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Ending genocide means dismantling the economic structures that make it possible

## **Silencing the messenger**

To findings of grave violations of the law by Israel, the response has been denial and fierce retaliation.

by Francesca Albanese\_

For over two years, my mandate has been the subject of carefully orchestrated and increasingly virulent accusations. On 8 February a French MP attacked me personally on the basis of manipulated statements, falsely attributing to me the claim that Israel is ‘the common enemy of humanity’, when in fact the targets of my remarks were the countries which have supplied Israel with weapons, and the traditional and social media that have amplified genocidal rhetoric ([1](#)).

Without bothering to verify what I had said or examine the facts, France’s foreign minister Jean-Noël Barrot immediately spread these attacks internationally, condemning remarks I never made as ‘outrageous and culpable’ and announcing that France would contact the UN Human Rights Council to seek my resignation.

His Italian, German and Czech counterparts followed suit, without carrying out the most basic checks. On 19 February the French prime minister, Sébastien Lecornu, publicly repeated the same demand. While criticism is an inherent part of any public office – especially when human rights are involved – this episode has revealed a troubling dimension: some states relentlessly attack the messenger rather than challenging the message.

What is unprecedented and corrosive about this attack on an independent expert who works for the UN is not only the violence of the accusations and the deliberate fabrication of lies. It’s also – and especially – the fact that the strategy was directed and endorsed at the highest levels of the state. It is therefore no longer simply a controversy, but indicative of the failure of a system: one built on solemn promises and international treaties, which are invoked in peacetime, but which get buried when applying them is inconvenient.

I was appointed as special rapporteur, a voluntary role, by the UN Human Rights Council and in May 2022 began my term, which runs until 2028. I’m the eighth holder of this post, and the first woman to occupy it. I took it on after a career spent defending human rights, primarily within the UN – notably at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Jerusalem – and in academic research on Palestine.

The UN mandate calls on the special rapporteur to ‘investigate Israel’s violations of the principles and bases of international law [and] international humanitarian law’, ‘to receive communications, to hear witnesses, and to use such modalities of procedure as he [sic] may deem necessary for his mandate’; and ‘to report, with his conclusions and recommendations, to the Commission on Human Rights at its future sessions, until the end of the Israeli occupation of those territories’. The end of the Israeli occupation, which began in 1967, is thus the stipulated time limit for this mandate.

The focus on Israel's actions is neither the result of personal choice nor bias: it is a consequence of the Human Rights Commission's resolution 1993/2A, adopted on 19 February 1993 in response to nearly 30 years of occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Accusing me of 'a lack of neutrality' is a wilful distortion of this mandate. None of the 14 other UN special rapporteurs with country mandates have been subjected to such attacks; no one accuses those responsible for Afghanistan, Russia or Iran of being 'obsessive' in carrying out their mission. Yet when it comes to Israel, some people – including some politicians – treat the ordinary discharge of a mandate as a fault requiring justification, not a duty to be fulfilled.

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My job is to establish and legally categorise the facts in the occupied territories, where there is an institutionalised dual legal system: civil law applies to Israeli settlers and military law to Palestinians, including children. Israel is the only country in the world where children are automatically prosecuted before military courts. Calling this system apartheid imposed on Palestinians in the form of a military dictatorship is not a provocation but a legal description. My first reports to the UN from 2022 and 2023 documented the systematic obstruction of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination; the arbitrary and routine deprivation of liberty; and the structural impact of the occupation on childhood (2).

Self-determination affects the exercise of all other rights: the right to live freely as a people, to choose one's political voice, to manage one's resources, to chart one's own future. Denying that right is central to any settler-colonial project. For decades, territorial fragmentation, the expansion of settlements, restrictions on movement, work, education and access to justice, land confiscation, the demolition of tens of thousands of homes, the sealing-off of Gaza, and the nearly 6,000 deaths – including around 1,200 children – as the result of Israeli attacks between 2008 and 2022 have rendered any prospect of a free and independent life increasingly unlikely.

Throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel has established a carceral regime – varying in intensity and methods – that constrains every aspect of daily life. Palestinians are constantly monitored, hindered in their movements by checkpoints, walls and an oppressive network of bureaucracy, perpetually at risk of arrest and arbitrary detention, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and live in what is effectively an open-air panopticon (3).

