

# Statement by 65 scholars denouncing the smear campaign against UN human rights rapporteur Francesca Albanese

20 December 2022

We, scholars of antisemitism, Holocaust, Jewish Studies and related fields, denounce the escalating smear campaign against Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Once again, a high-ranking UN official defending the human rights of the Palestinians is being castigated, based on disingenuous allegations of antisemitism. This time, the trigger for such allegations is a statement Ms. Albanese made in 2014, excavated from a personal letter about Israel's attack on Gaza she had shared on Facebook.

Indeed, Ms. Albanese said therein 'America is subjugated by the Jewish lobby'. But first, she has rightly distanced herself from this inappropriate choice of words, and second, it is clear from the context of her statement that she was referring to pressure groups that are commonly referred to as the 'Israel lobby'. Books have been written including by Jewish scholars about such groups. They legitimately exist and their influence, however effective, on American foreign policy towards Israel is real, in particular when it comes to blocking any initiatives aimed at holding Israel accountable for its inhumane treatment of the Palestinians.

When Special Rapporteur Albanese is delegitimized and stigmatized as an antisemite based on isolated and decontextualized statements, this amounts to political abuse of antisemitism, which fundamentally harms the urgent and important fight against antisemitism.

It is no surprise that SR Albanese is being attacked this way. She plays a visible and vocal lead role in efforts to promote accountability for Israel's violations. In addition, she has spoken out against the political instrumentalization of antisemitism aimed at shielding Israel from international scrutiny. As part of that, she has criticized the weaponization of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism (WDA), which the Israeli government wants the United Nations to adopt. On 3 November 2022, 128 scholars, many of whom are Jewish, published a [joint statement](#) warning the UN not to identify itself with that controversial definition. In raising her voice, SR Albanese represents broader concerns.

It is evident that the *campaign* against SR Albanese is not about combating today's antisemitism. It is essentially about efforts to silence her and to undermine her mandate as a senior UN official reporting about Israel's violations of human rights and international law. Against this background, we regret that the US Ambassador to the Human Rights Council and the US Envoy on Antisemitism have issued statements effectively giving a tailwind to the campaign against SR Albanese. We call on other governments to refrain from such statements.

More specifically, we call on the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Member States at large to support and protect Ms. Albanese's mandate as an independent legal expert and human rights rapporteur. Doing so is of particular importance, while Israel is accelerating towards its most radical government ever, with disastrous implications for the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Moreover, dismissing the smear campaign against SR Albanese protects the integrity and serves the effectivity of the fight against antisemitism, including at and by the UN.

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