

UN expert exposes Australian government, media complicity in Gaza genocide

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A recently-concluded visit to Australia by Francesca Albanese, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, was highly revealing. By stating basic and irrefutable truths about Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, Albanese came into conflict with virtually the entire political and media establishment.

The hostile response to Albanese demonstrated the extent to which the ruling elite and its mouthpieces are dispensing with fundamental conceptions of international law. As they are backing the unfolding genocide in Gaza, the official politicians and most journalists cannot tolerate a legal expert pointing out that the state mass murder of civilians, 40 percent of them children, is a war crime.

Most notably, the Labor government's Foreign Minister Penny Wong refused to meet with Albanese. She was "too busy" to speak with a UN official, as the Labor government continues to insist on Israel's "right to defend itself" and oppose all calls for a ceasefire. A meeting was eventually delegated to one of Wong's juniors after her snub of Albanese was publicly reported.

The Labor government's implicit hostility has been made explicit by its allies in various pro-Israeli Zionist organisations, who have campaigned against Albanese. Together with right-wing figures such as former Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, they have denied the importance of her UN mandate and angrily denounced her interventions.

The capstone of Albanese's visit was an address to the National Press Club (NPC) in Canberra last Tuesday, televised live by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Weeks earlier, on October 25, the assembled reporters had listened politely to an NPC address by Israeli ambassador Amir Maimon, as he defended Israel's bombardment and spouted war propaganda. By contrast, Albanese's remarks provoked consternation, concern and discomfort, reflected in a barrage of sceptical and hostile questions.

Albanese began by acknowledging the Australian indigenous people. The record of colonialism, with its

"method of control, resource exploitation and subjugation of the natives," was particularly relevant to her mandate on Palestine, she said.

"My heart goes out to Palestine," Albanese said. She referenced "the indigenous Palestinians," there "or what remains of them," noting that "the majority were ethnically cleansed in 1947-49 from what is modern-day Israel, and in 1967 from the territory that for 56 years Israel has militarily occupied," including East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Albanese stated: "The Palestinians under occupation today are fighting an existential struggle not to be forcibly displaced from, or fatally subjugated in, the little that remains of their historical homeland. In fact, it is correct to say that the indigenous Palestinians have been progressively ethnically-cleansed as of 1947."

These opening comments can only be described as a breath of fresh air. Albanese was one of the first and only prominent figures to explain clearly on national television that the conflict did not begin on October 7, and to instead frame developments from the standpoint of the historical oppression of the Palestinians.

The hardest part of her UN mandate was to be exposed to a situation of "endless suffering" where "people are too easily killed, blamed and smeared." Albanese could only examine facts reported to her, because Israel had banned the UN official from entering the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

In the 16 months of her mandate, prior to the latest developments, Albanese had documented the killings of 460 Palestinians. That reality, of continuous Israeli state killings, was the status quo.

Albanese expressed hostility to the Hamas military action of October 7 and her sympathy for all who were impacted by it and the bombing of Gaza.

Turning to the "carpet bombing" of Gaza, she reviewed the figures of more than 11,000 civilians killed, 40 percent of them children, and one and a half million displaced. Countless others were dead or dying beneath the rubble. Albanese and other UN officials had warned, three weeks

earlier, that Israel may commit “the crime of genocide.” Israeli politicians had made genocidal statements.

Since October 7, Israeli forces had also gone on a rampage against Palestinians in the other occupied territories, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where Hamas had no presence. Entire villages were being cleared in the West Bank, and its residents given flyers instructing them to leave for Jordan.

Albanese declared: “In the face of all this, the international community is almost completely paralysed ... with the UN experiencing its most epic political and humanitarian failure since its creation.” She added that “individual member states, especially in the West, and Australia is no exception,” were “on the margins,” many staying silent while backing Israel’s “right to self-defence.”

The world, Albanese said, was “staring into the abyss.” If “in 75 years the international community” had not realised what the Nakba was—the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948—“here is what it is, televised.” Masses of people were, and would be, forced out of Gaza through the continuous bombardment, as well as from the West Bank, as a result of “unrestrained” terror from Zionist settlers.

The struggle of the Palestinians for “basic rights,” was being presented as an “existential threat” to Israel, Albanese stated. This was a fraud, and a line that was also placing ordinary Jews around the world in danger, through the relentless and false identification of Israel with the Jewish people. She called for a “rehumanisation of the discourse,” a subject on which journalists “had a lot of homework to do.”

The reporters in attendance proved her point. They responded with a series of vile questions, some legitimising the mass murder, others maliciously misinterpreting Albanese’s remarks and seeking to cast aspersions on her.

The moderator, Tom Connell of Sky News, said Israel had instructed civilians to leave northern Gaza, so the subsequent bombing “was not them actually targeting civilians at that point.”

Albanese asked how he could keep a straight face when presenting such a question. There was “nowhere” for the civilians to go in Gaza, one of the most densely-populated places on earth. The consequences were known because Israel was waging its sixth war against the people of Gaza of this century, all the others having resulted in massive civilian deaths.

Another journalist incredulously asked Albanese about a comment she made in her prepared remarks, denying that Israel has a right to self-defence against Gaza. Albanese explained that under international law, confirmed by the top judicial bodies of the UN, “the right of self-defence can be invoked when a state is threatened by another state.”

That was not the case in Palestine, and even the

descriptions of an Israel-Gaza war were false. Gaza was not a “stand-alone entity” but part of the occupied territories. “Israel cannot claim the right of self-defence against a threat that emanates from the territory that it occupies, that is kept under belligerent occupation.”

The *Guardian*’s foreign editor, Daniel Hurst, was a strong contender for the most obnoxious question. In her remarks, Albanese stated that ending “Israeli-Jewish domination” would be a “rehumanising” development, not only for the Palestinians but for the Jewish people.

Hurst said he had been “tripped up” by that remark. He wondered whether it was “helpful in the current climate” and the “word domination has a wider connotation.” It was a “trope.” The clear connotation was that Albanese’s remarks somehow bolstered antisemitic claims of global Jewish domination.

Albanese angrily responded: “You seem not to understand what I am saying. There is an apartheid regime. Domination is not a trope, this is international law. I invite you to read the Apartheid Convention, because it talks about racial domination and this is what I’m talking about... I’m using domination in a strictly legal sense.”

The exchanges were not an exception, but the norm throughout Albanese’s visit. In other media appearances, journalists hotly contested her warnings that a genocide was unfolding, without providing any substantive refutation. Others were shocked when she raised the idea that Israel’s onslaught was not really aimed at the defeat of Hamas, but formed part of a decades-long project of ethnic cleansing.

All in all, the Australian press corps have shown themselves to be mostly a pack of scoundrels, who will legitimise any imperialist crime. If they were transported back to 1930s-40s Germany, it is not hard to imagine what role they would have played, nor, in the more recent period, if they worked under apartheid South Africa.

They were, however, echoing and justifying the position of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s Labor government, which has vociferously defended Israel’s slaughter in Gaza and libelled the hundreds of thousands protesting these actions by accusing them of being antisemitic.



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