Congress members urge removal of UN official for antisemitism exposed by ToI

January 24, 2023

By Luke Tress

The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/congress-members-urge-removal-of-un-official-for-antisemitism-exposed-by-toi/>

US Congress members on Monday called for the removal of a UN Palestinian rights official over antisemitic comments exposed by The Times of Israel.

UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese, who is tasked with investigating Israeli activities in the Palestinian territories, has a history of antisemitism but has not faced any repercussions from the UN or issued a clear apology.

Albanese [said during a 2014 conflict](https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-palestinian-rights-officials-social-media-history-reveals-antisemitic-comments/) between Israel and Gaza terror groups that the ‘Jewish lobby’ was in control of the United States.

She has also sympathized with terror organizations, dismissed Israeli security concerns, compared Israelis to Nazis, accused the Jewish state of potential war crimes, said Israel controlled the BBC, and claimed that the Jewish state started wars out of greed.

Albanese attempted to distance herself from the comments in a statement to The Times of Israel, but since the report exposing the comments last month, has [denied that the comments are antisemitic](https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-palestinian-rights-investigator-denies-jewish-lobby-comments-are-antisemitic/) and [brushed off criticism](https://twitter.com/FranceskAlbs/status/1603394239236378630) as ‘yet another politically motivated attack.’

A member of a UN Commission of Inquiry into Israel, Miloon Kothari, has also made antisemitic statements and remains in his position.

In a letter addressed to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and High Commissioner Volker Turk, 11 Congress members said, ‘Enough is enough.’

‘It’s clear from Ms. Albanese’s statements that these comments were not simply a mistake, but rather a fundamental part of her worldview,’ they said. ‘Instead of taking responsibility for repeating age-old antisemitic tropes and her incitement to violence, Ms. Albanese attacks those who notice her public comments.’

‘You have stated that ‘there is no room for antisemitism in the UN,’ but it seems you have room for Special Rapporteur Albanese and others who have repeatedly made statements that are antisemitic,’ the letter said.

The Congress members said Albanese’s rhetoric is part of an anti-Israel pattern at the UN, noting that the General Assembly [passed more resolutions criticizing Israel](https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-condemned-israel-more-than-all-other-countries-combined-in-2022-monitor/) than against all other countries combined last year. The letter also noted Kothari’s statements and antisemitism by the employees of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.

‘This pattern seriously undermines not only the UN’s credibility on issues in Israel and the Palestinian territories, but also the UN’s commitments to its own chartered principles of tolerance, equal treatment, and impartiality,’ the letter said. ‘We urge you to demonstrate that the UN is capable of genuinely addressing antisemitism by removing Ms. Albanese from her post.’

The letter was led by US House Representative Brad Sherman, a California Democrat, and Representative Dina Titus, a Democrat from Nevada.

‘No one should get a free pass for engaging in antisemitism — including at the UN,’ Sherman said.

Albanese, an Italian lawyer, was appointed last 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.

‘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.

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 response, Israel’s Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva called the comments ‘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.’

‘Antisemitism is a persistent malice that has infected the United Nations Human Rights Council for far too long,’ the mission said.

Albanese’s statements [have also 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.

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs defended Albanese, attacking condemnation of her remarks as a ‘coordinated assault’ and ‘character assassination.’

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 last year, 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.