



c/o Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre
5, Upper Bow,
EDINBURGH EH1 2JN

Police Investigations & Review Commissioner

Hamilton House
Hamilton Business Park
Caird Park
HAMILTON
ML3 0QA

25th August 2017

Dear Sir/Madam,

Police enforcing artistic censorship
Incident No.1851, 22nd August 2017

I write to make a formal complaint about 2 Edinburgh police officers who recently enforced the removal of a series of pictures from a Festival Fringe Exhibition which I curated on behalf of the Network of Photographers for Palestine.

The circumstances were as follows:

The exhibition is located on an area of fencing outside St. John's Episcopal Church, Princes St. Edinburgh. A member of the public took exception to some of the pictures, entered the church lobby and proceeded to abuse the church manager and the senior cleric, accusing them of racism and anti-semitism. She then approached two police officers and demanded that the pictures be taken down. The police officers ordered the pictures to be taken down. From what I hear, these instructions were delivered in an unduly forceful manner, and this forms the subject of a separate complaint about police conduct by the church authorities. It is perhaps also relevant that a number of onlookers complained to the police as the pictures were being taken down.

I hope that you will agree with me that Police Scotland should have no role in the censorship of artistic expression in Scotland. Many people may feel offended by a wide range of things in our country, but freedom of expression must be preserved at all cost in any democracy. In this instance, it seems that an emotional and vociferous complainant forced the two officers to attempt to defuse a situation by completely acceding her demands, thereby ignoring the higher principle of freedom of expression.

I would therefore be grateful if you would investigate this incident, and clarify if Police Scotland considers itself to have any role in the censorship of artistic expression in Scotland, and if so, under what circumstances they would find it appropriate to exercise this role. Could you also clarify whether Police Scotland would consider current Hate Crime legislation to cover photographs which have already appeared in the public domain. (Apparently, the complainant regarded one of the pictures as being distressing and/or anti-semitic, or both).

Many thanks for investigating this case.

Yours sincerely,

Phil Chetwynd
(Secretary – Network of Photographers for Palestine)