



[UNITED4GAZA/LTR/2026/001](#)

20 February 2026

Letter addressed to H.E. Mr. Jérôme Bonnafont, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations in New York, and H.E. Ms. Céline Jurgensen, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations Office at Geneva*

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Excellencies,

We write to you as current and former members of United Nations personnel who are **gravely concerned** by recent pronouncements made by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs and by the Prime Minister of France, H.E. Mr. Jean-Noël Barrot and H.E. Mr. Sébastien Lecornu, about the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, Ms. Francesca Albanese. Ahead of the upcoming session of the Human Rights Council, on 23 February, we wish to bring our concerns, through you, to the attention of the Government of France.

On 8 February, after Special Rapporteur Albanese had participated in the Al Jazeera Forum a day earlier, a [fabricated distortion](#) of her remarks was disseminated by [UN Watch](#), a group that continuously spreads disinformation about the United Nations and its work in defence of the human rights of Palestinians. This distortion was [copied, repackaged, and magnified](#) by a French parliamentarian, who orchestrated an [open letter](#) to Minister Barrot replete with misinformation. On 11 February, in parliament, she repeated the falsehoods contained in her letter, based on which the Minister then levelled accusations against Special Rapporteur Albanese and called for her resignation. **Minister Barrot hereby amplified disinformation about the Special Rapporteur and fuelled the abuse that she endures while she exercises her legitimate functions as an independent expert mandated by the Human Rights Council.**

A corollary of the Minister's pronouncements is that they risk contributing to the worrying growth and normalization of abuse, threats, and intimidation levelled against agencies, mandate-holders, and personnel of the

* This letter is copied to the Permanent Missions of Austria, Czechia, Germany, and Italy to the United Nations, in both New York and Geneva.

United Nations, as well as against judges and prosecutors of the International Criminal Court, human rights defenders, humanitarians, and journalists.

Many organizations and spontaneous coalitions, like [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#), have appealed to the Minister to acknowledge the misinformation and retract his call for the Special Rapporteur's resignation.¹ On 18 February, however, Minister Barrot intensified his caustic pronouncements vis-à-vis Special Rapporteur Albanese, **thereby renewing and deepening their corrosive risks and effects.**

On 19 February, Prime Minister Lecornu **added fuel to the fire** by demanding the Special Rapporteur's resignation, accusing her of "antisemitic rhetoric" because she qualifies Israel's crimes in Gaza as **genocidal**.

Based on this:

- We express **disappointment** that Minister Barrot opted to double down on his vitriolic attacks against Special Rapporteur Albanese, even after it had been brought to his attention that he had been misled. We are also **disturbed** that Prime Minister Lecornu levelled a direct threat against the independence of experts appointed by the Human Rights Council. We maintain that the integrity of the system of special procedures of the Human Rights Council must be protected. We further **reject** the Prime Minister's indefensible accusation that the attribution of genocidal intent to Israel is antisemitic.²
- We are concerned that Minister Barrot and Prime Minister Lecornu contribute to the **erosion of international laws and norms** concerning the protection of human rights defenders and related categories of persons, such as humanitarians and journalists.

¹ United Staff for Gaza issued a statement on 13 February in support of Special Rapporteur Albanese (see [UNITED4GAZA/S/2026/001](#)). Aside from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, similar public appeals have also been made by [French Senators and Members of the National Assembly](#), the [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), the [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East](#), [Artists for Peace](#), a [group of French academics](#), the [Coordination Committee of the Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council](#), and the [Coalition of Former Diplomats and Civil Servants for Accountability](#).

² In early 2024, the [International Court of Justice](#) found that genocidal intent is plausible. The [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel](#), assessed, in September 2025, that the State of Israel has perpetrated the crime of genocide. This same conclusion has been reached by other authoritative entities, including the [International Association of Genocide Studies](#) and [Amnesty International](#).

- We recognize that France has played a constructive role on the Palestinian question, including by having recognized the State of Palestine, facilitated the [New York Declaration](#), and [condemned](#) Israel's attempts at de facto annexation of the West Bank. **We regret that France risks harming its own constructive positions** through the pronouncements of Minister Barrot and Prime Minister Lecornu.
- We underline that disagreements with an independent expert mandated by the Human Rights Council should be fact-based and should be expressed through appropriate means and channels in ways that neither stir abuse and intimidation nor harms the integrity of the international human rights system. We would have assumed that this position was shared by France.
- **We appeal to the Government of France to reconsider its position and refrain from further harming the integrity of the international human rights system. We ask that France and its representatives desist from fuelling abuse against Special Rapporteur Albanese and consider refraining from calling for her removal or resignation at the upcoming session of the Human Rights Council.**

We should be grateful for your consideration of this letter and for your transmission of it, should you deem this appropriate, to other concerned authorities.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,



United Staff for Gaza

United Staff for Gaza is an association of current and former members of United Nations personnel, acting in their private capacities. Visit our [website](#), contact us by [email](#).