I completed my report on childhood – the most damning and the least discussed of them – just before the 7 October 2023 attacks and submitted it shortly after. It deals with the process of 'unchildling', a term borrowed from the Israeli-Palestinian academic Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (4) which describes the daily reality of children deprived of protection and innocence, growing up amid omnipresent violence, in situations where they may be killed, maimed, orphaned, or become witnesses to the death or constant humiliation of their loved ones and the destruction of their homes. To ignore their despair is to give up part of our humanity and violate the most sacred obligation in the world and international law: to protect childhood.

My March 2024 report, ‘Anatomy of a genocide’ (5), takes the same approach; it too focuses on the victims of an organised system and documents the first five months of Israeli attacks on Gaza following Hamas’s massacres on 7 October 2023: killings, serious physical and mental harm, the imposition of living conditions calculated to bring about the Palestinians’ destruction, against a background of dehumanising rhetoric from state officials. During this period, Israel cloaked its actions in ‘humanitarian camouflage’, couched in emollient language – ‘conflict’, ‘collateral damage’, ‘safe zones’, ‘evacuation orders’ – to justify the progressive erasure of Gaza and its identity, and the suppression of Palestinians’ ability to exist as a community, inhabit their land and transmit their memory.

In my next report, ‘Genocide as colonial erasure’ (6), I showed how this genocide had been expanded to the West Bank and East Jerusalem through ethnic cleansing, the whole forming the logical culmination of a settler-colonial project: erasing in order to replace, destroying in order to appropriate.

I am not alone in reaching these conclusions. In January 2024 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) judged that there was a plausible risk of the Genocide Convention being violated, and ordered provisional measures. In July 2024 the court ruled that Israel’s presence in occupied Palestinian territory was unlawful and ordered it to withdraw immediately and unconditionally. The court also found evidence of systemic discrimination, violations of the prohibition of racial segregation and apartheid, and policies of annexation. Countless other institutions and organisations have concluded that Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinian people in what little remains of their land.

The Israeli historian Raz Segal first raised the alarm in October 2023. In 2024 Israeli historians who specialise in the Holocaust, such as Amos Goldberg and Omer Bartov, likewise considered that their country was committing genocide (7). A few months later, Amnesty International reached the same conclusion, and in July 2025 (8) the Israeli organisation B’Tselem published a report with the devastating title ‘Our genocide’, all the more dreadful when imagined in Hebrew (9). And the Independent International Commission of Inquiry among many others in September 2025 stated that a genocide was taking place in Gaza (10).

## **Silence from the West**

Despite meticulous documentation of the crimes committed, these reports have received little or no attention from Western media and governments. In the absence of a formal judicial decision, the Commission of Inquiry is the closest we have to a quasi-judicial conclusion based on fact-finding and legal analysis. In any event, the obligation to prevent genocide arises as soon as a serious risk has been identified. In January 2024, when the ICJ recognised a plausible risk in Gaza, states had a legal duty to act, starting with the suspension of arms transfers.

My analysis of the complicity of some companies, published in July 2025, provoked the most virulent reactions. In it, I describe the ‘economy of genocide’ (11): a network of private actors who, through their investments, technologies, services and supply chains, materially support the reality set out in the previous reports. Such involvement brings with it responsibility. Ending genocide also requires dismantling the economic structures that make it possible – and profitable.

This report led to the US imposing draconian sanctions on me in August 2025 – a measure already applied to International Criminal Court (ICC) judges and several Palestinian organisations. I have been completely cut off financially; anyone who maintains links with me, including family members (my daughter has US citizenship), faces a fine of \$1m and 20 years' imprisonment. My ability to carry out my mandate and, quite simply, lead my life, has been severely restricted.

Although these attacks are supported by my own country, Italy, I have continued my mission, with no concrete backing from other states. My most recent report characterises the genocide in Gaza as a 'collective crime' ([12](#)), because it is enabled and financed by the unwavering political and military support of several states, among them the ones which have attacked me most aggressively.

### **Israel's biggest trading partner**

The US remains by far Israel's leading arms supplier, while several EU member states continue these transfers; the EU is also Tel Aviv's biggest trading partner. With a few exceptions, such as Spain or Slovenia, European states have chosen inaction or complicity. France, for example, has on several occasions authorised the overflight of its airspace by Binyamin Netanyahu, despite the ICC warrant for his arrest. Paris has continued to trade in military equipment, facilitated transits via its ports and airports and maintained intense commercial exchanges with Israel. Major French banks finance companies linked to the Israeli military industry and the settlements, and several thousand French-Israelis serve in the Israeli army.

