



Sanctioned, Isolated & Silenced: Francesca Albanese

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Chris Hedges (CH): Francesca Albanese, the special rapporteur in the occupied Palestinian territories comprising the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, is one of the singular most courageous voices against the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the savage repression meted out to Palestinians in the West Bank. Her detailed UN reports have been fearless examinations of the machinery of apartheid and genocide and Israel's disregard for international humanitarian law. She has been viciously attacked. The Trump administration ordered the US Department of Treasury to classify her as a specially designated national, cutting her off from the global financial system and blocking any US citizen and corporation from engaging with her. All of her US assets have been frozen. She is unable to carry out routine financial transactions. She has paid for her courage and her honesty. Her book, *When The World Sleeps: Stories, Words, and Wounds of Palestine*, lifts up the voices of Palestinians, many of whom she knows and others, in ten short chapters to expose the human cost of Israel's occupation and mass slaughter. She draws from her own experience living in Palestine, weaving her chapters around individuals who give a human face to the suffering. These include Malak Mattar, an artist who fled Gaza to Egypt and who suffers tremendous guilt for those he left behind, as well as Eyal Weizman, who opened her eyes to Israel's vertical politics, the three-dimensional use of physical space employed by Israel to control airspace and subsoil, as well as horizontal borders. She excoriates the Western press, the world's diplomats, for creating a false sense of equivalency in the conflict, as if Palestinians stand on equal footing with their occupiers. Palestinians do not have an air force, heavy weapons, mechanised units, a navy, or billions in military aid from the United States and Israel's European allies. It cannot structurally subordinate Israelis' control, their movement and access to land, air and water, or the flow of goods essential to maintain a minimum quality of life. To use words like war and conflict masks the truth, it presents a false version of reality. Israel's apartheid system and genocide cannot be stopped until it is acknowledged and understood, she writes. This requires not only knowledge but empathy. She, fortunately, is endowed with both.

Joining me to discuss her new book *When The World Sleeps* is Francesca Albanese.

Francesca I want to begin with the case of Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya. He has been jailed by the Israelis for 18 months since the 27th of December 2024. He was the, of course, the head of a hospital in Gaza and there's very disturbing news from his attorney, Nasser Odeh. He's been moved to this underground prison, Rakevet, that used to be closed, and Ben Gvir has reopened, has no light; it's a severe detention facility. And when Dr. Abu Safiya arrived for the attorney's visit, he was handcuffed, shackled in leg irons accompanied by masked prison guards and his attorney saw fresh and severe bruises on his body, especially on his head around his eyes ears and neck and the lawyer said it was hard to recognise him. He struggled to breathe, he struggled to speak, he appeared extremely weak. He was terrified, he was in severe distress, he couldn't express himself for fear, he said of retaliation. And he told his lawyer that after his hearing took place on June 10, 2026, regarding the appeal to the Supreme Court against the extension of his incarceration order, four or five prison guards entered his cell, beat him on all parts of his body with a hammer and batons and he's basically suffered daily violence, lost consciousness several times. And as you write in the book, this isn't the first time that Israeli doctors have died within Israeli prisons. You had Dr. Adnan Al-Bursh, a surgeon and head of orthopaedics at Al-Shifa. This was after severe torture, perhaps sexual torture. You had Dr. Iyad al-Rantisi, the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital's maternity unit. I just want to speak to this kind of very urgent case. His lawyer, Physicians for Human Rights, Amnesty International, and others are at this point saying his life is in danger and I think he actually told his lawyer in court that this would be the last time – that he was finished, I think, or something like this.

