UN Palestinian rights investigator denies ‘Jewish lobby’ comments are antisemitic

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-palestinian-rights-investigator-denies-jewish-lobby-comments-are-antisemitic/>

A UN official investigating Israeli activities in the Palestinian territories said Thursday that her past statements claiming the “Jewish lobby” controls the US were not antisemitic.

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](https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-palestinian-rights-officials-social-media-history-reveals-antisemitic-comments/).

In her first public statement since the report, Albanese decried “yet another malicious attack” against her office and said the criticism was motivated by politics.

She said her comments were “wrongly mischaracterized as antisemitic,” and the report was “decontextualized and disingenuous extrapolation.”

Taking a shot at the US mission to the UN in Geneva, which said it was “appalled” by her antisemitism, Albanese said, “Should anyone feel the urge to be ‘appalled’ about something, please consider the 215 Palestinians killed this year.”

It wasn’t clear what figure she was referring to. According to [the UN’s own statistics](https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties), 168 Palestinians have been killed this year. Israeli officials have said many of them — but not all — were killed while carrying out attacks or during clashes with security forces.

Albanese also said six Israeli “soldiers and settlers” have been killed in 2022. Palestinian attacks have killed 31 people so far this year.

“This is the oppressive reality that the politically-motivated attacks against my mandate are trying to obscure,” she said. “I will not let anyone define who I am and what I stand for.”

She promised “further clarifications” on her comments, but in a previous statement to The Times of Israel, she acknowledged “mistakes” in her past rhetoric and sought to distance herself from the 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 last week. “People make mistakes. I distance myself from these words, which I would not use today.”

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also defended Albanese on Thursday, calling condemnation of her remarks a “coordinated assault.”

“Such coordinated attacks are old and tried tactics that must not be dignified as credible or factual,” the ministry said.

“Such attempts at character assassination are further proof that the defenders of Israeli occupation and its crimes and those complicit in such crimes have no logical or fact-based response to Ms. Albanese’s sound legal assessment of the situation in Palestine,” it said, calling on all countries and the UN to reject criticism of her antisemitism.

Special rapporteurs are appointed by the Human Rights Council and carry out their mandate independently. The Human Rights Council has not responded to a request for comment.

A UN official, Craig Mokhiber, the director of the New York Office for UN Human Rights, defended Albanese, calling criticism a “ridiculous campaign of slander” and a “tired old trick” and implied that her detractors are “evil.”

References to Jews and Jewish lobbies wielding disproportionate power are viewed as antisemitic because they conjure age-old tropes and conspiracy theories about Jews controlling the world from the shadows. Many of those stereotypes also depict Jews as greedy.

In addition to the comments from 2014, Albanese has more recently compared Israelis to Nazis, which is considered antisemitic under the widely-accepted IHRA definition of antisemitism and has justified violence against Israelis.

Her statements [have been condemned](https://www.timesofisrael.com/appalled-us-israel-jewish-groups-slam-un-official-for-past-antisemitic-rhetoric/) by the Biden administration’s antisemitism envoy Deborah Lipstadt, the US mission to the UN in Geneva, the co-chair of the US House task force on antisemitism, Israeli officials and leading US Jewish groups.

Lipstadt 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.

Israel’s mission to the UN in Geneva called on the world body to address antisemitism in its ranks, calling Jew-hatred “a persistent malice that has infected the United Nations Human Rights Council for far too long.” Albanese’s predecessors have also been harshly critical of Israel and at least one, Richard Falk, also made antisemitic statements.

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.

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

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, sympathized with terror groups and 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’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 but remains in his position.

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.