

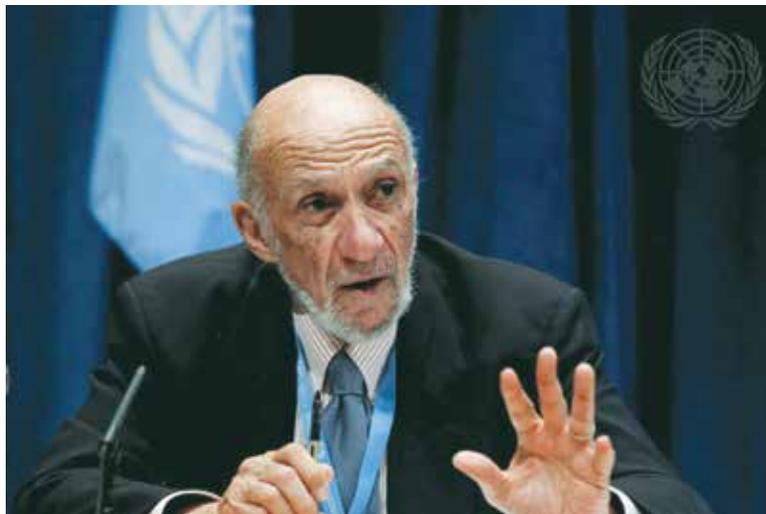
Prof. Richard Falk to the IPC

It's Time To Defeat the 'Politics of Deflection'

This is an edited transcript of remarks by Prof. Richard A. Falk, delivered to the 44th meeting of the International Peace Coalition on April 5, 2024. Prof. Falk is an American professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University, and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor. He served as the United Nations "Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967" from 2008 to 2014, the position now held by Francesca Albanese, whom Prof. Falk discusses in this statement. Prof. Falk himself was stopped by Israeli officials upon his first visit to the region after his 2008 appointment as Special Rapporteur in Palestine, was held in a filthy holding cell, and was regularly subjected to personal attacks during his tenure.

Friends, I'm sorry not to be able to be with you in person and for the duration of the meeting. But I did want to take this opportunity to say something about the vicious attack that has been directed at Francesca Albanese, who is the UN Special Rapporteur for occupied Palestine, and has recently issued a report in that role, a formal report with the title, "Anatomy of a Genocide," which is, in my judgment, the most objective and meticulously researched and analyzed assessment of the genocidal dimensions of what Israel has been doing in Gaza since October 8th or 9th—however you want to delimit the start of their onslaught—against the people of Gaza, numbering 2.3 or possibly 2.4 million. Francesca succeeds in this role.

In my own prior experience as Special Rapporteur for Occupied Palestine, I also endured a series of smears, death threats and unpleasantness, both from very pro-Zionist, Geneva-based NGOs and the organized sort of Jewish press around the world, and from various officials that were aligned with Israel. I had the insight that those that were making the smearing remarks knew they were untrue; [that] they were not



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Prof. Richard Falk, former UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian occupied territories.

trying to identify anti-Semites, which is what the principal accusation was; that this kind of criticism of Israel could only be understood as a form of anti-Semitism and, in my case, additionally compounded by [my] being a "self-hating Jew."

Those who made those smears realized they were doing something that was dishonest and untruthful. But they were motivated pragmatically and opportunistically by what I have called a "politics of deflection"—making people focus on the messenger rather than to examine the message. And it's a very effective means of sidelining substantive criticism and discussion. It has been called the weaponizing of anti-Semitism, and it draws on European guilt about the Holocaust that lingers, particularly in Germany, but also generally the base of Zionist support in the U.S. Those are the two principal foundations of this kind of behavior.

But for an unpaid civil servant like Francesca, who has devoted incredible time and energy to the task of depicting a pattern of violating the basic rights of the Palestinian people, it is deplorable to treat her in this manner, and shocking that the U.S. State Department spokesman echoed the sentiments of this kind of smear diplomacy, by confirming their belief that Francesca Albanese is indeed an anti-Semite, which is completely

false, and just helps distract attention from, in this case, a crucial substantive focus on the most original, transparent genocide in all of history, in the sense that other genocides and past genocides, including the Holocaust, have all been understood only in retrospect.

This is a case where the perceptions of people around the world are taking place in real time, with overwhelming evidence that is supplied by the image of injury that is shown nightly on TV and by the self-justifying language used by Israeli leadership to dehumanize the Palestinian people. So, the genocide is hidden beneath an avalanche of misleading and dehumanizing statements of genocidal intent. And what has also appalled me from the beginning is the willingness of the liberal democracies of the West to endorse this behavior. It exceeds my sense of what this kind of unholy alliance, which has gone on for decades with Israel, would be prepared to do.

One context has been the U.S. contempt for international law that has been exhibited throughout the crisis

and can be summarized by its attack on South Africa for daring to bring a complaint to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, by saying that it was an allegation without merit. Yet, a near-unanimous number of judges among the 17 that participated found that not only had it legal merit, but it was persuasive legally that Israel was guilty of what they called a “plausible genocide.”

Let me only add to this the view that we are at a real inflection point in human experience, in the sense that those societies that have presented themselves to the world as the custodians of democracy and human rights, have now so dramatically and systemically discredited themselves, and at the expense of a heroic personality who has been willing to swim against this bloody tide. We should all support people of good will and strong conscience; should support Francesca Albanese in resisting this kind of smearing effort to discredit her report and to practice this diplomacy and politics of deflection.