Francesca Albanese (FA): Thank you very much Chris, for having me. The situation of Dr. Abu Safiya is extremely, extremely serious, extremely painful. He told his lawyer that he doesn't think he will survive. Imagine how painful it is for a man who's been unlawfully detained, he's held without charges, without trial, severely beaten, with signs of torture, as you said, I don't need to repeat this, but I got this message from his family yesterday they were imploring me to do something for their beloved one. And the sense of powerlessness is incredible. So there are three dimensions here. One, the fact that he's a very well respected doctor who's been injured himself, who has survived the loss of one of his children, his child was killed during this genocide. And this notwithstanding, he went back to work and he stayed there. He stayed in a hospital under siege. He said, I cannot leave my patients behind. He had to surrender to the Israeli army as a way not to have the hospital raided. In any case, the patients were displaced anyway. And so what is done to the man is incredible. Again, he's been held for 18 months now, and there is no charge, just proof, visible evidence of severe abuse. He's lost half of his weight. He's emaciated. He has visible signs of bruises. He looks terrified. And he's a doctor. This is part and parcel of a continuous relentless attack that Israel has conducted against medical personnel, medical facilities that have been reduced to nothing, which is also the way to ensure that whatever wound, whatever disease, whatever illness that the Palestinians trapped in the Gaza nightmare have, they won't be able to be cured.

The second aspect is torture; it is heavily documented. I've reported with another Special

Rapporteur who received a notice already in January 2024, the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Reem Alsalem, severe violence, abuse and rape against female inmates. So we reported it and after there have been denunciations from PCATI, Physicians for Human Rights, B'tselem, multiple reports denouncing torture and the network of torture centres that Israeli prisons had turned into. Then the Committee Against Torture has documented the recourse to torture as a state policy. Later in 2025 I have documented torture after the Commission on Israel and Palestine also reported torture as an act of genocide. There is no doubt whatsoever that torture exists, and in the face of this, and this is the third element which this shocking, is the sense of impunity that Israel continues to enjoy. Because it's absolutely normal that there was a huge campaign to bring the Israeli hostages home. I just wonder why there is a selective empathy and there is no campaign to bring the Palestinian hostages as Dr. Abu Safiya home and there are 10,000 people detained by Israel who maintain an unlawful occupation. So this speaks to the moral decay of global leadership and also many of us enjoying the summer indifferently.

CH: So this is from your book: "The torture and killing of nearly a thousand health workers is a key component of the destruction of the health care system." You're quoting one of the people you write about, Ghassan, in the book. "The Al-Shifa hospital can rebuild in a couple of years. It took twelve years to train a doctor", you're talking about Dr. Adnan al-Bursh who was probably tortured to death. "Considering the main medical specialists that Gaza urgently needs, it can be said that of the five pathologists present before October 7th, only two are still alive. In Gaza there are no qualified doctors to perform emergency surgery." And then you talk about how a worker, a healthcare worker in Gaza is two and a half times more likely than any other individual to be killed. I just want to stay on that. Doesn't Israel hold 18 Palestinian surgeons? That number may fluctuate or change, but I think it's about that. I just want to talk about the savagery directed at medical workers who don't carry weapons, who under international law, under the Geneva Convention are completely exempt from being treated as combatants.

FA: Israel has blurred the distinction between civilians and combatants times and times again during its occupation, its nearly 60-year-long occupation of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. What it has done, though, in the last 1,005, 1,007 days, is humanitarian camouflage. Israel has used the categories of international humanitarian law and capsized them. So in order to have a more convincing narrative at the international level and reduce criticism, it has accused everyone, everyone in Gaza to be Hamas, a terrorist, a terrorist accomplice, and two doctors were protecting Hamas, hospitals were allegedly Hamas headquarters. I mean, you might remember, the audience might remember the video that was shared simulating the presence of a Hamas headquarter built underground under the Al-Shifa hospital, it was a lie. You might remember the Israeli generals pointing to the Hamas schedule of attacks, which was a medical shift, in fact, just because it was written in Arabic, so it was easy to convince the audience that this was a Hamas planning found in a hospital. So this is how Israel has convinced ignorant people, or naturally proponents to bias people that every doctor could be a potential terrorist and henceforth deserving to be punished, arrested, detained, or killed, tortured, whatever. But so there is no civilian, no innocent

civilian as many, many leaders, many Israeli leaders have said. And therefore everyone was to be considered guilty until proven innocent. This has always been the norm, but they've endured a treatment which includes extrajudicial killing, torture, and again, this is the blowing of the international humanitarian legal system, which is premised upon distinguishing between civilians and combatants, civilian objects and military personnel.

