By maintaining Palestinians' permanent refugee status, the UN has perpetuated violence

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The United Nations ‘special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories,’ Francesca Albanese, told an English-language Middle East news site that the European Union erred by adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

Apparently, she wants UN leaders to be able to scrutinize Israel without any guidance about when such criticism veers into hate. ‘No one should be above scrutiny,’ she said. Good, because on the heels of my expose last week on how the West is aiding and abetting Palestinian terrorism, the UN should not be above scrutiny, either.

Despite the work being done to promote peaceful solutions in the Middle East through the Abraham Accords, the UN appears to insist on keeping Israel’s very existence in question and disrupting peace-building efforts by ensuring Palestinians remain as permanent refugees.

The UN’s planners must have been absent from school the day the teacher repeated the old adage that if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; but if you teach him to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. Instead, the UN established the only permanent refugee organization in the world, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Millions of refugees poured out of Syria following President Bashar Assad’s gassing and murder of nearly 500,000 civilians, but no dedicated UN agency was founded for them. Instead, they were quickly assimilated into countries like Germany and Canada. There are no international campaigns or significant Syrian refugee movements on university campuses calling for their return, because most have acclimatized to their new homes — as refugees generally do.

A number of permanent exhibits line the wall near the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York. Of all the refugees past and present, the Palestinians are the only ones who have their own permanent exhibit, under the heading, ‘The Question of Palestine and the United Nations.’

The exhibit states, ‘The question of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda since the organization’s earliest days.’ The Arabs rejected the establishment of the Jewish state following the UN’s positive vote on the ‘partition plan,’ which called for two states living side-by-side in peace.

In 1948, the Arab world went to war against the newly founded State of Israel. Many Arab-Palestinians either fought Israel or fled to neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Syria), hoping to return when the Jews were pushed into the sea. That did not happen.

Instead of absorbing the refugees into their host countries, UNRWA deliberately kept them in so-called refugee camps. They were (and still are) used as pawns by both their host countries and the UN itself to leverage a ‘final status agreement’ with Israel.

From a human rights point of view, that is completely unfair to the millions of children who have had their futures stolen from them by the UN. Their host countries continue to refuse to allow them citizenship or to integrate them into civil society.

For its part, instead of down-scaling operations, UNRWA has grown into a bureaucratic behemoth that employs 30,000 people and has an annual budget of around US$1.5 billion (C$2 billion). By keeping Palestinians trapped and needy as refugees, the agency reinforces their false hope that they may one day return to a country that never existed in the first place.

Everyone deserves to be free in their own land. But the truth should always be the truth. Before 1948, the area was ruled by the British for a short time and by the Ottomans for 400 years before that. There was never a state of Palestine. This generation of Palestinians wants to lay claim to Jerusalem, but the holy city was never Palestinian. Still, Israel has recognized the right to Palestinian self-determination since its inception — but despite the fact that Jews are indigenous to the land, Palestinians refuse to share, even at their own peril.

Since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, countless peace overtures have been made. The Palestinian leadership rejected them all — carrying forward the false narrative that one day, ‘from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.’

Now, it appears as though peace and a two-state solution are more elusive than ever. Both sides have entrenched their positions. More violence is inevitable. The way back to peace is for the UN and its agencies like UNRWA to stop deceiving the Palestinian people by suggesting that Israel is a temporary political entity. It’s not going anywhere.