Amnesty International honours envoy who called Oct 7 a ‘response to oppression’

Francesca Albanese will receive the Ambassador of Conscience award at a private ceremony in December

377 Gift this article free Add us as preferred source



The decision to give an award to Francesca Albanese has angered families of those killed in the Oct 7 attack Credit: Ivan Romano



Janet Eastham
Senior News Reporter
Show biography

Published 15 November 2026 7:00am GMT

Amnesty International is to give its “highest honour” to a UN envoy who said the Oct 7 victims had been killed “in response to Israel’s oppression”.

Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied territories, will receive the Ambassador of Conscience award at a “highly confidential” ceremony in Paris on Dec 7, leaked correspondence has shown.

The 240-seat event, at which Javier Bardem, an Oscar-winning actor, will also be honoured, will be private for “security reasons”, according to an email seen by The Telegraph. Amnesty plans to use it to court donors.

Advertisement

Ms Albanese made her comments about the Oct 7 atrocities in 2024, when she disputed Emmanuel Macron’s description of the attack as the “greatest anti-Semitic massacre of our century”.



Ms Albanese has caused anger with comments on Israel and Jewish people before Credit: Reuters/Willy Kurniawan

She wrote on X: “The victims of Oct 7 were not killed because of their Judaism, but in response to Israel’s oppression. France and the international community did nothing to prevent it. My respects to the victims.”

France and Germany condemned the post. Ms Albanese said she had repeatedly condemned Hamas’s crimes and that she rejected anti-Semitism, calling it “a global threat”.

News of the award has angered human rights campaigners, politicians and bereaved families. Adam Ma’anit, a British-Israeli man whose relatives were killed in the Hamas massacre, said it had made him “sick to my stomach”.

“After Hamas terrorists shot my cousin Tsachi’s daughter in the head, one said to her little sister that she was ‘with her God now’. Religion was most certainly on the minds of her murderers.

“My family were targeted because they were Jews living in their ancestral homeland. Amnesty honouring someone who justified their slaughter makes me sick to my stomach. This perverse ceremony needs to be stopped.”

Ms Albanese has a history of causing offence with comments. In a Facebook post in 2014, before her UN appointment, she described the US as having been “subjugated by the Jewish lobby”. She separately said that the BBC had the “Israeli lobby” in its “veins and system”.

When confronted about the remarks in 2022, she acknowledged using words that were “infelicitous, analytically inaccurate and un-intendedly offensive”.

Plans for the award ceremony were set out in an email from Sylvie Brigot, Amnesty France’s executive director, in which she said the award “honours individuals whose life journeys, stances and actions have made outstanding contributions to the defence of human rights and the promotion of human dignity around the world”.

This year’s recipients will be recognised for having “spoken out about the genocide in Gaza”, she added.



Javier Bardem, the Academy Award-winning actor, will also be honoured at the ceremony in Paris Credit: Getty Images/Stefania D'Alessandro

Ms Brigot said the ceremony would “generate more support for Amnesty, notably by reaching out to numbers of major donors or people who could become so”. She urged national directors to attend and to “work on

bringing with you one or two of your major donors to secure support for our collective work".

Amnesty has drawn criticism from governments and divided its own ranks in recent years. In 2022, its Ukraine chief resigned after the NGO accused Ukrainian troops of endangering civilians during Russia's invasion.

Leaked documents have revealed concerns within Amnesty that "increasing hostility" towards the organisation was a major threat to its ability to operate.

A confidential risk assessment warned that the NGO could be forced to "reduce, alter, or worst – withdraw its physical presence" from some countries.

Separately, in 2024, an investigation by MG Consultants into allegations of anti-Semitism and anti-Palestinian racism warned that donors and partners could lose confidence in Amnesty.

"Stakeholders, including donors, partners, and the global human-rights community, may question [Amnesty International]'s ability to uphold its principles within its operations," investigators said.

They added that this could cause a "diminution of the organisation's moral authority to challenge human rights abuses and advocate for change on the global stage".

The report said: "There appears to be an implicit assumption within parts of the movement that critiques coming from Jewish members, or related to Jewish experiences, are inherently biased, potentially diminishing their validity.

"This assumption may contribute to a systemic issue where concerns raised by Jewish individuals or related to Jewish welfare are not taken as seriously, fostering an environment where anti-Semitic attitudes could go unaddressed."

The failings had had a "significant emotional and professional impact" on those affected, the report said.

It stated: “The investigation brings to light a trend within the movement of insufficient institutional responses to raised concerns, including those related to anti-Semitism.”

However, it stopped short of finding there was systemic anti-Semitism within Amnesty.

‘Moral degradation’

Dame Priti Patel told The Telegraph that Ms Albanese’s comments had “undermined the neutrality of the United Nations”.

“For Amnesty, an alleged human-rights organisation, to celebrate such an individual is astonishing, and only confirms their own political and ideological bias and indifference to the acts of a murderous terrorist regime,” she said.

Anne Herzberg, a legal adviser to NGO Monitor, said: “The award by Amnesty to Francesca Albanese is just the latest example of the moral degradation of the once-respected organisation.”

Ms Herzberg claimed that the UN rapporteur had initially denied the mass rape of Israelis by Hamas on Oct 7.

In October 2024, Ms Albanese told an interviewer: “But what’s the need to talk about mass rapes? There is no evidence of rape, which doesn’t mean that rape didn’t occur, but there is no evidence.”

The following month, she described reports of mass rape as among the “fabrications” surrounding the Hamas-led attacks, alongside other “horror stories”.

Her remarks came despite a UN investigation having found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that rape had occurred during the atrocities.

Ms Albanese has since insisted that she has never denied that sexual abuse occurred.

Reader views

Alyson Silcox
These ‘kind’ organisations are not kind at all. There are too many to mention.
Reply 15 0

Jonny Wiltshire
This is why giving to charity is a bad idea. As explained by Ralph Waldo Emerson, you have absolutely no idea ... show more
Replies (2) 16 1

Jay
Thi
pec
ide

Have your say

An Amnesty International spokesman said: “Amnesty International supports the independent work of UN special procedures, including the mandate of the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Francesca Albanese.

“We stand with all those who face threats, intimidation, smear campaigns or unfounded attacks for documenting human-rights violations, seeking justice for victims, and working to prevent and end atrocity crimes.

“Attempts to discredit or silence those carrying out legitimate human-rights work undermine accountability and the protection of human rights.

“Amnesty International takes allegations of anti-Semitism very seriously. Anti-Semitism is antithetical to human rights and has no place within our organisation.

“We remain committed to ensuring that our movement’s culture, language and practices consistently reflect our human-rights principles.

“Regarding the question about Amnesty’s Ambassador of Conscience award, we are only able to comment on events that have been formally communicated through Amnesty’s official channels.”

Sign up to Cables: The Telegraph's world affairs newsletter

Your daily briefing of international news, analysis and in-depth reporting, plus a window into what people are talking about in capitals around the world.

Sign up →