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UN Rapporteur Claims US Sanctions Breach Diplomatic Protections

July 16, 2025
— Categories: Human Rights

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A United Nations Special Rapporteur has accused the United States of crossing a line by imposing sanctions in response to her criticism of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, calling the move an unprecedented violation of diplomatic immunity.

Francesca Albanese, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, spoke in Bogotá, Colombia, where she underscored that Washington's decision undermines the safeguards that allow international experts to perform their roles without interference. Albanese has faced strong

backlash for repeatedly labeling Israel's operations in Gaza as "genocide," a charge that Israel's government and many American officials firmly reject.

The sanctions were announced last week by United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who accused Albanese of pursuing what he called a "biased and malicious campaign" to pressure the International Criminal Court, often referred to as the ICC, into targeting American and Israeli leaders as well as private companies. Rubio said the measures were necessary to protect U.S. personnel and businesses from what he described as politically motivated attacks.

"It's a very serious measure. It's unprecedented. And I take it very seriously," Albanese told her audience in Bogotá, warning that the sanctions send a chilling message to anyone who advocates for international law and accountability. The United Nations, along with the European Union, expressed alarm at the sanctions, with a spokesperson for United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres cautioning that they set a dangerous precedent that could undermine the independence of human rights mandates.

Albanese's recent report named several companies, many based in the United States, that she alleges have profited from the occupation of Palestinian territories. Predictably, the document drew fierce condemnation from Israel and objections from firms singled out in her findings.

The dispute reflects rising tensions over the ongoing conflict in Gaza, which erupted on October 7, 2023, when militants from Hamas, officially known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, attacked Israel, killing over 1,200 people and taking hostages. In retaliation, Israeli military operations have resulted in tens of thousands of Palestinian casualties, according to figures cited by United Nations agencies.

Special Rapporteurs like Albanese are independent experts appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council. While they do not officially speak for the United Nations, their work is protected under the United Nations Convention on the Privileges and Immunities, which shields them from legal or political reprisals linked to their official duties.

The United States has also imposed sanctions on four International Criminal Court judges in response to arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials. Albanese insists these efforts are intended to intimidate investigators and silence those who document alleged violations of international law.