UN hid details of official’s travel funding amid alleged pro-Hamas financing

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The United Nations Human Rights Office appears to have disseminated intentionally deceptive information in an attempt to cover up travel funding that pro-Hamas organizations provided to a UN official.

UN special rapporteur for Palestinian rights Francesca Albanese took a politically-charged trip to Australia and New Zealand in November 2023. The trip included a fundraiser for a Palestinian lobby group, participation in media events, as well as meetings with pro-Palestinian politicians and civil society members, and pushing New Zealand’s sovereign wealth fund to divest from Israel.

Albanese has been accused of antisemitism by the American, French and German governments, among other entities.

Now, the Australian Friends of Palestine Association, which praised Hamas terror mastermind Yahya Sinwar as ‘incredibly moving,’ claimed publicly that it had ‘sponsored’ Albanese’s visit, and Free Palestine Melbourne, the Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network, and Palestinian Christians in Australia stated that they ‘supported’ the trip. All four are lobbying groups.

*i24NEWS*asked various UN officials and entities for months whether pro-Hamas groups actually did fund the trip. Albanese repeatedly insisted the trip, estimated by the UN Watch NGO to cost around $22,000, was paid for by the UN, calling claims to the contrary ‘egregiously false.’

Finally, in July of last year, the UN Human Rights Office, acknowledging it was fully aware of documentation that pro-Hamas groups had said they sponsored or organized the trip, told *i24NEWS*that, ‘With respect to the Australia trip by the Special Rapporteur, her travel was funded by the UN.’

They ignored requests to provide any documentation showing that to be the case.

Since then, a six-person panel of Albanese’s peers, who have long attacked her accusers, was assigned the task of investigating a host of accusations against Albanese. In a letter written last month to UN Human Rights Council President Jurg Lauber by that panel, known as the UN Coordination Committee of Special Procedures, they finally acknowledged Albanese had taken ‘partial external funding for internal trips within Australia and New Zealand.’

*i24NEWS*asked the media offices for UN Human Rights and Special Procedures for clarity on what seemed to be contrary claims.

Like former US president Bill Clinton’s cagey testimony in the Lewinsky affair, when he famously remarked, ‘It depends upon what the meaning of the word 'is' is,’ for the UN Human Rights Office and Albanese, it apparently depends upon what the meaning of the word ‘to’ is.

The Special Procedures office told *i24NEWS*: ‘With regard to the Special Rapporteur’s visit to Australia, her travel was funded by the United Nations regular budget. The Coordination Committee of Special Procedures assessed the allegations concerning partial external funding for internal travel (the bolding of the words is theirs) within Australia and New Zealand and concluded that there was no breach of the Code of Conduct. The Committee noted that it is common practice for conference organizers to cover the participation costs of mandate holders, and such arrangements do not constitute a violation of the established standards.’

With that, the UN finally conceded Albanese had in fact received external funding after all.

In follow-up conversations, it became clear: the UN was drawing a distinction between funding for travel TO a country, and funding for travel WITHIN a country – a bizarre distinction they failed to make for a year and a half, almost certainly to avoid discussing the topic of Hamas-supporting groups paying for a UN official’s anti-Israel business travel.

Even with all this, the UN Human Rights Office continues to ignore requests to clarify which group or groups funded this trip, and how much they contributed. Accused by *i24NEWS*of lying, the Special Procedures Media Office said it was a ‘regrettable and unfair mischaracterization,’ though it still made no attempt to reconcile why the UN made no previous mention of external funding, or why the funding for Albanese’s trip ‘to’ Australia should be counted differently from ‘external funding for internal travel.’

Asked during a press briefing whether UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres would condemn UN spokespeople for intentionally misinforming the media and whether Guterres would support finally releasing the funding information surrounding the trip, Stephane Dujarric, Guterres’ spokesperson, said, ‘We support transparency in the activities of any official affiliated with United Nations.’