

115 HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS CONDEMN ISRAEL'S TARGETED SMEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST RESPECTED UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR, FRANCESCA ALBANESE



On 14 December 2022, Israel's mission to the United Nations in Geneva smeared the respected and eminent UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territory Occupied since 1967, Francesca Albanese, in a direct attempt to attack and undermine the mandate she has been entrusted with and thwart her expert human rights work on Palestine. The statement which contains baseless accusations of antisemitism, raises concerns about the "impunity that exists today regarding antisemitism and antisemitic comments made by UN officials". More specifically, it refers to a historic Facebook post made by UNSR Francesca Albanese almost a decade ago, in 2014, which at the time reflected on the reasons for international inaction on the question of Palestine. Therein, UNSR Albanese opines, "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 [...]". Notably, 2014 was the darkest year in the occupation to date, characterised by devastating human loss, as Israel's 50-day military offensive on the Gaza Strip, resulted in the killing of 2,215 Palestinians, including 1,639 civilians. The remarks served to castigate the international inaction.

Our organisations and groups warn, that this smear campaign against UNSR Albanese constitutes the latest manifestation in a pattern of Israeli attacks aimed at silencing any legitimate criticism of the inhuman manner in which it treats Palestinians in the Occupied

Palestinian Territory (OPT). Previously, Israel objected to the appointment of Francesca Albanese as UN Rapporteur, arguing that she “harbors significant bias against the Jewish State”, a reference directed to her widely acclaimed joint academic treatise on “Palestinian Refugees in International Law”, published by the prestigious, Oxford University Press. Such attempts to undermine the expertise of the UN Special Rapporteur to discredit the mandate are of particular concern given the importance of its functions: protecting at-risk communities, promoting transparency and calling for accountability of the perpetrators of rights abuses.

Notably, Israel has a demonstrated record of circumventing UN work in Palestine, including systematic non-cooperation with UN Special Procedures, in violation of its obligations under the UN Charter. Former UN Special Rapporteur, Michael Lynk was continuously denied entry into Palestine, measures which clearly intended to impede his work monitoring the human rights situation on the ground in the OPT. Similarly, former UN Special Rapporteur Richard Falk was denied entry into the OPT by Israel because of his “methodic criticism of Israel”. While UN Special Rapporteur Wibisono even resigned his position as his “efforts to help improve the lives of Palestinian victims of violations under the Israeli occupation have been frustrated every step of the way [by Israel]”.

Israel’s attempts to frustrate the monitoring and documentation of human rights abuses are not limited to this mandate and entry was also denied to UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women its Causes and Consequences, Ms. Rashida Manjoo, to prevent her from witnessing first-hand issues related to violence against women in Palestine. Denials of entry were similarly imposed on UN Fact-Finding Missions established to investigate the human rights situation in the OPT. Meanwhile, in 2020, Israel refused to grant visas to UN staff from the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, expelling 15 international staff from the OPT after 26 years of operating there, a situation which continues to this day. In a statement, then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet warned that, “Israel’s treatment of our staff is part of a wider and worrying trend to block human rights access to the occupied Palestinian territory... This raises the question of what exactly the Israeli authorities are trying to hide”.

There is an obvious link between this pattern of attacks on UN experts and staff and Israel’s intent to maintain its prolonged belligerent occupation, de facto and de jure annexations of Palestinian territory, the unlawful transfer in of settlers and institutionalised discriminatory laws, policies and practices to maintain the regime. This pattern of attacks against UN experts takes place within a shrinking space, which threatens the fundamental right of freedom of expression of those willing to expose Israel’s unacceptable human rights abuses in the OPT. It is time to cease Israel’s onerous and targeted restrictions on this freedom of expression, which in this case stymie reflection on the political enablers of Israel’s continued impunity for severe violations of international law, some of which are peremptory.

We commend UNSR Francesca Albanese’s tireless efforts toward the protection of human rights in the OPT and in raising awareness of the alarming daily violations of Palestinian rights. We call on third States to strongly condemn this politically-motivated attack on the Special Rapporteur’s mandate and to compel Israel to comply with its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations.