So yes, you're right when you say aren't medical personnel, medical workers and hospitals protected under international humanitarian law? Surely so, and for two reasons, both as civilians and second, because they serve an incredibly important and vital function in a situation of hostilities, helping continue to provide medical care. But this is exactly why Israel has targeted the medical system. This is why Israel has killed and tortured and maimed over a thousand medical personnel in order to make sure that the people in Gaza have no redress, no medical medical support. This is part and parcel, part and parcel of the genocide. What I find, however, incredibly disturbing is the fact that how and again – now I'm investigating, as I speak, the role of the media. There was a video that I shared from the BBC speaking of Dr. Abu Safiya yesterday. It was a two minute/ three minute video, and most of it instead of talking about the torture, how visibly abused the doctor appears, the fact that he's been detained without a charge for 18 months and the fact that he reports his fear of being killed, of having been taken in these dark places, in this dungeon in order to be killed, the journalist, the BBC journalist goes on and on and on saying – I mean, casting doubt about him as an Hamas acolyte. This is the point. Western audiences do not even have the opportunity to understand what's happening because legacy media, instead of scrutinising, has amplified the Israeli narrative. This is not journalism. This is complicity, complicity with genocidal propaganda.

CH: Which has been true from the beginning. Israel started attacking hospitals and at once denying that they were responsible although we now know from the genocide that this was Israeli policy from the beginning to eradicate the health care system. And the press dutifully reported these lies. We should also be clear that the only journalists on the ground in Gaza were Palestinian; over 250 of whom have been killed, a large number, perhaps most, in targeted assassinations. So you call your book *When The World Sleeps*, unfortunately much of the world certainly the Western world including the media didn't sleep at all; they were completely complicit.

FA: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. I think that, like in any genocide, and I truly encourage people who feel so compassionate with Israel because of the Holocaust, I really encourage people to go and read for real what the Holocaust was and how Jewish people were treated before the Holocaust and even after the Holocaust because since the 60s, there has been such a manipulation of the memory of the Holocaust to serve the Zionist agenda. But the Jewish people have suffered transnational denigration from the media of the time as well. And this is so similar in a way to what's happening to the Palestinians with added elements that in 2026, we have a legal framework which should have prevented certain phenomena of decay and moral collapse in light of what has happened in the past. So we like to claim, we, I say we in the so-called West, but definitely the media has amplified the Israeli narrative and contributed

to portray the Palestinians as part of the problem to be eradicated. But the word sleeps; it is part of indifference, part of lack of knowledge, but even those who know, even those who see seem to be paralysed. And they seem not to understand that this moment of awakening requires action, requires change, change in every sphere of life. We cannot be the same in the time of genocide. This is the only thing that I keep on repeating over and over, that there is hope for a change. And we will stop this genocide, the moment even that those who are awakened, we will be able to connect it, that awakening to a sense of action and responsibility.

CH: Well, you write in the book, I think correctly, that the genocide in Gaza has kind of exposed a new and very frightening world order, one that has utter disregard for the rule of law. You write the crisis in Gaza is a symptom of a global crisis: "I think more and more often that all of this, while it is bound to instil fear, must give us courage. The system that represses the Palestinians, a well-established alliance between Israel and all the other states whose elites guarantee it. The impunity it has always enjoyed, is the same one to which we belong. It is the system that decides for us on issues that are crucial to our lives without listening to us and representing us. It's the system that transforms secure jobs into part-time and temporary work, writes into privileges that alienates us from each other, making us all more fragile and insecure, that considers solidarity a subversive act, and empathy a form of mental and social dysfunction." You actually talk about, for you, Palestine was the red pill in the matrix. Talk about that place Palestine and the genocide in that global context.

