UN Palestinian rights official’s social media history reveals antisemitic comments

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-palestinian-rights-officials-social-media-history-reveals-antisemitic-comments/>

A lawyer heading the UN Human Rights Council’s open-ended investigation into Israel’s treatment of Palestinians said during a 2014 conflict between Israel and Gaza terror groups that the ‘Jewish lobby’ was in control of the United States.

Francesca Albanese, an Italian lawyer, was appointed earlier this year as the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories. The rapporteur is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council tasked with investigating human rights in Palestinian areas, publishing public reports and working with governments and other groups on the issue.

Albanese, who now says she regrets the ‘Jewish lobby’ remark, has long been a harsh critic of Israel, and the Israeli mission to the UN in Geneva formally objected to her appointment, arguing that she harbors significant bias against the Jewish state.

A review of her past social media posts, media appearances and talks with activist groups found that aside from inveighing against a ‘Jewish lobby,’ she has also sympathized with terror organizations, dismissed Israeli security concerns, compared Israelis to Nazis and accused the Jewish state of potential war crimes.

Then, as now, she refers to Israel as a settler-colonial enterprise and to Jews in Israel and the pre-state British mandate as foreign interlopers subjugating an indigenous Palestinian population. In her first official report to the UN this year, she urged a rejection of the conflict paradigm, describing Israel solely as an oppressor and legitimizing Palestinian ‘resistance.’ She rarely acknowledges Palestinian terrorism.

In 2014, in [an open letter](https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2022/12/Screen-Shot-2022-12-07-at-12.28.55-PM.jpg) posted to her Facebook page, Albanese castigated the US and Europe for their conduct during Operation Protective Edge, a war between Israel and Gaza terror groups that year.

‘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 and continue to condemn the oppressed — the Palestinians — who defend themselves with the only means they have (deranged missiles), instead of making Israel face its international law responsibilities,’ Albanese wrote.

She was not employed by the UN at the time, but had previously worked for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) a UN agency that assists displaced Palestinians and their descendants, according to her LinkedIn profile. The letter she posted was meant to raise funds for UNRWA.

As of publication, the previously unreported [post](https://www.facebook.com/franci.albanese/posts/pfbid02PBSE3hyh56yG9DemZrhbQKkgMRwPo74jkhyjrffxC8NfmyQNfaCKissePYwDabsNl) remained on her personal Facebook page, which is viewable by the public and identifies her as a UN investigator.

In [another post](https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2022/12/Untitled-1-4.jpg) from that year, which was [hidden from view](https://www.facebook.com/franci.albanese/posts/pfbid02PN9PxZpKKjnzM6FShHaWSMiz9UsP6WKSkGNxWrWBC2E5tw4ku86kwMki1rsZE4hul) after her office was contacted by The Times of Israel, Albanese referred to the Israel lobby and Israel’s greed. The comments were directed at the BBC over its coverage of the conflict, even though the British broadcaster is often critical of Israel.

‘The Israeli lobby is clearly inside your veins and system and you will be remembered to have been on the big brother’s side of this orwellian [sic] nightmare caused once again by Israel’s greed. Shame on you BBC,’ she wrote.

And last year, [she referred](https://www.facebook.com/groups/inter.demokrat.socialista.antiraz/posts/4273086952742936/) to Jewish and pro-Israel lobbies influencing Israeli arms sales and quieting criticism of Israel.

Responding to the revelations about Albanese’s statements, the Foreign Ministry claimed that antisemitism is widespread in the UN.

‘Antisemitism is a persistent malice that has infected the United Nations Human Rights Council for far too long,’[read](https://embassies.gov.il/UnGeneva/NewsAndEvents/MediaStatements/Pages/20221412-Statement-Remarks-Made-By-UN-Special-Rapporteur-Francesca-Albanese.aspx) a statement by Israel’s Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva. ‘Comments made by UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese that surfaced today are yet another stain on the credibility of this body and yet another example of the impunity that exists today regarding antisemitism and antisemitic comments made by UN officials.’

The mission argued that the lack of accountability for statements by UN officials ‘only works to legitimize antisemitism and endangers the Jewish people.’

