‘Appalled’: US, Israel, Jewish groups slam UN official for past antisemitic rhetoric

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Officials from Israel and the US on Wednesday decried antisemitic comments by a UN Palestinian rights investigator, with some questioning whether she should remain in her position.

Francesca Albanese, the UN Human Rights Council’s special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, said during a 2014 conflict between Israel and Gaza terror groups that the ‘Jewish lobby’ had taken control of the US, that the ‘Israel lobby’ controlled the BBC and that Israel started the war out of greed.

The Times of Israel uncovered the comments in Albanese’s social media history and revealed them in a Wednesday report.

Albanese is also overwhelmingly critical of Israel and has sympathized with terror groups, dismissed Israeli security concerns, compared Israelis to Nazis and accused the Jewish state of potential war crimes.

Deborah Lipstadt, the Biden administration’s antisemitism envoy, said Albanese’s antisemitism ‘severely undermines the credibility of the UN Human Rights Special Rapporteur to deal with the issue of human rights in the context of Israel and the Palestinian territories.’

‘Such blatant antisemitic rhetoric — particularly when it’s an established pattern — is simply unacceptable,’ Lipstadt said.

The US representative to the UN Human Rights Council, Michèle Taylor, said, ‘We are appalled by recently uncovered antisemitic remarks on social media made by a UN Human Rights Special Rapporteur.’

‘References to the ‘Jewish Lobby’ are an age-old trope; this is outrageous, inappropriate, corrosive, and degrades the value of the UN,’ she said.

Israel’s mission to the UN in Geneva called on the world body to address antisemitism in its ranks.

‘Antisemitism is a persistent malice that has infected the United Nations Human Rights Council for far too long,’ the mission said in a statement. ‘Comments made by UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese that surfaced today are yet another stain on the credibility of this body.’

‘It is about time that the United Nations take concrete action in addressing systemic antisemitism within the United Nations Human Rights Council and its mechanisms,’ the Israeli mission said. ‘The lack of accountability and impunity for comments made by UN officials only works to legitimize antisemitism and endangers the Jewish people.’

Israel’s UN ambassador Gilad Erdan said Albanese’s comments were ‘not a surprise.’

‘You can feel her hate toward the Jewish state in every speech and report she delivers, which we now know is based on her antisemitic ideology,’ Erdan told The Times of Israel. ‘I call upon the secretary-general to show his commitment to fighting antisemitism with deeds and not only with words.’

Albanese has in the past lashed out at Erdan and questioned Israel’s involvement in the UN.

The UN Human Rights Council did not respond to a request for comment.

US House Representative Kathy Manning, a North Carolina Democrat and the co-chair of the House Bipartisan Task Force for Combating Antisemitism, said Albanese’s rhetoric has been ‘completely unacceptable and frankly shocking.’

She highlighted the fact that Albanese had sworn in her application for the rapporteur position that there were no reasons, currently or in the past, that could impinge on her moral authority or credibility.

‘She made statements that were not true in her application which I think calls her fitness for that position into question,’ Manning told The Times of Israel.

‘There’s also a code of conduct for mandate holders and I think she has violated that code of conduct,’ said Manning, who has spoken out against anti-Israel bias at the UN before. ‘I think her ability to perform the job should be called into question because I think she has shown herself to be quite biased.’

Jason Greenblatt, former US president Donald Trump’s Mideast envoy, said Albanese should be removed from her position.

US Jewish organizations including the Anti-Defamation League, B’nai B’rith International and the American Jewish Congress condemned the antisemitic statements. The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on the UN to remove Albanese from her position.

Outside the US, the head of Rome’s Jewish community condemned the antisemitism by Albanese, who is from Italy.

Albanese has not commented since Wednesday’s article was published.

She told The Times of Israel last week, ‘Some of the words I used, during Israel’s offensive on the Gaza Strip in 2014, were infelicitous, analytically inaccurate and unintendedly offensive.’

‘People make mistakes. I distance myself from these words, which I would not use today,’ she said.

UN special rapporteurs are supposed to be unbiased, but Albanese 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. She has repeatedly justified violence against Israelis or dismissed Israel’s right to self-defense.

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.

Albanese has also compared Israel to Nazi Germany, which is viewed as deeply offensive in Israel, an affront to the victims of the Holocaust and is considered antisemitic according to the widely-accepted definition formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

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. He later apologized after coming under heavy pressure.

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

Kothari’s open-ended commission of inquiry has been described as harshly critical of Israel and the country’s backers point out that it almost entirely ignores Palestinian terror and violence.

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.