FA: Yeah, I think those who have read the book, and then I'd like also to say a few words about how difficult it's been to have this book made available to the US readership because there has been such pressure from pro-Israel support groups against it. You guess why. But for me Palestine has been a revealer. It's not that all of a sudden we woke up in a world that is dominated by the US. I mean, especially the world we are part of politically, militarily, strategically, the US is the dominant character here, and Israel is a sort of extension of it in the Middle East, is an extension of Western power and Western supremacy. I know that Israelis do not like it. But I do also believe that they do not realise how instrumentalized they are because of interests that are above all of us. We tend to think in terms of states as the ultimate decision makers. We think of it in democracies, we think of it in dictatorships, but in fact, I don't think that states are the decision makers, states today more than before, more than a few decades ago, respond to certain interests, economic, military, and financial interests that are connected to the main power holders in this world, and there are numbers. What I'm saying may sound like conspiracy theories to people who might not know enough about the inequality of the world.

Thomas Piketty Institute in its most recent inequality report mentions this data, which I found shocking, staggering, the fact that half of the world's population detains altogether one third of the wealth, which is detained by 50,000 people in the world. I repeat, 50,000 people in the world detain three times the wealth of half of the world population. How is it possible? Who are these? Clearly they are not just individuals like you and I. They detain pockets of power. And it's those connected to the extractive industry for the control of natural resources. Those

connected to securing the use of force, military power and surveillance. And those connected to financial transactions, corporations, and banks and pension funds. So these are the main powers with certain corporations like pharmaceuticals, more influential than others, those related to tourism, for example. However, this is the brain power with these 50,000 people. And today there is also big tech. They are above the law. I mean, when you try to sue corporations, you are inundated with problems, with issues, with more legal issues, with more litigation. And so it's impossible to face this. Palestine has revealed this world order. Palestine has been the epicentre of it. Because this is the reason why I was sanctioned for that report, *The Economy of Occupation and Economy of Genocide*, that we discussed earlier last year, Chris. But again, explaining to the world that while the economy of many Israeli families and individuals was collapsing, the stock exchange of Tel Aviv was rising, skyrocketing, doubling, tripling its value has been a revelation. So there was someone profiting from the genocide and these are Palantir and the likes, these are Lockheed Martin and the likes, the military industry, not just Israeli and the US, but they are all connected. And because we are all connected, this is the second and last part of the story, we are part of it. We are part of it as consumers, we are part of this as producers, because you know how many trade unionists or workers have been speaking with us over the past two years. You know how many consumers I have been speaking to?! And they say the same, you know how difficult it is to get out of this market. You know that we would like not to work for this company, which is, for example, connected in Italy to the military industry, like Leonardo. But they're scared of losing their job. They realise that their fragility is part of the system because they have to choose between producing weapons that are used to kill children and not working at all. This means that we are part of, or we are seeing pockets of populations who are just sacrificial; they are sacrificial entities, sacrificial beings. And probably we can change this order. This is the other thing that Palestine is telling us; through boycotting, divesting, we can break the ties of the system. And through sanctions, we can curtail the complicity with Israel. But this requires individual commitment.

CH: And I should say I was in Italy with you last November joining the dock workers who have refused to load weapons onto Israeli ships. I think both you and I feel that is where all of our energy should go, that kind of blockage of the system. People can watch an hour-long documentary on it called *Resistance 101* if you type in my and *Resistance 101*. You write in the book that when you were at the School of Oriental and African Studies you discovered two fundamental things, the first was that Palestine could and should be discussed as a legal issue of protracted institutional and systematic illegality not simply as a political issue with opposing claims, the second thing you said you discovered was the encounter with law firms influenced by critical race theory, a way of understanding law in a critical and decolonial key, framing it in the historical evolution, not necessarily written by the victors, but observed from the perspective of the people who, until recent times, have been subjected to international law as it has been formulated above all by Western countries. I do want to talk about the sanctions against your book, but just address those two points if you could first.

