

The 13th anniversary of Rachel Corrie's death

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<https://palsolidarity.org/2016/03/the-13th-anniversary-of-rachel-corries-death/>

Today marks the thirteenth anniversary since the passing of fellow ISM activist Rachel Corrie (April 10, 1979 – March 16, 2003). Rachel was tragically crushed to death under the front blade of an Israeli military, American funded, Caterpillar D9R bulldozer near Rafah, in the southern part of the Gaza Strip. Rachel died whilst placing herself in the path of the military bulldozer to protect the family and their home that the bulldozer was on route for and due to be demolished. Rachel's death created a global outcry towards the Israeli military's actions and prompted an international investigation under the contested circumstances in which she died during the height of the second intifada.



Rachel Corrie

Rachel had come to Gaza during part of her senior-year college assignment that connected her home town with Rafah in a sister cities project. Whilst in Palestine, Rachel had engaged with other International Solidarity Movement (ISM) activists in efforts to prevent the Israeli army's continued demolition of Palestinian homes in operations that the Israeli military claims were aimed at eliminating weapons smuggling tunnels.



<https://youtu.be/O3JI-axaRF4>

Less than two months after Rachel had arrived into Palestine, on March 16, 2003, Corrie was killed. Her death came during an Israeli military operation after a three-hour peaceful demonstration between occupying Israeli forces operating two armoured bulldozers and eight ISM activists.



Rachel Corrie after being crushed

The exact nature of her death and the culpability of the bulldozer operator have since been disputed largely through extended judicial proceedings, with fellow ISM protestors that were at the scene saying that the Israeli soldier operating the bulldozer deliberately ran over Corrie, and Israeli eyewitnesses saying that it was an accident since the bulldozer operator could not see her.

Joe Carr, an American ISM activist who used the assumed name of Joseph Smith during his time in Gaza, gave the following account: *“Still wearing her fluorescent jacket, she knelt down at least 15 meters in front of the bulldozer, and began waving her arms and shouting, just as activists had*

successfully done dozens of times that day.... When it got so close that it was moving the earth beneath her, she climbed onto the pile of rubble being pushed by the bulldozer.... Her head and upper torso were above the bulldozer's blade, and the bulldozer operator and co-operator could clearly see her. Despite this, the operator continued forward, which caused her to fall back, out of view of the driver. He continued forward, and she tried to scoot back, but was quickly pulled underneath the bulldozer. We ran towards him, and waved our arms and shouted; one activist with the megaphone. But the bulldozer operator continued forward, until Corrie was all the way underneath the central section of the bulldozer. "



A Caterpillar D9R bulldozer

Corrie's father, Craig Corrie has said "I know there's stuff you can't see out of the double glass windows." But he has denied that as a valid excuse, saying "you're responsible for knowing what's in front of your blade... It's a no brainer that this was gross negligence". He added that "they had three months to figure out how to deal with the activists that were there."

The report on the autopsy findings that were initially denied to the public by Israel were later revealed by the Human Rights Watch, who say a copy was provided to them by Craig Corrie, along with a translation provided by the U.S. Department of State. In the report they quote Professor Yehuda Hiss, who performed the autopsy, as concluding, "Her death was caused by pressure on the chest (mechanical asphyxiation) with fractures of the ribs and vertebrae of the dorsal spinal column and scapulas, and tear wounds in the right lung with haemorrhaging of the pleural cavities."

The Israeli army conducted an investigation into Corrie's death, which concluded that her death was an accident, and that the driver of the bulldozer could not see Corrie due to limited visibility

from his cab. Many have criticised the investigation as bogus and are outraged at the level of direct negligence displayed by the driver and the impunity that the Israeli army receives under Israeli law.

Corrie's family has been involved in ongoing legal battles through the Israeli supreme court in an attempt to attain justice for Rachel.

Following extended trials in an attempt to attain justice for their daughter, the Corrie family lost their latest appeal in the Israeli Supreme Court on the twelfth of February, 2015, exempting the Israeli defense ministry from liability for actions by its forces that it deemed to be "wartime activity," but wrongly refused to assess whether those actions violated applicable laws of armed conflict, Human Rights Watch said.

A statement from the Corrie family on the twelfth of February, 2015 read, *"Today we received word from our attorneys that the Supreme Court of Israel dismissed our appeal in the wrongful death case of our daughter and sister Rachel Corrie. Our family is disappointed but not surprised. We had hoped for a different outcome, though we have come to see through this experience how deeply all of Israel's institutions are implicated in the impunity enjoyed by the Israeli military."*



Cindy and Craig Corrie

Human Rights Watch documented that in the primary stages of Rachel's trial, Israeli investigators failed to call any Palestinian witnesses, threatened to indict other foreign volunteers who witnessed Corrie's death while questioning them about the incident, and failed even to ask witnesses to draw a map of the area at the time of the incident. The initial military inquiry into her death even concluded that "no signs substantiate [the] assertion that Ms. Corrie was run over by a bulldozer," a conclusion that the military later reversed.

Rachel's death is an extremely sad and timely reminder of the callous acts of negligence and the immunity that the Israeli military receives under Israeli law. However, Corrie's death is no way in vein nor is it forgotten. The spirit she displayed in her actions along with her will to take up the fight against injustice to those whom it is imposed upon by the Zionist regime will forever be remembered.



Rachel Corrie

At the time of her death, Yasser Arafat, the first President of the Palestinian Authority, offered his condolences and gave the "blessings of the Palestinian people" to Corrie. The municipality of Ramallah in the West Bank dedicated a street to Rachel Corrie whilst a cafe in Al-Khalil/Hebron bears her name. Yearly demonstrations are held in the name of Rachel by Palestinians and by activists for human rights alike. The memory and the fight for justice displayed by Rachel will not be forgotten and will continue to be remembered by those fighting the war of injustice and human rights abuses that plague the Palestinian people to this day and onwards, until occupation is non-existent and there is peace.



Rachel Corrie St. in Ramallah

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