

Scottish Activist Legal Project

Update on police powers at COP 26, Glasgow

TL;dr - The COP 26 blue zone will not be international territory under international law, it will remain under the jurisdiction of Scots law but it will be controlled by UN security guards and treated as private space by Police Scotland. In case of criminal activity Police Scotland are likely to be invited in by the UN and treat it as they would any other crime in Scotland.

A meeting of the Scottish Government Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, on 12th March 2020 has brought some clarity to the issue of how COP 26 will be policed. Previous reports on the BBC and other outlets had suggested that the space where the conference would take place, known as the 'blue zone', would legally become international territory, subject to international law, rather than Scots Law and the authority of Police Scotland.

During the meeting Assistant Chief Constable Higgins (Police Scotland) stated that contrary to those reports "the [blue] zone will still be sovereign soil and will still be under the jurisdiction of Scots law and the Lord Advocate." However the Blue Zone will be "under United Nations control and will be patrolled by United Nations security guards".

He goes on to explain that "From an operational perspective we are, in effect, treating the [blue] zone as private space. When Police Scotland deals with any matter in private space, we can enter only at the request of the owner of the property, under warrant or, in extremis, when there is a threat to life."

In the case of a crime, Police Scotland "will still be the primary investigating agency under the direction of the Lord Advocate. There will be a protocol by which the United Nations will invite us in, and we would treat the crime as we would any other crime in Scotland." UN security and Police Scotland "have worked very closely" and will liaise during the event through a 'joint operation control centre' where Police Scotland liaison officers will work with the UN to respond to instances. He goes on to say that he is "reasonably comfortable" that "the integrity of any police operation and/or subsequent investigation will in no way be compromised" nor will their "ability to react swiftly to something that might happen in that area."

The full report of the meeting can be read here:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12581>

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