FA: [00:27:16] Absolutely. And even here, I think that Palestine epitomises what happens to, let's say, to the most disadvantaged part of the world, the former colonies, people whose

indigeneity has been experienced as a as a toll, almost as a crime in the eyes of the coloniser, Palestine are among them. And Palestinians have always been projected as potential savages, for example, when I think of Western media, they're always the ones deemed barbaric or recurring to violence. I mean the discourse concerning Arab people, Muslim people, is so vicious, violent violent that I say, how do we not connect the dots and understand that this is the way we were talking about the Jewish people 100 years ago, and probably less, because there is still antisemitism, and we should talk of the real antisemitism instead of apartheid Israel's paranoia and manipulation of what antisemitism means. But, however, I think that for a long time Palestinians have been, even by those well-intended, proposed, presented as a humanitarian issue, as a humanitarian issue to be managed instead of a critical political issue, to be resolved in line with international law. For example, now the International Court of Justice, so there is an international tribunal, which has pronounced itself on the fact that the occupation is unlawful. Henceforth, it is to be dismantled totally and unconditionally. The deadline was September 2025. No one is talking about that, but this is why I say the international law already offers a roadmap, a way out of this quagmire. And instead the situation continues to be treated as if it was a humanitarian emergency after an earthquake or as after a flood. I think that this is part of the problem, which is also intimate to what has gone wrong within the United Nations. However, international law has been used often as part of the problem because I remember 15 years ago it was unthinkable to look at the occupation as a whole, as a whole illegal endeavour. Even those who were progressive back then used to refer to the legality of the occupation because of Israel's occupation violating such and such provision of international and humanitarian law. For example, abusing the detainees or translating into abusive practises toward leading to home demolitions, punitive home demolitions. So it was criticised because of its excesses, but not ontologically, not in its entirety, which today is normal. And I think it's because there has been finally a shift, I hope to, as a Special Rappateur, to have helped that effort, but there has been a shift from addressing the symptom type of approach to looking at the overall phenomenon of the illegality of the occupation. Critical studies have played an enormous role and critical studies are primarily animated by scholars from the global majority, from South Africa, from Kenya, from Nigeria, from Palestine, from the indigenous scholars themselves, from Australia or Canada and the United States or Asia. And this is beautiful. I think that this has helped us progress as lawyers, but of course, of course there is still a lot of patronising attitude and chauvinism in legal studies, as in many other disciplines and realms.

CH: So let's talk about what's happened to the book, but let's begin with the broader sanctions. You were sanctioned, as I mentioned in the introduction, you won a court case that lifted those sanctions, and then the Trump administration turned around and reimpose them. And that, of course, has I mean, you can talk about that process, that has affected your ability to even publish and disseminate this book.

FA: In a way yes, in a way, yes, absolutely. I would like people to spend a moment to reflect upon what freedom of expression means. Because here we are outside the physiology of a democratic debate. The moment you prevent someone you do not agree with to speak, this is no longer a liberal space. You and I do not have to agree, people can disagree with me. But I

will always protect the right of those who think differently from me to speak because this is the essence of a democratic space. This is the essence of protection of freedom of expression. All the more, I mean, I'm protected as a UN person who's voluntarily, I serve on a pro-bono basis just for those who are wondering, the United Nations, and I'm a protected person under the Convention on Privileges and Immunities. So I shouldn't face consequences for words spoken or actions taken in the exercise of my mandate, in the execution of my mandate. Instead, I've been sanctioned and very severe instruments taken normally against drug dealers or dictators in the US and this time to sanction me, the judges and prosecutors of the International Criminal Court who have investigated Israel's crimes and Palestinian human rights organisations who have provided evidence for those trials. So you see, there is also such an attempt to strangle and tamper with evidence and strangle the international justice system that the US helped to create with the Nuremberg trial and after the Nuremberg trial, so it's vicious. And because of it, people in the US cannot entertain financial interactions with me of any nature, including a glass of water, is the commission of a felony, which means up to 20 years in jail and up to \$1,000 in fines for those who are caught provoking an economic advantage to me.

