

Francesca Albanese and the lonely road of defiance

by Chris Hedges,* USA



Chris Hedges.
(Photo zvg)

(CH-S) Following the abduction of the Venezuelan president and his wife by the US military, which violated international law, there has been little coverage in the public media of the catastrophic conditions in Gaza and the illegal "sanctioning" of UN employees who draw attention to these conditions. UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese draws attention to the conditions in Gaza. For this reason, she is on the US blacklist and is treated like a terrorist.

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(Nice, France) – It is a late November afternoon. I am driving to Genoa, Italy with *Francesca Albanese*, the *U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967*. We are traveling to join striking dockworkers. The dockworkers call for a moratorium on weapons bound for Israel and a halt to the Italian government's plans to increase military spending.

We speed past the inky waters of *Baie des Anges* on our right and the razor-backed French Alps on our left. Chateaus and clusters of houses with red-tiled roofs, shrouded in the fading light, are perched on the rolling hillsides. Palm trees line the seafront road.

Francesca – tall with flecks of grey in her hair and wearing large, black-framed glasses and hoop earrings – is the *bête noire* of Israel and the United States. She was *placed*¹ on the *Office of Foreign Assets Control* (OFAC) list of the U.S. Treasury Department – normally used to sanction those accused of money laundering or being involved with terrorist organizations – six days



Francesca Albanese. (Photo Un Photos/Mark Garten)

after the *release*² of her report, "From economy of occupation to economy of genocide".

The OFAC list – weaponized by the Trump administration to persecute Francesca and in clear *violation*³ of the diplomatic immunity granted to *U.N. officials*⁴ – prohibits any financial institution from having someone on the list as a client. A bank that permits someone on the OFAC list to engage in financial transactions is banned from operating in dollars, faces multimillion-dollar fines and is blocked from international payment systems.

In her report, Francesca *lists*⁵ 48 corporations and institutions, including *Palantir Technologies*,⁶ *Lockheed Martin*, *Alphabet Inc.*, *Amazon*, *International Business Machines Corporation* (IBM), *Caterpillar Inc.*, *Microsoft Corporation* and the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* (MIT), along with banks and financial firms such as *BlackRock*, insurers, real estate firms and charities, which in violation of international law, are making billions from the occupation and the genocide of Palestinians.

The report, which includes a database of over 1,000 corporate entities that collaborate with Israel, demands these firms and institutions sever ties with Israel or be held accountable for complicity in war crimes. It describes "Israel's "forever-occupation" as "the ideal testing ground for arms

* Chris Hedges, born in 1956, is an American journalist and author. He has published numerous political non-fiction books and was a long-time foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*. He graduated from Colgate University with a B.A. in English literature and went on to receive a master of divinity degree from Harvard.

Hedges spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans. He was an early and outspoken critic

of the U.S. plan to invade and occupy Iraq and called the press coverage at the time "shameful cheerleading". In 2002, he was a member of *The New York Times* reporting team that won a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of global terrorism. That same year he won an "Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism". Now, in order to maintain his independence as a journalist, he publishes a weekly column and weekly podcast, *The Chris Hedges Report*, on Substack.

manufacturers and big tech – providing boundless supply and demand, little oversight and zero accountability – while investors and private and public institutions profit freely.” You can see my interview about the report with Francesca [here](#).⁷

Francesca, whose previous reports including “Gaza Genocide: a collective crime” and “Genocide as colonial erasure”⁸ along with her impassioned denunciations of Israel’s mass slaughter in Gaza, have made her a lightning rod. She is excoriated every time she deviates from the approved script, including when pro-Palestine demonstrators stormed the headquarters of the Italian daily newspaper *La Stampa* while we were in Italy.

Francesca condemned⁹ the incursion and property destruction – protesters scattered newspapers and spray-painted slogans on the walls such as “Free Palestine” and “Newspapers complicit with Israel” – but added that it should serve as a “warning to the press” to do its job. That qualification expressed her frustration with the media’s *discrediting*¹⁰ of the reporting of Palestinian journalists – over 278 journalists and media workers have been *killed*¹¹ by Israel since 7 October along with over 700 of their family members – and uncritical amplification of Israeli propaganda. But it was seized upon by her critics, *including*¹² Italian Prime Minister *Giorgia Meloni*, to lynch her.

Secretary of State *Marco Rubio* imposed sanctions on Francesca in July.

