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U.S. Sanctions UN Palestine Expert Francesca Albanese

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The United States has imposed sanctions on Francesca Albanese, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, in a move that has ignited debate over the limits of international advocacy and the potential consequences for those who criticize American allies.

On Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that Francesca Albanese would be added to the federal sanctions list. According to Rubio, her statements and reports contributed to what he called “illegitimate prosecutions” of Israeli officials at the

International Criminal Court, often abbreviated as ICC. As a result, Albanese now faces possible asset freezes and travel restrictions that could prevent her from fulfilling her mandate.

Albanese, an Italian lawyer who has been an outspoken critic of Israel's policies in Gaza, warned that these penalties could discourage others from cooperating with her office. Speaking to Reuters from Bosnia, where she was attending a commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide, Albanese said, "There are no red lines anymore. It is scary." She cautioned that the U.S. decision could set a dangerous precedent for human rights experts worldwide and make it difficult for American citizens or lawful permanent residents to engage with her work.

The European Union has expressed regret over the sanctions, describing them as a measure that risks undermining global human rights efforts. The United Nations Human Rights Office confirmed that Albanese is the first UN Special Rapporteur ever sanctioned by Washington and called for the decision to be reversed. Albanese, however, stated that she intends to carry on her work regardless of the restrictions. "My plans are to continue what I've been doing," she told reporters.

Albanese recently released a report urging countries to adopt an arms embargo and suspend trade with Israel, accusing the government of committing genocide in Gaza. Israel's diplomatic mission in Geneva rejected her findings as legally unfounded and defamatory. Israeli officials maintain that their military campaign is an act of self-defense in response to the October 2023 Hamas-led attack that killed civilians and sparked the war.

While advocacy groups and international organizations have rallied to Albanese's defense, the U.S. administration has stood by the sanctions, framing them as a necessary response to what it views as biased and harmful accusations against an American partner. The controversy underscores a growing divide over the role of international investigators and the limits of acceptable criticism in highly contested conflicts.

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