Costa Rica detains UN rapporteur and critic of Gaza genocide, Francesca Albanese, as a “terrorist”

Andrea Lobo
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Costa Rican immigration police detained Francesca Albanese, the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, at Juan Santamaría International Airport on Thursday night, November 26, and denied her entry to the country. The Italian jurist had flown in from Tunisia, via Paris, to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Costa Rica (UCR) the following day.

The director general of Migration, Omer Badilla, justified the measure in a video message: “This woman has an international alert for links to terrorist acts.” He did not say who issued the alert or what acts it referred to. In the habeas corpus proceedings, the only basis the authorities gave was that the Trump administration placed Albanese on the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctions list in July 2025, according to the Defensoría de los Habitantes, the country’s human rights ombudsman.

This “terrorist” is a UN-appointed jurist whose crime has been to document Israel’s genocide in Gaza, where more than 73,000 Palestinians have been killed according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

The Constitutional Chamber (Sala IV) granted a habeas corpus filed by Frente Amplio (Broad Front, FA) deputies and ordered that Albanese not be expelled while it rules. On Friday, she accepted the doctorate by videoconference from an airport waiting room. “Defending human rights is not terrorism,” she said, “and the government will answer for these insinuations, as it should in a state governed by law.”

To *Semanario Universidad*, she noted that her being placed on a US list does not explain her detention: “We are not in the United States. We are in Costa Rica.” UN human rights chief Volker Türk urged the government to reverse the decision “urgently.” The only government to applaud was Israel’s: its UN ambassador, Danny Danon, praised Costa Rica on social media.

The detention is no bureaucratic blunder. The Chaves-Fernández regime has adopted Washington’s blacklist as Costa Rican law and branded opposition to genocide as “terrorism,” a category it is preparing to use against workers and youth at home. In doing so, it has followed Argentina’s President Javier Milei and the far-right governments of Trump’s “Shield of the Americas,” who wear unconditional support for Israel as a badge of loyalty to US imperialism.

Costa Rica’s official opposition, the same parties that prepared the ground for this far-right government, has responded by pleading for the country’s “international prestige.”

Rodrigo Chaves, the former president who now serves as Fernández’s minister of the presidency and finance, answered the court on Facebook on Thursday night. He called the injunction “a new usurpation by an increasingly arbitrary judiciary” and repeated, without evidence, that Albanese has links to “TERRORIST ACTS!”

He then concluded, “Do you see why 38 patriotic deputies were needed?” Thirty-eight votes is the two-thirds majority the ruling Pueblo Soberano (PPSO) party needs to rewrite the Constitution and bring the judiciary to heel.

The UCR warned that immigration powers cannot become “an indirect mechanism of censorship” over the universities. The Defensoría recalled that UN rapporteurs are immune from detention for acts carried out in their mission.

The detention caps a long record. On December 8, 2025, the Chaves government signed a free trade agreement with Israel in Jerusalem, two years into the slaughter in Gaza. When Albanese urged Costa Rica to pause

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ratification, Foreign Trade Minister Manuel Tovar replied that what she said "is irrelevant" to the government. Chaves then opened a trade office with diplomatic rank in Jerusalem, and in March, the Zionist Israelite Center of Costa Rica gave him an award. Costa Rica has abstained on UN resolutions condemning the occupation.

Fernández went further. Her first official meeting after her May 8 inauguration was with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, to whom she said she wants Costa Rica's embassy in Jerusalem: "I want the same." Costa Rica was one of the first three countries targeted by Milei's "Isaac Accords," launched in 2025 with Netanyahu to bring Latin American governments into Israel's orbit.

The "terrorism" smear against Albanese belongs to a wider campaign against anyone who opposes the government. On the very day Fernández took office, police seized two UCR students, Aren Vindas and Yoilyn Bermúdez, for carrying Palestinian flags at the National Stadium, where Israeli and PPSO flags were allowed. They face charges of "aggravated resistance" carrying one to five years in prison, even though the Sala IV unanimously ruled their detention illegitimate and discriminatory.

Since then, the government has declared the November 11 national teachers' strike illegal and called strikers "vagrants." On November 3, Security Minister Gerald Campos warned students protesting an ?8 billion (US$18 million) cut to university funding: "Unfortunately, they will be people we detain." On Wednesday, police broke up the march against violence against women in San José and arrested at least two women, now referred to prosecutors for "aggravated resistance."

This turn to repression answers a growing movement of the working class against being forced to pay for an emerging economic downturn. *CR Hoy* counted 17 protests against the government by mid-November, as unemployment rises, with a slowing economy and the 2027 budget cuts to education at its lowest share of output since 2007.

It takes place as Washington's far-right bloc in the region enters crisis, with Paraguay's Santiago Peña forced out, Trump's candidate defeated in Brazil and US workers repudiating Trump in the midterms. The ruling class answers growing opposition from below with the police and criminalization.

FA deputy Joselyn Sáenz denounced "authoritarianism on the rise in Costa Rica," while Vianey Mora appealed to the country's "democratic tradition." Their chief concern, like that of the UCR, was that the detention damages "the international prestige" of the state and puts "diplomatic relations" at risk.

Social Christian (PUSC) deputy Abril Gordienko called it an "international embarrassment." Claudia Dobles of the Coalición Agenda Ciudadana (CAC), heir of the former Citizens' Action Party (PAC) and wife of former PAC president Carlos Alvarado, spoke of an "affront to institutions." The press reports quote not a single deputy of National Liberation (Partido Liberación Nacional, PLN), the largest opposition caucus. Even PPSO deputy José Miguel Villalobos said Albanese should be let in, while calling her views "pro-Hamas."

On May 1, the FA joined the PLN, PUSC and CAC in a "Democratic Bloc." FA leader José María Villalta explained that when democracy is threatened, "democratic forces must unite." Weeks later, on May 19, the PLN caucus agreed with Fernández on "permanent dialogue" and found broad agreement on her "security" priorities.

The PAC, which the FA backed in the runoffs of 2014 and 2018, imposed the 2018 fiscal reform and the 2020 law restricting public sector strikes, the instruments Fernández now wields against teachers. The rise of Chaves and Fernández was prepared by these parties, whose austerity and pro-imperialist policies drove masses of workers to despair.

The defense of democratic rights and the struggle against the Gaza genocide cannot be entrusted to these parties. Teachers, students, healthcare and free trade zone workers need rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions and all the establishment parties, linked through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees with workers across the Americas and internationally. We urge workers and youth who agree with this perspective to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* and take up the fight to build a Costa Rican section of the International Committee of the Fourth International



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