References to Jews and [Jewish lobbies](https://www.ajc.org/translatehate/Jewish-lobby) wielding disproportionate power are viewed as antisemitic because they conjure age-old tropes and [conspiracy theories](https://www.timesofisrael.com/100-year-old-hoax-why-the-protocols-is-still-a-hit-with-anti-semites/) about Jews controlling the world from the shadows. Many of those stereotypes also depict Jews as greedy.

‘Talking about a uniform and ever-powerful Jewish lobby feeds into the stereotype of Jewish power, that there is a nefarious Jewish hand manipulating governments,’ said Susan Heller Pinto, the vice president of international policy at the Anti-Defamation League.

‘When she’s saying America is subjugated by the Jewish lobby it reinforces that image of this Jewish lobby being all-powerful and America and America’s actions and policies being directed by this Jewish lobby, and that’s antisemitic,’ Heller Pinto said. ‘It’s making generalized statements. It’s not a political critique of an Israeli action, it is blanket characterizations that invoke age-old antisemitic tropes.’

Earlier this year, an investigator with the UN Commission of Inquiry into the conflict [apologized](https://www.timesofisrael.com/member-of-un-gaza-probe-apologizes-for-jewish-lobby-remark-slammed-as-antisemitic/) after a similar ‘Jewish lobby’ comment caused an uproar.

Contacted by The Times of Israel via email, Albanese attempted to distance herself from her past remarks.

‘Some of the words I used, during Israel’s offensive on the Gaza Strip in 2014, were infelicitous, analytically inaccurate and unintendedly offensive,’ she said through her office. ‘People make mistakes. I distance myself from these words, which I would not use today, nor have used as a UN Special Rapporteur.’

‘Following this clarification, our attention should not be distracted from the unlawful state practices which cause suffering for millions and denial of human rights on a daily basis in the occupied Palestinian territory,’ she said. ‘This is what I am mandated to report on and which should be our focus.’

**Code of conduct**

In [her application](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/ALBANESE_Francesca_form.pdf) for the special rapporteur position, Albanese stated there was not ‘any reason, currently or in the past, that could call into question’ her moral authority or credibility, and that she did not ‘hold any views or opinions that could prejudice the manner’ in which she investigates.

Special rapporteurs are not paid for their work and are appointed to three-year terms, with the possibility of a three-year extension. The Human Rights Council [code of conduct](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/SP/CodeOfConduct.pdf) for mandate-holders stresses that they should be objective and eliminate ‘double-standards and politicization,’ and act with ‘integrity, meaning, in particular, though not exclusively, probity, impartiality, equity, honesty and good faith.’

[Previous rapporteurs](https://www.timesofisrael.com/uns-falk-accuses-israel-of-ethnic-cleansing/) into the Palestinians have also been staunchly opposed to Israel, which is the only country that is assigned a permanent investigator. A series of mandate-holders have held the rapporteur position on the Palestinian territories [since 1993](https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-palestine).

Albanese has also compared Israel to Nazi Germany, which is viewed as deeply offensive in Israel and an affront to the victims of the Holocaust.

In a 2015 post uncovered by The Times of Israel, she shared a picture of what she said was a Nazi trooper and a Jewish man, and next to it, an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian. And in an [interview](https://twitter.com/UNWatch/status/1510075680037474316) with Italian media, she compared the Nakba, the Palestinian word for the ‘catastrophe’ of Israel’s creation, to the Holocaust, in a comment that was previously reported by the pro-Israel group UN Watch.

Comparing Israel to Nazi Germany is considered antisemitic according to the widely-accepted definition formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Albanese has recently [spoken out](https://twitter.com/FranceskAlbs/status/1600822653593468930) against the IHRA definition.

**Armed resistance**

Albanese has also been heavily critical of Israel in other more recent or previously reported comments, repeatedly brushing aside Israeli security concerns, including since she took up the special rapporteur position, and has justified violence against Israel and Israelis.

[Last month](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rev6hNVcpJU&t=2661s) she told a podcast that Israeli security fears were ‘paranoia thinking.’

‘Israel cannot claim self-defense while illegally occupying and while directing an act of aggression against another country,’ she said. ‘Those who have the right to self-defense are the Palestinians.’