“The United States has repeatedly condemned and objected to the biased and malicious activities of Albanese that have long made her unfit for service as a Special Rapporteur,” the State Department’s press release read.¹³ “Albanese has spewed unabashed antisemitism, expressed support for terrorism, and open contempt for the United States, Israel, and the West. That bias has been apparent across the span of her career, including recommending that the *International Criminal Court* (ICC), without a legitimate basis, issue arrest warrants targeting Israeli Prime Minister *Benjamin Netanyahu* and former Defense Minister *Yoav Gallant*.”

“She has recently escalated this effort by writing threatening letters to dozens of entities worldwide, including major American companies across finance, technology, defense, energy, and hospitality, making extreme and unfounded accusations and recommending the ICC pursue investigations and prosecutions of these com-

panies and their executives,” it went on. “We will not tolerate these campaigns of political and economic warfare, which threaten our national interests and sovereignty.”

The sanctions followed those imposed in *February*¹⁴ and *June*¹⁵ on the court’s prosecutor *Karim Khan*¹⁶ along with two judges for issuing arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant.

Francesca is barred from entering the U.S. even to appear at the United Nations in New York City, to present one of her two annual reports. The other is delivered at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Francesca’s assets in the U.S. have been frozen, including her bank account and her U.S. apartment. The sanctions cut her off from the international banking system, including blocking her use of credit cards. Her private medical insurance refuses to reimburse her medical expenses. Hotel rooms booked under her name have been cancelled. She can only operate using cash or by borrowing a bank card.

Institutions, including *U.S. universities*,¹⁷ human rights groups, professors and NGOs, that once cooperated with Francesca, have severed ties, fearful of penalties established for any U.S. citizen who collaborates with her. She and her family receive frequent death threats. Israel and the U.S. have mounted a campaign to get her removed from her U.N post.

Francesca is proof that when you stand steadfastly with the oppressed, you will be treated like the oppressed.

She is unsure if her book, “*When the World Sleeps: Stories, Words, and Wounds of Palestine*,”¹⁸ which has been translated into English and is expected to be released in April next year, will be distributed in the U.S.

“I’m a sanctioned person,” she says ruefully.

But she is not cowed. Her next salvo will be a report that documents the torture of Palestinians in Israeli prisons. While torture, she says, was “not widespread,” before 7 October, it has now become *ubiquitous*.¹⁹ She is collecting testimonies of those released from Israeli detention.

“It reminds me of the stories and testimonies I read from Argentina’s dictatorship,” Francesca tells me. “It’s that bad. It’s systemic torture against the same people. The same people are taken, raped and brought back, taken, raped and brought back.”

“Women?” I ask.

“Both,” she answers.

"To have women tell you they have been raped, multiple times. They've been asked to masturbate soldiers. This is incredible," Francesca says. "For a woman to say that. Imagine what they have endured? There are people who have lost their words. They cannot talk. They cannot speak after what they've endured."

Establishment media organizations, she says, not only dutifully parrot back Israeli lies, but routinely block reporting that reflects negatively on Israel.

"In April, I reported the first cases of sexual harassment and rape that had taken place in January and February 2024," she says. "People didn't want to listen. The *New York Times* interviewed me for two hours. Two hours. They didn't write a line about it."

"The *Financial Times* had – because of the relevance of the topic – an embargoed version of 'From economy of occupation to economy of genocide,'" she says. "They didn't publish it. They didn't even publish a review, an article, days after the press conference. But they did publish a critique of my report. I had a meeting with them. I said, 'This is really depressing. Who are you? Are you paid for the work you do? Who are you loyal to, your readers?' I pushed them. They said, 'Well, we didn't find that it was up to our standards.'"

This, I tell her, is how the *New York Times* would spike stories by reporters that editors deem too incendiary.

"They discredit your sources regardless of what your sources are," I tell her. "That becomes the vehicle by which they don't publish. This isn't a good faith discussion. They're not giving a fair analysis of what your sources are. They are categorically dismissing them. They're not telling you the truth, which is, 'We don't want to deal with Israel and the Israel lobby.' That's the truth. They don't say that. It is always, 'It's not up to our standards.'"

"There is no free media, no free press in Italy anymore," Francesca laments. "There is, but it's fringe or on the margins. It is an exception. The main newspapers are held by groups connected to big powers, financial and economic powers. The government controls – directly or indirectly – much of Italian TV."

The drift towards fascism in Europe and the United States, Francesca says, is intimately tied to the genocide, as is the emerging resistance.