So even my publisher Other Press has faced a huge pressure um they had to hire a lawyer in order to find a way to publish the book because Judith Gurewich who really liked the book and she was first one, the first one, Other Press has been the first one to offer to translate the book, which is now available in 60 countries and in 20 languages, but the English one should have been the first to come out in the US, in Australia and in the UK. But apart from the longer process of publishing in the US, there has been a huge opposition in order not to have my book published and distributed. So I said, look, I don't care, I don't need to claim the copyright of this as I'm sanctioned. I don't want the publisher to go in trouble. I want people to read this book. So we found a way for me to keep on sort of working pro bono even as a writer and I said it doesn't matter, I still want the book to be read and this was the only agreement we could find to have *When The World Sleeps* available in US bookstores. One thing is that because the United Nations and no other states, certainly not Italy, found the courage to stand before the International Court of Justice, bringing a case against the US for violation of privileges and immunities of a UN person. My 13-year-old daughter, and my husband works for a US-based organisation, who are clearly directly impacted by the fact that my assets in the US, we own a small apartment in the US where my daughter was born, it's been taken, it has been frozen. My bank account was shut down and I've not been able to open a bank account anywhere else, so I cannot be paid, I cannot even be reimbursed for medical expenses, and even my private insurance doesn't reimburse me anymore. You know, it's a very heavy situation and because it affects my entire family they recur to justice, because the United Nations didn't even give me the possibility to defend myself in court, so my 13-year-old daughter brought to court President Trump and Secretary of State Rubio and others involved in the sanction. And in the first instance, the federal judge in the first district court in Washington D.C. recognised the fact that the proceeding appeared not to be right, to have persecuted me just for exercising freedom of expression and so proposed to suspend the sanctions. And then because of the system and because of the fact that there are judges appointed by the executive, there was an appeal against the suspension of the order of the

sanctions, and now I need to wait until the judge pronounces itself on the merit, so I'm still sanctioned by the US.

CH: Let's talk a little bit about Gaza in the book you write about President Trump, this is you, "has repeatedly intimidated anyone who dares to touch Israel saying that they will have to quote 'deal with us', a threatening language unbefitting of politics as we have known it until now, but which is entirely consistent with the substance of what Trump himself said when he declared, quote, 'everyone I've spoken to likes the idea that the United States owns that piece of land' – referring to the Gaza Strip. In this sentence," you write, "there is all the violence of an unbridled power that can achieve everything through force, because like Caligula of the 21st century considers himself above the law. In fact he doesn't even know the law." I want to talk about his proposal for Gaza and of course Hamas has said that they would step aside for a technocratic government. I don't think that any appeasement that Hamas makes is going to placate Netanyahu, but let's address that.

FA: Yeah. First of all, I think that you are the first interviewer who picks on the fact that I define Trump, the Caligula of our time; yeah, but it's real. I mean, you don't need to be an expert on Roman history to understand what Caligulas' features were and the absolute arbitrary power unconstrained by the law, the extreme narcissism and self-aggrandisement, the corrupt preciousness and erratic nature of power, the humiliation of opponents, the cult of personality, all of this, all this makes me think of Caligula, the Roman Emperor. I said when Trump came out with this Gaza Riviera thing in February, 2025, I said three things. It's unlawful because the United States has no right whatsoever to decide or to speak or decisively of the future of Gaza or the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory or Palestine or frankly any part of the world, full stop. Because there is something called the right of self-determination of people. And the Palestinians have the right to self-determination vis-à-vis Israel, vis-a-vis the United States and anyone else. It's unlawful and this would entail, this would embroil the United States in a different set of crimes, like the crimes of forced displacement, because if these would entail the forced displacement of Palestinians, and as Israel is doing. I said it's unlawful and it's immoral, because what on earth would push the president of the United States to say something so disrespectful toward the population at the time of the greatest suffering that the latter is enduring. And then I said, it's irresponsible. Because it will foster more, it will prompt more sense of impunity and licence to kill, torture and displace among the Israeli leaders, which is in fact what has happened. So it's unlawful, immoral, irresponsible. This is what I said and this is what I still think.

However, I also think that the Gaza Riviera is a distraction. I don't think that anyone is really planning to have a Riviera in Gaza. Gaza has been ungrounded. Gaza has been made unlivable. I already started researching for a next report I want to write about ecocide. So but what this current US administration is surely the champion of among many, is the psychological overwhelming of its audiences, including us in Europe. Every day in this part of the world, in Europe, we wake up with a new shocking thing said by President Trump; might be the Gaza Riviera or might be that he's intervening in the World Cup in a way that only Caligula would do if he was with us today in 2026. Because the inexistent self-restraint

of this man is incomparable, incomparable. So I do think that this is a way to distract us from the real plans of again, displacing the Palestinians and using Gaza as an extension of Israel, but probably for economic purposes. I keep on thinking of why Netanyahu has brandished over and over the plan to have a gas duct that goes from the Arab countries, Gulf countries into the Mediterranean through southern Israel and probably Gaza. Because this is something that is going to be convenient for Israel. But in any case, whatever the plan they might have, it remains unlawful, immoral and irresponsible.

