

## In Defence of Francesca Albanese

Francesca Albanese is a wholly admirable person. She is an international lawyer, an expert on Palestinian refugees, and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory— a post she performs pro bono. She is currently under savage attack in the Israeli press and in social media for alleged antisemitism which is said to disqualify her from acting as a UN representative.

In the absence of any evidence of antisemitism, the *Times of Israel* have dredged up a 2014 Facebook post, in which she wrote “America and Europe, one of them subjugated by the Jewish Lobby, and the other by the sense of guilt about the Holocaust, remain on the sidelines.” This was written in a personal capacity, eight years before she assumed her UN position. The context, invariably left out by the critics, was a brutal Israeli assault on Gaza that claimed the lives of more than 2,000 Palestinians, including 550 children.

Ms Albanese had every reason to castigate America and Europe for doing nothing to restrain the aggressor. It would have been better to speak of the Israel lobby rather than the Jewish lobby and Ms Albanese has admitted her mistake. But there is no denying that the Israel lobby wields enormous influence in American politics. It is in fact the most powerful foreign policy lobby in the United States. Nor can there be any doubt that a sense of guilt about the Holocaust continues to inhibit Europe from denouncing Israel for its daily violations of international humanitarian law.

The attacks on Ms Albanese are politically motivated. In September 2022 she submitted to the UN Human Rights Council a 23-page-long report on the “Situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967”. The attacks do not engage with the analysis of this excellent report; they only reference the 2014 Facebook post. They amount to character assassination. Their purpose is to discredit her, to deflect her from fulfilling her UN mandate, and to undermine her efforts to hold Israel accountable to universal standards of human rights.

The attacks on Ms Albanese are just the most recent example of an ongoing global campaign waged by Israel and its supporters with the aim of conflating legitimate criticism of Israeli policies towards the Palestinians with anti-Jewish bigotry.

Israel has already lost the battle in the court of public opinion. In the last two years four major human rights organisations have concluded that Israel is an apartheid state. The position paper issued in January 2021 by B’Tselem, the highly respected Israeli human rights organisation, is tellingly entitled “A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid.”

Israel is also under investigation by the International Criminal Court for war crimes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The more Israel's brutal and criminal actions are exposed, the

more aggressive its spokespersons and supporters become in their efforts to smear and delegitimise its critics.

Today it is Israel that is in the dock, not the UN rapporteur. Ms Albanese deserves nothing but credit for the courage and dedication she has demonstrated in discharging her UN mandate. She can wear the attacks on her as a badge of honour.

The three main pillars of Judaism are truth, justice, and peace. Ms Albanese personifies these values to a remarkably high degree. And there will be many Jews worldwide, disturbed by Israel's departure from these core Jewish values, who may have reason to thank her for upholding them.

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