In an interview with [Italian media earlier this year,](https://altreconomia.it/francesca-albanese-il-mio-impegno-per-i-diritti-in-palestina/) she accused Israel of being ‘very effective in passing off the equation ‘resistance equals terrorism.’ But an occupation clearly necessitates and generates violence.’ [She said](https://twitter.com/HillelNeuer/status/1526543254363291649) in another interview that Palestinian violence is ‘inevitable.’

Earlier this year, after a flare-up between Gaza terrorists and Israel, she said, ‘Palestinians’ right to resist is inherent to their right to exist as a people.’ She also [said](https://twitter.com/FranceskAlbs/status/1556534732715876353) the right to Palestinian armed resistance was a ‘necessary conversation’ that had been ‘demoted.’

In a speech delivered to a gathering in Gaza via video earlier this month, [she said](https://www.facebook.com/cir.pal/videos/835323264351402/), ‘There is a right to oppose this occupation.’ The Times of Israel translated her comments from Arabic, although she delivered the speech in English, because the English audio was not available.

‘The occupier cannot say he is defending himself,’ she told the audience in the enclave, which has been ruled by the Hamas terror group since a bloody takeover in 2007.

Seven years earlier, [she expressed joy](https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2022/12/Untitled-2-2.jpg) over the European Union’s General Court taking Hamas off of its terror blacklist: ‘Two good news one after another from the radio while I was taking a nap. Normalization in the relations usa cuba and removal of hamas from the list of terror organizations. Was i dreaming???’

The post was also [recently removed](https://www.facebook.com/franci.albanese/posts/pfbid0UZZqQPRYtuvN1tXGg8BbWN5jWBUjwjpTHQFbXYoF5VdDyYyiVdAKF3NL3PTMoC5Vl). The Times of Israel contacted Albanese’s office for comment on that post and several others but did not receive a response.

On at least one occasion she condemned Palestinian rockets fired at Israel.

‘Indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza is no acceptable response to Israel’s unlawful bombings, because it harms civilians and it is therefore unlawful too,’ [she said](https://twitter.com/FranceskAlbs/status/1556385406358372353) earlier this year.

**Major crime allegations**

She has rejected any Israeli presence in the West Bank as ‘foreign alien domination,’ saying it has ‘no justification,’ ‘no reason,’ and calling it ‘an instrument to colonize the land.’

Israel justifies its presence in the West Bank, which sits on highlands overlooking the country’s central plains, on security grounds. There is also heavily documented evidence of a Jewish presence in the West Bank going back thousands of years which is recognized by [UNESCO](https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1565/), among other bodies.

In 2018 Albanese posted a [screenshot](https://www.facebook.com/franci.albanese/posts/pfbid0nvaMFLSoQQQ9a12EDKK9ie9ae9oxRTmrfDbuaeody5P8GqVrzNhtSu5vbNrdT4Scl) of a quote she attributed to David Ben-Gurion that said, ‘We will abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine.’ The quote appeared to be a translation of a disputed 1937 letter Ben Gurion wrote to his son.

Albanese commented that ‘taking all of Palestine (and much more in fact) has always been the plan of the Zionists.’

She has also said Israel may be guilty of alleged major crimes including [genocide](https://twitter.com/FrancinAlbanese/status/492740681610174464), ethnic cleansing, [war crimes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBX9drO5x2w) and crimes against humanity.

[She said](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OxQi28Sc6U) this year that ‘dozens’ of journalists have been killed in the conflict since the year 2000, all by Israel. According to the UN’s [own statistics](https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/observatory/country/223793), both those claims are false.

‘There is a practice of willful killing that is ongoing and could definitely be a crime against humanity,’ she said.

Even though she declared she was objective when she applied for the rapporteur position, she [acknowledged](https://twitter.com/HillelNeuer/status/1509699722121994246) on a panel last year that she had doubts about taking up the post.

‘Deep down perhaps I feared that embarking on research on a matter in which I had deeply held personal views could compromise my objectivity,’ she said.

Before she took up the position in May, [Israel argued](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-blasts-unfit-lawyer-tapped-to-head-un-probe-into-treatment-of-palestinians/) that her bias should disqualify her from the post.