"There is a brewing anger and dissatisfaction with political leadership in Europe," she says.

"There is also a fear that lingers in many countries because of the rise of the right. We've been there. There are people who have living memories of fascism in Europe. The scars of Nazi-fascism are still there, even the trauma. People cannot process what has happened and why it's happened. Palestine has shocked people. Italians in particular. Maybe because we are who we are in the sense that we cannot be silenced that easily, we cannot be scared as has happened to the Germans and the French. I was shocked in France. The fear and repression is incredible. It is not as bad as Germany, but it's much worse than it was two years ago. The minister of education in France cancelled an academic conference on Palestine at the Collège de France – the highest institution in France. The minister of education! And he bragged about it."

Francesca says our only hope now is civil disobedience, embodied in actions such as strikes that disrupt commerce and government or the attempts by the *flotillas*²⁰ to reach Gaza.

"The flotillas created this sense of 'Oh, something can be done,'" she says. "We are not powerless. We can make a difference even in shaking the ground, rocking the boat. Then the workers have come in. The students have already been mobilized. There has been a sense through the various protests that we can still change things. People have started to connect the dots."

Francesca presented her 24-page report "*Gaza Genocide: a collective crime*"²¹ to the U.N. General Assembly in October, a report that had to be delivered remotely²² from the *Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation* in Cape Town, South Africa, because of the sanctions.

Danny Danon, the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, following her presentation, said, "Ms. Albanese, you are a witch and this report is another page in your spellbook." He accused her of trying to "curse Israel with lies and hatred."

"Every page of this report is an empty spell, every accusation, a charm that does not work, because you are a failed witch," Danon continued.

"It triggered a moment of enlightenment," Francesca says of the insults. "I connected it to the injustice that women have suffered through the centuries."

"What is happening to the Palestinians and to those who are speaking out for the Palestinians,

is the 2025 equivalent of burning witches in the public square," she goes on. "It was done to scientists and theologians who didn't align with the Catholic Church. It was done to women who held the power of herbs. It was done to religious minorities, to indigenous people, like the Sámi people."

"Palestine," Francesca says, "has opened a portal to history, to where we come from and to what we risk if we don't pull the brakes."

Source: <https://chrishedges.substack.com/p/francesca-albanese-and-the-lonely>, 30 December 2025

¹ https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20250709_33

² <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session59/advance-version/a-hrc-59-23-aev.pdf>

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2025/08/us-sanctions-special-rapporteur-francesca-albanese-threaten-human-rights-system>

⁴ <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/1946/en/12064>

⁵ <https://chrishedges.substack.com/p/profiting-from-genocide>

⁶ <https://chrishedges.substack.com/p/the-rise-of-the-thiiverse-and-the>

⁷ <https://chrishedges.substack.com/p/the-rise-of-the-thiiverse-and-the>

⁸ <https://chrishedges.substack.com/p/the-member-states-complicit-in-genocide>
and <https://chrishedges.substack.com/p/the-persecution-of-francesca-albanese>

⁹ <https://brusselssignal.eu/2025/12/in-italy-un-envoy-albanese-accused-of-justifying-violence-against-journalists>

¹⁰ <https://chrishedges.substack.com/p/the-betrayal-of-palestinian-journalists>

¹¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/28/israel-kills-over-700-relatives-of-palestinian-journalists-in-gaza-report>

¹² https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2025/12/01/meloni-raps-albanese-over-la-stampa-raid-warning-comment_cf8690fd-8a75-4da3-a7dd-28dd5ad67489.html

¹³ <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/07/sanctioning-lawfare-that-targets-u-s-and-israeli-persons>

¹⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/imposing-sanctions-on-the-international-criminal-court>

¹⁵ <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/06/imposing-sanctions-in-response-to-the-iccs-illegitimate-actions-targeting-the-united-states-and-israel>

¹⁶ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2022-06/Bio-Karim-Khan.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/us-georgetown-university-cuts-ties-with-un-rapporteur-albanese-after-her-push-for-justice-in-occupied-palestine/3784114>

¹⁸ <https://otherpress.com/product/when-the-world-sleeps-9781635426038>

¹⁹ https://www.btselem.org/publications/202408_welcome_to_hell

²⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2025/9/2/live-geta-thunberg-once-more-on-board-sumud-flotilla-sailing-for-gaza>

²¹ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/new-un-published-report-exposes-complicity-states-enabling-genocide>

²² <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-10-29-israels-gaza-genocide-fuelled-by-western-support-albanese>