

PRESS RELEASE

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(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

**EUROPEAN COURT FINDS UK IN VIOLATION OF
JOHN CATT'S PRIVACY RIGHTS**

After an eight year legal battle where he has faced repeated police obfuscation and secrecy John Catt has finally been vindicated in his challenge to the police "domestic extremism" database. In a damning judgment the European Court has unanimously held the UK government to have violated Mr Catt's right to privacy, in breach of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Court found: *"Personal data revealing political opinion falls among the special categories of sensitive data attracting a heightened level of protection"* [112] and criticised the fact that the data retained about John *"could potentially be retained indefinitely"*. [120] It commented on the *"chilling effect"* of retaining such information. [123]

The Court went on to find that: *"at least some of the applicant's personal data concerning his involvement in non-violent protest was collected over six years ago and remains in the domestic extremism database...despite the fact that the police concluded, and the domestic courts affirmed that the applicant was not considered a danger to anyone"*. [122]

The court criticised the *"fluid"* definition of "domestic extremism" which has changed many times over the years. Two judges criticised the police justification for their database as *"extremely vague and obscure"*.

The court rejected the police argument that it would be too burdensome to delete entries relating to John and other peaceful protestors because of the size of their database: *"it would be entirely contrary to the need to protect private life under Article 8 if the Government could create a database in such a manner that the data in it could not be easily reviewed or edited, and then use this development as a justification to refuse to remove information from that database."* [127]

Finally, the Court noted that the police had failed to disclose all the database entries they held about John to him or even to the Supreme Court and this had an impact on the Court's evaluation of available safeguards: *"The Government stated that the police could not provide any explanation of why the reports were not disclosed previously."*

The Applicant **John Catt** said:

"I now expect police forces nationally to respect this ruling, destroy any data they hold on me, on other peaceful protestors and also journalists who are on the database and ensure they focus their resources more wisely in future."

Bhatt Murphy Solicitors

“I also await a full explanation from the police as to why they failed to disclose all the information they held about me to the Supreme Court in the course of my legal challenge in the UK”.

John’s lawyer **Shamik Dutta** at **Bhatt Murphy** said:

“This ruling sets an important precedent that it is unlawful for governments across Europe to label citizens engaged in peaceful protest “domestic extremists” and put them on a searchable database for a potentially indefinite period.

“The judgment offers timely protection given the rise of far-right parties and governments across Europe who would wish to place those who oppose them under surveillance for the purposes of persecution and worse.”

Notes to Editor

- The European Court judgment is [here](#):
- Any request for further comment should be e-mailed to s.dutta@bhattmurphy.co.uk

www.bhattmurphy.co.uk