‘The newly appointed special rapporteur’s opinion expressed in numerous articles, events and media outlets endlessly voicing anti-Israel libel show that she is unfit to take up this role,’ Merav Marks, legal adviser for the Israeli mission to the UN in Geneva, said at the time.

The American Jewish Committee also condemned her appointment at the time.

Israel — backed at times by the United States — has long accused the Human Rights Council of anti-Israel bias and has generally refused to cooperate with its investigators.

**Echoes of Kothari**

Albanese’s ‘Jewish lobby’ comments echoed recent statements by another UN official investigating Israel.

In July, Miloon Kothari, a member of the UN’s commission of inquiry looking into alleged Israeli crimes, said that social media was ‘controlled largely by the Jewish lobby.’ He also questioned why Israel was allowed in the UN.

Kothari’s open-ended commission of inquiry has been described as [harshly critical](https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-commission-says-it-will-investigate-apartheid-charges-against-israel/) of Israel and the country’s backers point out that it almost entirely ignores Palestinian terror and violence.

Last week, 49 US Congress members [wrote a letter](https://phillips.house.gov/uploadedfiles/unhrc_coi_letter_-_final_with_signatures.pdf) to US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield expressing their concern about the commission’s bias, including due to Kothari’s ‘Jewish lobby’ comment.

Among those who have spoken out against the use of the ‘Jewish lobby’ trope is US State Department antisemitism envoy Deborah Lipstadt, who [called](https://twitter.com/StateSEAS/status/1552600882210037763) Kothari’s comments unacceptable.

‘Outrageous that a [Human Rights Council] appointed human rights expert on Israel and the West Bank and Gaza repeated antisemitic tropes [and] questioned Israel’s legitimacy as a UN member,’ Lipstadt said. ‘It is wholly unacceptable that such comments would come from an appointed member of a Commission of Inquiry.’

The Prime Minister’s Office and officials from Canada, Britain and a number of other countries have also condemned Kothari’s remarks.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’s office [said](https://press.un.org/en/2022/db220801.doc.htm) in response to Kothari’s comments, ‘There is no room for antisemitism in the work of the UN.’

‘Israel is unquestionably a member state of the United Nations, with the same rights and responsibilities as the other 192 countries that make up this organization,’ a Guterres spokesperson said. Guterres spoke out against antisemitism [last month](https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/11/1130947) and [met last week](https://twitter.com/Daroff/status/1599827810025017345) with Jewish leaders to discuss bias.

Albanese is also not the first special rapporteur to be accused of trafficking in antisemitic tropes. In 2011, American jurist Richard Falk, who held the post at the time, was condemned for posting [an antisemitic cartoon.](https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-urges-action-after-un-official-posts-anti-semitic-cartoon-on-his-personal)

‘The actions of Richard Falk at the time, statements by UN officials, it just feeds into the lack of confidence that people have in the United Nations to be even-handed and constructive when it comes to anything related to Israel and even related to Jews,’ said the ADL’s Heller Pinto.

**Defending Kothari**

Albanese has defended Kothari, calling criticism of his remarks ‘preposterous allegations of antisemitism’ and a ‘smear campaign.’

She said criticism of the commission of inquiry ‘seemed to be coordinated. I think that this should [prompt scrutiny](https://youtu.be/rev6hNVcpJU?t=2898).’

She has also questioned Israel’s involvement in the UN, calling pro-Israel activities ‘[vile](https://youtu.be/rev6hNVcpJU?t=2785).’

‘This should trigger a proper inquiry inside the UN,’ she said. ‘I’ve personally seen the breach of the code of conduct by Israeli authorities, the Israeli ambassador.’

Albanese said last week that Israel had granted her permission to visit the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but later posts appeared to say Israel had blocked the visit due to statements she has made.

Her [first report](https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/A.77.356_210922.pdf) as a rapporteur, released in October, called Israel an ‘intentionally acquisitive, segregationist and repressive regime.’

Reports by UN investigators are significant outside of the UN because they are cited by media and other organizations, making their way to the public, which is likely unaware of bias allegations.