CH: So we should be clear, there are extensive gas fields in southern Lebanon and on the northern coast of Gaza that Israel wants.

FA: Exactly, exactly. And this is why there is a need to scrutinise each and every company involved in it because these amounts for the companies themselves is in the crime of pillage. You know recently and I can think that it was also following external pressure from myself, the working group on Business and Human Rights, Italian civil society, and probably also internal from conscientious people working for the company that the energy giant ENI went out of the consortium to exploit those fields of offshore gas in Gaza. And again, this is why we need to pressure both states and companies to disengage and divest from the Israeli occupation.

CH: Well, those gas fields are in the territorial waters of Lebanon and Palestine, correct?

FA: Yes, these gas fields are outside Lebanon, outside historical Palestine, so Israel and Gaza. Gaza toward Egypt.

CH: I want to close with this, you write about children and what's done to children by Israel. You write: "I attended several trials against minors, I've seen with my own eyes their absurd brutality." You're talking about the Israelis. "The children were brought into the courtroom in chains and I felt like I was watching scenes of slaves and labour camps. Small, emaciated, exhausted, anxious at the thought that for the first time since their arrest, they would be seeing their parents again in these hearings that lasted no more than a few minutes. The judge often did not even look at them. He heard the charge – he was throwing stones – and handed down the sentence. Two years in prison, three years in prison, and so on. And that's a generous judge. Given that the punishment for Palestinians who throw stones is up to ten years, 20 if done with the intention of harming someone. How can anyone be surprised that when jailed Palestinian children return home they are traumatised, do not want to go out, are afraid, wet the bed, and exhibit disturbances or violent behaviour? We are talking about 12, 13, 14 year old kids, but even younger kids are arrested. There were children as young as five or six being taken away by Israeli trucks, perhaps not detained but interrogated and then sent home." Let's talk about this and of course this war on children has reached epic kind of proportions in Gaza where children if they walk too close to the yellow are just killed by snipers.

FA: It's interesting, Chris, because I used exactly the same words you just used a few weeks ago in another interview, saying the war on childhood has reached epic proportions in

Palestine. And you can see that. I mean, it was already quite bad, probably when you and I were living, I mean at the various times we've been living in Palestine, because there has never been the possibility to enjoy childhood for kids who risk to have their homes demolished, their schools demolished their teachers, parents, uncles, either killed or arrested, and then returning like zombies because they've been beaten and tortured and sometimes raped in prison and so coming back and having so much repressed rage, anger and violence, so the entire life of a Palestinian child is contaminated by violence, is hijacked by violence and overdedicates the horizons of hope, has been shrinking and shrinking, but what I've seen happening in the last 1,005 days since October, 2023 is of another league. And this interrogates both Israelis, Israelis who think they are bystanders and bystanders around the world. What else? Whatever you qualify what Israel does, but have you seen the bodies of the kids turned into pieces? Have you seen bodies of kids hanging or what remains of them hanging from walls as if they were coats? Have you seen mutilated bodies? I mean, Gaza is the place with the highest number or highest ratio of orphan children in the world, and amputated children in the world. And now there is starvation and there is misery, there is malnutrition, stunting. Stunting was already an issue before, during the blockade, before the tightening of the blockades after October 23. And you don't even need to go to Gaza. Look at the West Bank where Palestinians live and including children live under threat of being assaulted by soldiers or under constant threat of settlers' terror. Who would like to live in a system like that? And again, it didn't start on October 23. It's been ongoing for decades. And again, I can only say, the only way forward is that we say to Israel's violence: no more. And we let children enjoy a bit of life. Look, the first chapter of my book, because each chapter, for those who have not read it, each chapter has a sort of Virgil in Dante's Divine Comedy, is a character, leading, who was a real person, existed for real; most of them are friends of mine who belonged to my life except for for one, Hind Rajab, the child who gives the name to the to the chapter. I wrote this chapter in general in January 2025 so one year after his death. So this was a well-known case among many, among thousands, but not as well known as it is today. And still it is one among hundreds of thousands. It's one of the tens of thousands of children brutally killed by the Israeli army. And then the chapter talks about my experience with Palestinian children, which has been beautiful and uplifting, but still these kids carry a weight and preoccupations that is not for any child to hold, any child to carry.