At the same time, the repression of protest is intensifying: demonstrations are banned, academic conferences have been censored, activists and journalists are accused of being 'apologists for terrorism', and there are violent police crackdowns. Germany, Italy, France and the UK are at the forefront of this, under the cover of a legitimate fight against antisemitism. Draft legislation seeks to conflate the vital fight against anti-Jewish hatred and all forms of racism with the prohibition of any criticism of Israel as a state.

Presented as self-evident, this conflation – which equates our Jewish brothers and sisters with Israeli policy – is part of a political offensive which aims to instrumentalise the fight against antisemitism in order to criminalise expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people and to justify smear campaigns. When Israeli nationals and Jewish people around the world criticise Tel Aviv's policy, they too are subjected to such campaigns. Their voices are stifled and their loyalty questioned.

Antisemitism, horrific and abhorrent, is hatred of Jews; it has nothing to do with the work of those who defend human rights, which entails analysing the actions of a state. The entire system of international law rests on the principle of state responsibility. It is states which assume and bear legal obligations, and it is states which must answer, in the first instance, for their violations. Israel is no exception: criticism of the state of Israel does not target what it *is*, nor the religion it professes, but what it *does* – particularly in relation to international law, which it has violated seriously, repeatedly and with consistent impunity.

The question raised is not ideological but legal: is France in compliance with its international obligations in undertaking such actions? My mandate as special rapporteur has taught me one essential lesson: when power is challenged, it does not debate, it hits out. It smears in order to discredit; it intimidates in order to silence; violence is a sign of anxiety rather than strength.

## Following my predecessors

My work is a continuation of that of my predecessors, John Dugard, Richard Falk and Michael Lynk. They too were accused of antisemitism and indulgence towards terrorism. The same tactics were used against them: replacing documented facts with polemic, legal analysis with personal attack. It's a well-established mechanism by now. Pro-Israeli groups – foremost among them the Geneva-based organisation UN Watch – have for years produced defamatory reports against anyone, especially within the UN, who documents violations of international law committed by Tel Aviv. Under the pretext of redressing the ‘unbalanced treatment of Israel’, these actors isolate and manipulate statements to distort their meaning, then amplify and repeat their disinformation until it acquires the appearance of truth.

On closer inspection, the ‘reports’ produced by these groups ring hollow. Inside the UN, their false and defamatory character has long been known. The accusations that I allegedly justified the atrocities of 7 October 2023, denied sexual violence or minimised the suffering of the hostages stem from this same machinery, even though I have unequivocally and relentlessly condemned the attacks against Israeli civilians on 7 October and Hamas's crimes in general.

Most Western governments do not confront Israel because, in doing so, they would be forced to confront themselves

I condemned them without hesitation as war crimes and crimes against humanity, whose perpetrators must be prosecuted by international bodies. I condemned the sexual violence committed against Israeli victims, as documented by the UN Commission of Inquiry (13), and, in accordance with international law, I consider rape used in a context of hostilities to be a weapon of war that may constitute a war crime and, depending on the circumstances, a crime against humanity. International justice does not function through selective indignation or political instrumentalisation. It rests on the legal definition of facts, the establishment of individual responsibility and respect for due process for all, without exception.

While my condemnation of the massacres and other crimes against Israeli civilians has been unequivocal, I have challenged the widely circulated claim – especially prevalent in France, for reasons that escape me – that they were primarily motivated by antisemitism (14). As eminent specialists in the Holocaust and antisemitism have pointed out, this reading is both erroneous and dangerous, as it obscures the structural causes of violence and distorts its analysis (15). While antisemitism may have played a role for some individuals, these massacres, as António Guterres stated, occurred in the context of 56 years of suffocating occupation (16). No crime justifies another crime, but ignoring the context sustains a distorted interpretation that risks fuelling the cycle of violence rather than resolving it, endangering Palestinians and Israelis alike.

What must be stated clearly is what this campaign reveals: the energy expended in slandering me is in stark contrast to the silence surrounding the ongoing crimes in Gaza and the inaction towards those for whom international arrest warrants have been issued by the ICC. Under the pretext of ‘holding the UN accountable’, the real aim is to redefine the defence of human rights as a partisan stance.

The irony is sharp. In September 2025 France recognised the state of Palestine, a gesture hailed as sending a strong signal and marking symbolic turning point. But recognising a state while actively supporting its occupier, without exerting pressure to ensure compliance with

international law and the unconditional withdrawal from the occupied territories mandated by the ICJ, is more about diplomatic posturing than legal and political commitment.

