chambers.

For more information contact Kat Craig on katherinec@christiankhan.co.uk or 07876 680 049, or Taherali Gulamhussein on t.gulamhussein@gmail.com