

“I have never felt this sense of lacking oxygen that I feel here.”

Massive police intimidation of UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese in Berlin

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Following the cancellation at short notice of her planned lecture on “Colonialism, Human Rights and International Law” by the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, and then by the Free University of Berlin, the UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Francesca Albanese, finally spoke in Berlin in a room organised at very short notice and under police surveillance.

Photos of the meeting in the central Berlin editorial rooms of the daily newspaper *Junge Welt* show riot police inside the meeting as Albanese spoke. Objections to the police presence in a public lecture by the JW management were swept aside by police officers who remained inside the meeting for its duration. According to some reports members of the German security forces also attended the meeting. Outside police vans were parked with dozens of police on hand to intimidate all those attempting to enter the meeting.

The meeting was organized by DiEM25, Jüdische Stimme (Jewish Voice), Eye4Palestine and the Gaza Committee Berlin, all of which have been attacked by the police several times before under the false accusation of being “anti-Semitic” because they oppose the Gaza genocide. The event also included a report by filmmaker Pary el Qalqili, who described cases of police violence against pro-Palestinian protesters, and a string concert by renowned violinist and Professor of Ensemble Playing and Violin at the Said-Barenboim Academy Michael Barenboim.

At the start of her speech, now with the title “Reclaiming the Discourse: Palestine, Justice and the Power of Truth,” Albanese declared, “I have to admit that about 75 hours in this country have made me pretty nervous and I cannot wait to get back to “peaceful”

Tunisia (where she is resident). I have never felt this sense of lacking oxygen that I feel here.”

In her speech, Albanese recounted the “suppression of Palestinians” by “Israeli settler colonialism”, describing the “genocide in Gaza” as “one of the most pressing problems of our time.” Addressing the role of Germany in a number of genocides, including the Nazi Holocaust of six million Jews, she criticised the repressive climate in Germany and why it was assumed that only politicians and journalists should decide what constitutes genocide.

Albanese, an Italian citizen, is a widely respected expert on international law who, in her official function for the UN, declared back in March 2024 that she saw “reasonable grounds” for assuming genocide in Israel’s military action in Gaza.” Albanese expanded and concretised this claim with her report for the UN last October, which stated that the actions of the Israeli government following its invasion of Gaza fulfilled all the criteria according to international law for the crime of genocide.

This is the message that the German political establishment and media is desperate to suppress.

Since stepping foot on German soil three days ago, Albanese has been subjected to a massive campaign of intimidation by the German political elite, Zionist organisations and the police aimed at preventing her from speaking.

Following the cancellation of her lecture in Munich, Albanese has faced a torrent of abuse and slander with leading pro-Israeli German newspapers running provocative headlines such as, “Terrorist propaganda in lecture halls?” The right wing mayor of Berlin, Kai Wegner, joined forces with the Israeli ambassador Ron

Prosor and the Zionist Werteinitiative (Values Initiative), claiming that Albanese's exposure of the genocidal policy of the Israeli government reflected "anti-Semitic world views," and she demanded that the president of the Free University in Berlin cancel Albanese's lecture.

This chorus of denunciation was joined by Berlin's senator for higher education, Ina Czyborra (Social Democratic Party), who declared: "In my view, Ms Albanese's statements meet all the criteria of anti-Semitism and I question whether the safety of Jewish students is guaranteed at a meeting planned in this way."

Parts of the press close to the Left Party also took part in the smear campaign against Albanese. While *Junge Welt* made its premises available, *Neues Deutschland* wrote in a commentary:

In fact, Albanese is by no means a neutral rapporteur. Instead, since her appointment in 2022, the Italian has been constantly working to further tarnish the image of the once respected United Nations. She legitimized the Hamas massacre in southern Israel on 7 October 2023 as a 'reaction to oppression by Israel'... Whether Albanese can make a meaningful contribution to scientific discussions can therefore rightly be doubted.

In a protest against the cancellation of Albanese's lecture at the FU, around 40 people occupied a large lecture hall at the FU campus Berlin on Wednesday morning. Blogs on social media show police intervening on the FU campus, evidently intent on forcibly expelling the occupiers.

Unable to speak at the FU, supporters of Albanese then organised an alternative venue, the Kühlhaus in Berlin. Overnight Zionist provocateurs sprayed the walls of the Kühlhaus building with the slogans 'Albanese, you are an anti-Semite' and 'UNRWA supports terror' (UN Palestine Relief and Works Agency). By Tuesday morning this venue was also cancelled by the building's landlord, following pressure from the authorities. On the same day a new venue was found for Albanese to speak that evening.

The police invasion of Albanese's talk in Berlin ominously recalled the Palestine Congress organised in Berlin in April 2024. After just two hours the planned four-day conference was stormed by riot police and subsequently closed down.

At the time the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) condemned the German state's crackdown—as we do now—and warned:

"It is not only directed against the congress and its supporters, but aims to suppress all social and political opposition. Under conditions in which the ruling class is again relying on militarism and war and is planning massive attacks on the working class, protests are not allowed."

Since then, in a wave of repression, artists, students and others opponents of the genocide, including Jewish activists, have repeatedly been criminalized, censored or repressed with police violence for their opposition. Even though Albanese did eventually speak in Berlin, the political authorities, in the lead-up of the German federal election, are intensifying their efforts at creating the atmosphere of a police state in order to intimidate and suppress the growing social and political opposition to militarism, war and the genocide in Gaza.



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