### **Recognition needs sovereignty**

Recognising a state without territory, without sovereignty, without an end to occupation, is empty rhetoric – especially when, in parallel, efforts are being made to intimidate the experts mandated to document precisely the violations that render impossible the concrete creation of that state. You cannot recognise Palestine one day and seek to muzzle its defenders the next.

The politicians who engage in this manoeuvre are not just targeting me. They are sacrificing the international legal order itself and accelerating the dismantlement of international humanitarian law and the institutions that safeguard it at the very moment when their survival is at stake.

It's possible to run from the truth, but harder to conceal it. It is only a matter of time before justice comes knocking at the door of those responsible for crimes in Gaza and their accomplices. The destruction of Gaza has awakened consciences previously thought numb and made visible what many refused to see: not just the brutality of the occupation, but the active complicity of our Western democracies in its perpetuation. For Israel is not an anomaly in the world order; in many respects it is a mirror in which we discover the logic of exception, the colonial hierarchy that deems some lives worth mourning and others expendable, a rhetoric of security that guarantees impunity. Most Western governments do not confront Israel because, in doing so, they would be forced to confront themselves.

It is therefore both instructive and dismaying that France, the self-declared home of human rights, finds itself on the front line, not defending a principle but protecting the status quo; not promoting international law but neutralising its guardians.

Yet something has changed. A movement has emerged – on campuses, on social media, in the streets, in the courts – calling for genuine social justice, effective respect for human rights, decolonised multilateralism and the universal application of its principles without exception. A universality that does not admit apartheid, even when practised by a state allied with the West. This movement will not be silenced by smear campaigns. It will not be discouraged by sanctions or repression. It grows and strengthens as the lies and distortions that seek to discredit it are exposed.

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Translated by George Miller

(1) See the full text of my statement at the Al Jazeera Forum (AJ Forum), X, 9 February 2026.

(2) See '[Situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967](#)' (A/77/356); '[Arbitrary deprivation of liberty in the occupied Palestinian territory: the experience of Palestinians behind bars and outside](#)' (A/HRC/53/59); and '[Situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967](#)' (A/78/545), United Nations, respectively 21 September 2022, 28 August 2023 and 20 October 2023, docs.un.org/.

- (3) See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1977.
- (4) Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding*, Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- (5) ‘[Anatomy of a genocide](#)’ (A/HRC/55/73), United Nations, 1 July 2024, docs.un.org/.
- (6) ‘[Genocide as colonial erasure](#)’ (A/79/384), United Nations, 1 October 2024, docs.un.org/.
- (7) Raz Segal, ‘[A textbook case of genocide](#)’, 13 October 2023, jewishcurrents.org; ‘Amos Goldberg: “What is happening in Gaza is a genocide because Gaza does not exist anymore”’, *Le Monde*, Paris, 29 October 2024; Omer Bartov, ‘[As a former IDF soldier and historian of genocide, I was deeply disturbed by my recent visit to Israel](#)’, *Guardian*, London, 14 August 2024.
- (8) ‘[Amnesty International investigation concludes Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza](#)’, 5 December 2024, [www.amnesty.org/](http://www.amnesty.org/).
- (9) ‘[Our genocide](#)’, July 2025, [www.btselem.org/](http://www.btselem.org/).
- (10) UN News, 16 September 2025, news.un.org/.
- (11) ‘[From economy of occupation to economy of genocide](#)’ (A/HRC/59/23), United Nations, 2 July 2025, docs.un.org/.
- (12) ‘[Gaza genocide: a collective crime](#)’ (A/80/492), United Nations, 20 October 2025, [www.ohchr.org/](http://www.ohchr.org/).
- (13) See ‘Detailed findings on attacks carried out on and after 7 October 2023 in Israel’, United Nations, 10 June 2024, [www.ohchr.org/](http://www.ohchr.org/).
- (14) See ‘[Israel’s symbolic “ban” must not distract from atrocity crimes in Gaza: UN expert](#)’, United Nations Human Rights, 15 February 2024, [www.ohchr.org/](http://www.ohchr.org/).
- (15) See Omer Bartov, Christopher R Browning, Jane Caplan, Debórah Dwork, David Feldman et al, ‘[An open letter on the misuse of Holocaust memory](#)’, *New York Review of Books*, 20 November 2023.
- (16) See ‘[Secretary-General’s remarks to the Security Council – on the Middle East](#)’, 24 October 2023, [www.un.org/](http://www.un.org/).