

# Trial in killing of Rachel Corrie opens in Israel

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The trial in the civil suit brought by the family of Rachel Corrie, the 23-year-old American activist who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer seven years ago, began last week in Israel.

Corrie was crushed to death on March 16, 2003, as she participated in a nonviolent protest to try to prevent the demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied Gaza Strip. She was a member of the International Solidarity Movement, a group of Palestinian-led volunteers who were fighting to publicize, protest and attempt to prevent the destruction of Palestinian homes as the Israeli authorities constructed the notorious “security” wall in that area.

Corrie’s parents, Craig and Cindy Corrie, have explained that their aim is to shed new light on the killing of their daughter and show that the Israeli military was responsible.

“We hope this trial will...illustrate the need for accountability for thousands of lives lost, or indelibly injured, by the Israeli occupation and bring attention to the assault on non-violent human-rights defenders,” said Cindy Corrie, Rachel’s mother. “My family and I are still searching for justice. The brutal death of my daughter should never have happened. We believe the Israeli army must be held accountable for this unlawful killing.”

The family is seeking \$324,000 compensation for specific costs related to Rachel’s death, including the funeral and legal expenses. They are also seeking compensation for the family’s suffering and punitive damages from Israel.

One of the first to testify at the trial was British nurse Alice Coy, an eyewitness to the events of seven years ago. According to Coy’s testimony, the driver of the bulldozer that killed Rachel could see her. This contradicts Israel’s whitewash investigation, which

cleared the driver and the military of all wrongdoing, claiming that Corrie had been “hidden from view” behind a mound of earth.

Coy also said the Israeli military forces had already begun demolishing homes that day and were preparing to destroy more when Rachel was killed.

Numerous witnesses have contradicted the official story. Tom Dale, an eyewitness who was some 30 feet away when Corrie was killed, wrote an account only two days later describing how she had knelt in front of the bulldozer and then stood as it reached her. She climbed on a mound of earth as the nearby crowd shouted at the bulldozer to stop. “They pushed Rachel, first beneath the scoop, then beneath the blade, then continued till her body was beneath the cockpit,” Dale wrote.

Also testifying was Richard Purssell, another activist who had come from Britain to occupied Gaza. Purssell described the scene as the bulldozer approached the house. He said that Corrie was, like the other protesters, wearing an orange fluorescent jacket, and that she climbed onto a mound of soil and was “looking into the cab of the bulldozer” shortly before it ran her over.

“The bulldozer continued to move forward,” Purssell said. “Rachel turned to come back down the slope. The earth is still moving, and as she nears the bottom of the pile something happened which causes her to fall forward. The bulldozer continued to move forward and Rachel disappeared from view under the moving earth.” He then described how the bulldozer “stopped and reversed back along the track it first made. Rachel was lying on the earth. She was still breathing.” She died soon afterwards.

Coy and Purssell were among four key witnesses at the scene in the town of Rafah when Corrie was killed who will give evidence at the trial. They were at first

denied entry to Israel, but were finally given permission to testify. However, Ahmed Abu Nakira, a Palestinian doctor from Gaza who treated Corrie and later confirmed her death, has been denied permission to attend the trial, or to provide testimony over a video link.

According to a Human Rights Watch report, between 2000 and 2004, over 2,500 Palestinian homes were demolished by the Israeli military in Gaza. Nearly two-thirds of these were in Rafah, and more than 16,000 people, over 10 percent of its population, lost their homes. A report by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem exposed the claim by the authorities that prior warning was given before the destruction of Palestinian homes. Advanced warning was given in only 3 percent of the cases, it concluded.

Rachel Corrie was one of several foreign victims of Israeli occupation forces during the same period.

Iain Hook, 54, a British UN official, was shot dead by an Israeli army sniper in November 2002. His family received an undisclosed sum in compensation from the Israeli government. Just a few weeks after Rachel Corrie's death, Tom Hurndall, a 22-year-old British photography student, was shot in the head in Rafah while helping to pull Palestinian children to safety. An Israeli soldier was later sentenced to eight years for manslaughter. James Miller, 34, a British cameraman, was gunned down in Gaza in May 2003, with the Israeli authorities later paying about \$2.5 million in damages to his family. Only in the case of Hurndall was anyone held personally responsible for the death.

Despite the efforts of the Israeli authorities and their propagandists to dismiss the case of Rachel Corrie and to slander her as responsible for her own death, her struggle and sacrifice have become widely known in the seven years since she died.

The play, *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, based largely on her diary entries, was shown first in London and then New York and has since been seen around the world, including in Israel and the West Bank. *Rachel*, a film released last year, was due to be screened in Tel Aviv on March 16, the seventh anniversary of her death and in the midst of the current trial.

The interest in the life and death of Rachel Corrie is in spite of an ongoing media blackout in the US. The Associated Press and *Washington Post* carried only brief accounts of the opening of the trial in Haifa.

The handling of this case over the past seven years demonstrates the uniform and unquestioning backing given to the Zionist regime and its crimes against the Palestinian people by the US political and media establishment.



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