CH: Well, you write in the book that when you actually did, I think when you were in Palestine and working for the UN, you did a report on children, but you talked about how these young children would speak to you and they sounded as if they were adults.

FA: Yeah, yeah, it's almost disturbing at times because there is someone in our mind, I mean, and again, and this is not that I don't have biases, I mean I try to be as open as possible, but you know I have two children myself and so I have my own way to measure the maturity of a child. So when you find that ten year old or a 13 year old who starts mentioning the right to education, the right to food, the right to health, you say, mmh, you know, maybe it's being taught to speak like that because they had to meet with me. But I have met these kids times and times again, because I've had focus groups all often with the same children and I came to know them a little bit during the two or three months of investigation, even if I couldn't go

there, I spent the summer of 2024, July and August and part of September speaking almost every day to Palestinian children and I can tell you the reason why they are so knowledgeable is because they've been forced to grow so fast and still find a peaceful way to overcome the horror in front of and in front off and around them. So the fact that I could find almost destabilising the fact that they were speaking as young lawyers, as I say in the book, is out of despair. They try to remain safe in a world and healthy, mentally healthy, in a world that is horrifically unhealthy for them and horrifically unfair to them.

CH: And of course, one of the chapters centres around Gabor Maté, who deals with this kind of trauma.

FA: Yes, I had a beautiful, beautiful talk with Gabor Maté about my book, *When The World Sleeps*, a couple of days ago, and we were talking about the characters in the book, what they evoke. It was weird for him at a certain point to say, I'm also a character in there. He asked me if I feel like screaming at times, yeah I wish, I wish, I don't. I don't know, yes of course at times you want to scream at politicians who seem like dead men walking but dead men walking not because death is awaiting them at the next corner it's just because they seem empty of life, empty of humanity. I say: What else do you need to see, whatever you want to call it, but what else does Israel need to do and say for you to take measures, for you to take international law seriously and do it? Because by letting Israel ravage the realm of international law with impunity, you're also destroying the foundations of the international legal systems. I mean, I feel the pain, but it's also a weird way of how we protect ourselves by numbing the pain. And so I think that I will probably be able to process what I've, the trauma of this. I mean. The secondary trauma of being exposed because nothing compares to what the Palestinians endure. The Palestinians in Gaza, the Palestinians in Israel, the Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the Palestinians in diaspora. But our secondary trauma, by being exposed, by being witnesses to this, I will probably be able to deal with it once the genocide is over, because right now I really try to stay healthy. And focused on how to bring this to an end. Because it's not over and people need to understand that the end of injustice doesn't happen because we want it or because we pray for it, we need to act. There are things that we need to do and we need to persevere. It doesn't matter if it takes one day, ten days, 100 days or 1,000 days, we need to persevere, this is the only way to win over injustice.

CH: It took us 14 years to get Julian Assange free, so that's a long fight, but you're certainly one of the most important figures in that fight for justice. Thank you, Francesca. I want to thank Thomas and Max who produced the show. You can find me at chrishedges.substack.com.

FA: Thank you. Thank you so much, everyone. Thank you, Chris.

END

Thank you for reading this transcript. Please don't forget to donate to support our independent and non-profit journalism:

BANKKONTO:

Kontoinhaber: acTVism München e.V.
Bank: GLS Bank
IBAN: DE89430609678224073600
BIC: GENODEM1GLS

PAYPAL:

E-Mail:
PayPal@acTVism.org

PATREON:

<https://www.patreon.com/acTVism>

BETTERPLACE:

Link: [Click here](#)