



Statement regarding the safety of working photographers and the threats posed to them by Police actions to seize journalistic materials. 7th October 2024

One of the key tenets of good journalism is the need to protect and retain the trust of those who we come into contact with. This position has been recognised in court over the years when attempts have been made to seize material. In a famous judgement in Judicial Review Lord Justice Eady emphasised this.

"The [previous] judge should have feared for the loss of trust in those hitherto believed to be neutral observers if such observers maybe too readily compelled to hand over their material. It is the neutrality of the press which affords them protection and augments their ability freely to obtain and disseminate visual recording of events."

Guidelines under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 specifically protect journalists and special procedure material. As news gatherers we must retain the right to refuse all attempts to force us to hand over material and it is a matter of huge concern that officers and their forces might try to use the courts to force us to do so. This is intimidation and bullying and members of the law enforcement community should not stoop to the use of such tactics - especially when there is a very real threat that defending ourselves could cost us a great deal of money in contrast to police forces who have access to far greater resources.

In the performance of our jobs press photographers regularly face difficult and dangerous situations. We cannot be seen to act as an extension of the police or as gatherers of evidence. Should this happen, our safety would be compromised and our ability to act as the eyes and ears of the general public would be damaged. Individual members of the media would become targets during events and at any point in the future when there may be a suspicion that our material is being used as part of an investigation or prosecution.

The Board of The British Press Photographers' Association met this week and considered, with great concern, the actions currently being taken by South Yorkshire Police against freelance photographer Joel Goodman following the recent civil unrest when protestors gathered outside a hotel in Rotherham largely occupied by asylum seekers. We consider the attempts by South Yorkshire Police to acquire his material to be wrong and to go against accepted norms of behaviour. Furthermore, we consider their singling out him as the sole independent freelancer present as harassment.