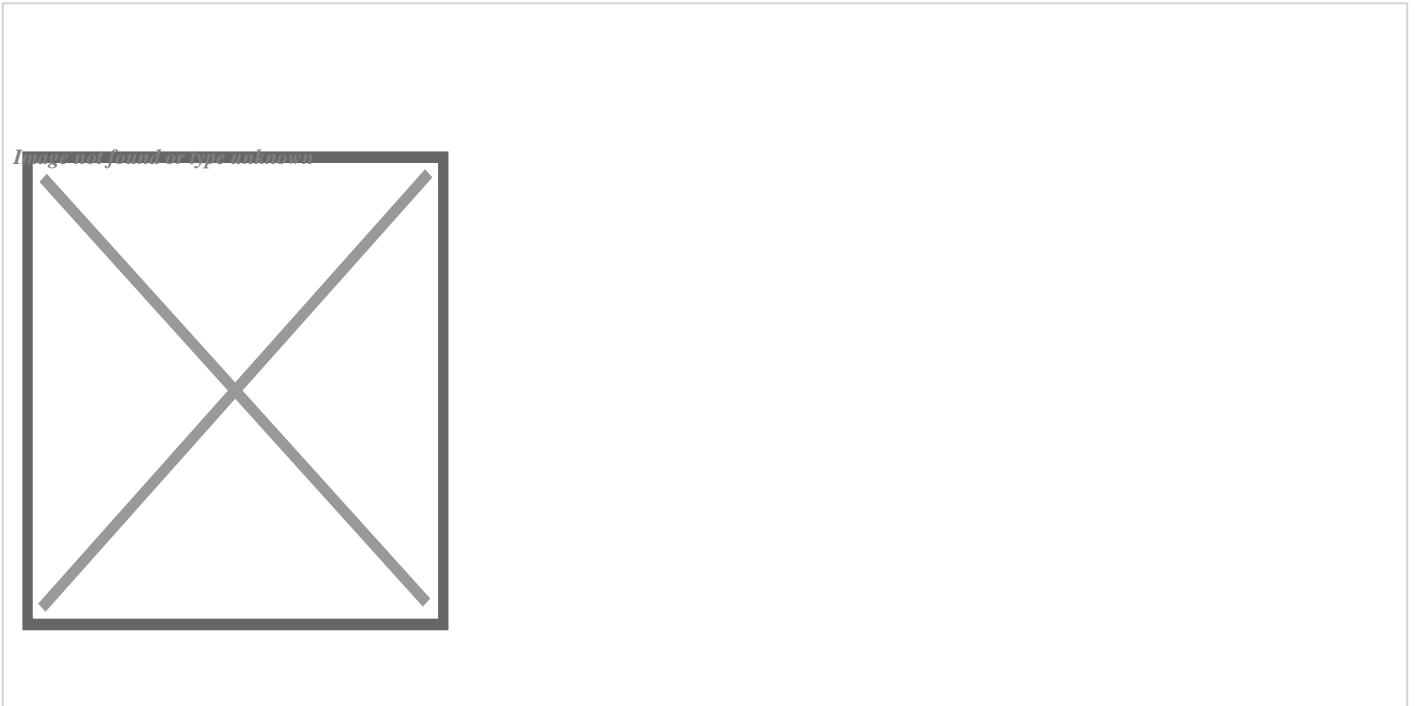


UN expert says Trump not just backing ethnic cleansing in Gaza -- it's worse



Copenhagen, February 13 (RHC)-- Francesca Albanese -- the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories -- on Wednesday denounced President Donald Trump's proposed U.S. takeover of the Gaza Strip and expulsion of most of its native inhabitants as something "worse" than ethnic cleansing.

"President Trump. Oh, where to start?" Albanese said in Copenhagen on Wednesday, calling the Republican president's plan "utter nonsense. "And it's unlawful, what he proposes," she continued. "People talk of ethnic cleansing. No, it's worse... it's inciting to commit forced displacement, which is an international crime."

"And in the context of a genocide... it will strengthen the complicity in the crimes that Israel has been committing over the past 15 months and before," Albanese added.

The special rapporteur's condemnation came in response to Trump's Tuesday remarks during a White House press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court, which Trump sanctioned on Thursday. The president asserted that "the U.S. will take over the Gaza Strip" after emptying the enclave of most of its native Palestinian population.

"We'll own it," Trump said, adding that "we're going to develop it" and turn Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East."

Palestinians roundly rejected and derided Trump's proposal, while Netanyahu said Israel would study the plan.

"It's unlawful, immoral, and irresponsible," Albanese said Wednesday. "It will make the regional crisis even worse."

Trump doubled down on his proposal in an early Thursday morning post on his Truth Social website. "The Gaza Strip would be turned over to the United States by Israel at the conclusion of fighting," he said. "The Palestinians, people like Chuck Schumer, would have already been resettled in far safer and more beautiful communities, with new and modern homes, in the region. They would actually have a chance to be happy, safe and free."

It is not clear what Trump's reference to the Democratic U.S. senator from New York meant.

Israel -- which was founded 77 years ago largely through the ethnic cleansing of more than 750,000 Palestinians -- has been accused of seeking to permanently remove Gazans, most of whom are descendants of survivors of the 1948 expulsions, to make way for the renewed Jewish colonization of the coastal enclave.

"No one has the right to say how Gaza will be rebuilt other than the Palestinians."

Trump has proposed relocating Gazans to Egypt and Jordan, a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention rejected by Palestinians, Egyptians, and Jordanians alike.

While ethnic cleansing, a term coined during the Balkan wars of the late 20th century, is not explicitly a crime under any international law, the South Africa-led genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice accuses the U.S.-backed nation of offenses including the forced displacement of around 2 million Palestinians in Gaza.

"This is a population of genocide survivors and they need to be rescued before thinking of who's going to rebuild Gaza," Albanese said in Copenhagen. "No one has the right to say how Gaza will be rebuilt other than the Palestinians."

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