*** The list of endorsing organizations included herein is as of 16 January 2023. Please note that this statement is now closed for endorsement.**

List of endorsing organizations, groups and initiatives:

1. Academics for Palestine (Ireland)
2. Academy for Equality
3. Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel
4. Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association
5. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
6. Aldameer Association for Human Rights
7. Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man
8. Al-Quds Human Rights Clinic- Al-Quds University
9. American Muslims for Palestine (AMP)
10. Arab Agronomists Association
11. Arab Canadian Lawyers Association
12. Arab cause Solidarity Committee (CSCA)
13. Arab Lawyers Association (UK)
14. Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR)
15. Asociación Americana de Juristas
16. Association Belgo-Palestinienne WB
17. Association France Palestine Solidarité (AFPS)
18. Association Switzerland Palestine
19. AssoPacePalestina
20. Australia Palestine Advocacy Network
21. Australian Centre for International Justice
22. BA4P/BACBI
23. BACBI Belgian Committee for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel
24. BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights
25. BDS Tokyo
26. BDS Vancouver/Coast Salish Territories
27. Bisan Center for Research and Development
28. British Committee for the Universities of Palestine
29. Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)
30. Center for Defense of Liberties & Civil Rights "HURRYAT"
31. Centre for Global Education

32. CJPME Saskatoon
33. Comhlamh Justice for Palestine
34. Cork Palestine Solidarity Campaign
35. Cultura è Libertà. Una campagna per la Palestina
36. Dalhousie University
37. Defense for Children International - Palestine (DCIP)
38. Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
39. Dibeem For Environmental Development
40. Dutch Scholars for Palestine
41. Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor
42. EuroMed Rights
43. European Legal Support Center (ELSC)
44. Finnish-Arab Friendship Society
45. Freedom Archives
46. Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA)
47. Front Line Defenders
48. Gaza Action Ireland
49. Gesellschaft Schweiz-Palästina
50. Gibanje za pravice Palestincev Slovenija
51. Global Legal Action Network
52. Greater Toronto for BDS
53. Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers
54. HK Norway - The Norwegian Union of Commerce and office employees
55. Housing and Land Rights Network - Habitat International Coalition
56. HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht
57. Human Rights & Democracy Media Center "SHAMS"
58. Human Rights for All (HR4A) Saskatchewan
59. Human Rights Institutions Association (HRIA)
60. ICAHD-USA
61. Independent Commission for Human Rights
62. International Association of Democratic Lawyers
63. International Commission of Jurists Norway (ICJ Norway)
64. International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD)

65. Ireland Against Fascism
66. Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign
67. Jews for Palestine-Ireland
68. Jews for Palestinian Right of Return
69. Just Peace Advocates/Mouvement Pour Une Paix Juste
70. Justice Call
71. Justice for Palestinians
72. Kairos foundation of Nigeria
73. Labor for Palestine
74. Law for Palestine
75. Leiden University
76. Letters for Palestine
77. Medico International
78. National Lawyers Guild International Committee
79. NorCal Sabeel
80. NOVACT
81. Oakville Palestinian Rights Association
82. ODV Salaam Ragazzi dell'Olivo Comitato di Trieste
83. Palestina Solidariteit vzw
84. Palestina Toma la Calle
85. Palestine Legal
86. Palestine Solidarity Alliance South Africa
87. Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Cape Town (PSC-CT)
88. Palestine Solidarity Network Aotearoa
89. Palestinian and Jewish Unity
90. Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace
91. Pax Christi Vlaanderen
92. Physicians for Human Rights Israel
93. Potchefstroom For Palestine
94. Regina Peace Council
95. Sadaka-the Ireland Palestine Alliance
96. Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network
97. South African BDS Coalition

98. South African Jews for a Free Palestine
99. Stellenbosch University Palestinian Solidarity Forum
100. Students4Change
101. The Canadian BDS Coalition
102. The Community Action Center/ Al-Quds University
103. The European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine (ECCP)
104. The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO-Norway)
105. The Norwegian Initiative Defend International Law
106. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
107. The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy-MIFTAH
108. The Palestinian NGOs Network (PNGO)
109. The Rights Forum
110. U.S. Palestinian Community Network (USPCN)
111. Union of Palestinian Women Committees (UPWC)
112. United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR)
113. United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel (UNJPPI)
114. University of Groningen
115. Vrede vzw – Belgium