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US sanctions UN expert Francesca Albanese over Israel criticism

The UN rapporteur appears to dismiss the Trump administration's economic penalties, calling them 'mafia-style intimidation techniques'.

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US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the penalties on Wednesday, accusing Albanese of waging a “campaign of political and economic warfare against the United States and Israel”.

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Albanese, who serves as UN special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territory, has been a leading global voice in calling for action to end Israel’s human rights violations.

Israel and its supporters have been rebuking Albanese and calling for her to be removed from her UN position for years.

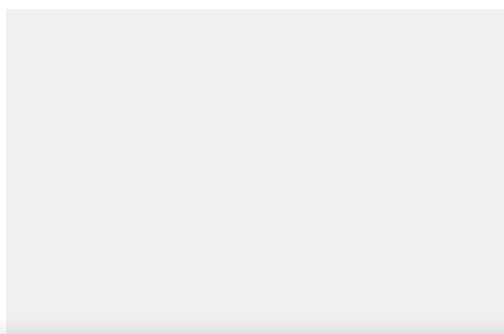
When reached by Al Jazeera, Albanese appeared to dismiss the US’s sanctions, saying she is focused on continuing her work.

“No comment on mafia style intimidation techniques,” the UN expert wrote in a text message. “Busy reminding member states of their obligations to stop and punish genocide. And those who profit from it.”

Earlier on Wednesday, she called out European governments for allowing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – who is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crime charges in Gaza – to [use their airspace](#) while travelling.

“Italian, French and Greek citizens deserve to know that every political action violating the [international] legal order, weakens and endangers all of them. And all of us,” Albanese wrote in a social media post.

Rubio cited Albanese’s push for the prosecution of Israeli officials at the ICC as the legal basis for the sanctions.



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Trump had issued an executive order in February to impose penalties on ICC officials involved in “targeting” Israel.

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Last month, the Trump administration [sanctioned four](#) ICC judges.

On Thursday, United Nations rights chief Volker Turk called for the “prompt reversal” of US sanctions against Albanese and a general halt to “attacks and threats” against people appointed by the UN and other international institutions.

Rubio had on Wednesday accused Albanese of anti-Semitism.

“That bias has been apparent across the span of her career, including recommending that the ICC, without a legitimate basis, issue arrest warrants targeting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant,” he said.

The ICC [charged Netanyahu](#) and Gallant with crimes against humanity and war crimes in Gaza for depriving Palestinians in the enclave of “objects indispensable to their survival, including food, water, and medicine”.

Rubio also highlighted a [recent report](#) by Albanese that documented the role of international companies, including US firms, in the Israeli assault on Gaza, which she describes as a genocide.

“We will not tolerate these campaigns of political and economic warfare, which threaten our national interests and sovereignty,” the top US diplomat said.

Trump’s ICC decree freezes the assets of targeted individuals in the US and bans them and their immediate family members from entering the country.

Nancy Okail, head of the Center for International Policy (CIP) think tank, decried the sanctions against Albanese as “devastating”.

“Sanctioning a UN expert gives the signal that the United States is acting like dictatorships,” Okail told Al Jazeera

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Agnes Callamard, the secretary general of Amnesty International, said she was “dismayed” by the US move.

“We recall that Special Rapporteurs are independent experts. They are not appointed to please governments or to be popular but to deliver their mandate,” she wrote on X.

“Albanese is working tirelessly to document and report on Israel’s unlawful occupation, apartheid and genocide, on the basis of international law,” Callamard added. She also urged governments around the world to protect to “do everything in their power to mitigate and block the effect of the sanctions” Albanese and protect the work and independence of special rapporteurs.

Over the past 21 months, Israel’s US-backed [campaign in Gaza](#) has levelled most of the territory and killed at least 57,575 Palestinians, according to local health officials.

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