

On 12th Anniversary of Rachel Corrie's Death, Renewed Calls for Justice

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(Photo: [Robert Shetterly](#)/Americans Who Tell the Truth)

Corrie family demands US lawmakers 'address their responsibility to all civilians whose lives are cut short by military actions supported with U.S. taxpayer funding.'

Twelve years since their daughter Rachel was crushed to death by an Israeli military bulldozer while nonviolently protesting the destruction of Palestinian homes, Cindy and Craig Corrie on Monday said they are still seeking justice and answers regarding her death.

The anniversary comes just a month after the Israeli Supreme Court [ruled](#) that the Israeli Ministry of Defense had no liability for Rachel's death. However, Rachel's family on Monday paid a visit to the U.S. Senate and State Department to warn lawmakers of the dangerous precedent set by the ruling, which now places all citizens, journalists, and human rights observers in occupied Palestine at great risk.

Rachel was crushed to death at age 23 on March 16, 2003, by an Israeli military Caterpillar D9R bulldozer in Rafah, Gaza. She was in Gaza working as a human rights observer and was protesting the impending demolition of the home of a Palestinian family.

After a lengthy legal battle and repeated calls for investigation by activists, supporters, as well as both the Bush and Obama administrations, the Israeli Supreme Court on February 12 of this year upheld a lower court ruling that said Rachel was killed in a "war activity" for which the state bears no liability under Israeli law.

That verdict, Cindy Corrie [told](#) *Huff Post Live* on Monday, says the Israeli military can operate with impunity in the Gaza strip. "The court is reflecting the will of the Israeli Knesset making it impossible for any legal action to be brought against the Israeli military for any action," she said.

On Sunday, activists commemorating Rachel's death with a tree-planting protest ceremony were attacked by Israeli forces.

[According](#) to the *Middle East Eye*, IDF forces surrounded the protesters "firing live bullets" and then arrested two Palestinians, one of whom "fell unconscious while running away."

"Photographs of Corrie were hung on the newly planted trees, alongside pictures of other international activists killed or injured while involved in solidarity action in Palestine," the reporting noted.

The Corrie family says its purpose now is to press the U.S. government to uphold its own laws and withdraw support for Israel in the face of egregious human rights violations, such as the attack on Gaza this summer.

“We are not against the state of Israel, we are against apartheid,” Craig Corrie explained. “I think we can enforce U.S. laws that say that if our aid is being used for human rights violations there are consequences. The aid stops.”

“And of course,” Craig Corrie added, “the bulldozer that crushed our daughter was paid for by Cindy and my tax dollars.”

In a [statement](#) released on Monday, the Corrie family described their ongoing search for justice.

“Our family’s legal options in Israel are nearly exhausted, but our search for justice for Rachel goes forward,” they wrote. “Back in Washington D.C., we have come full circle. We ask again that U.S. officials address their responsibility to U.S. citizens and to all civilians whose lives are impacted and cut short by military actions supported with U.S. taxpayer funding. We ask that they determine what to do when a promise from a key ally’s head of state to our own goes unfulfilled.”

“March 16, 2003, was the very worst day of our lives,” their statement continues. “Our family deserves a clear and truthful explanation for how what happened to Rachel that day could occur, and to know there is some consequence to those responsible. Rachel deserves this.”

The entire statement is included below:

STATEMENT FROM THE FAMILY OF RACHEL CORRIE

ON THE TWELFTH ANNIVERSARY OF RACHEL’S STAND IN GAZA

March 16, 2015

Today, the twelfth anniversary of our daughter and sister Rachel’s stand and death in Gaza, we find ourselves back where our journey for accountability in her case began - in Washington DC. We have come for meetings at the Department of State and in Congress and, also, to join our colleagues in pursuit of a just peace in Israel/Palestine at the national meeting of Jewish Voice for Peace.

Rachel was crushed to death March 16, 2003, by an Israeli military, US-funded, Caterpillar D9R bulldozer in Rafah, Gaza, while nonviolently protesting the impending demolition of the home of a Palestinian family. This was one of thousands of homes eventually destroyed in Gaza in clearing demolitions, described in the 2004 Human Rights Watch Report, Razing Rafah.

The U.S. Department of State reported that on March 17, 2003, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon promised President Bush that the Israeli Government would undertake a “thorough, credible, and transparent” investigation into Rachel’s killing and report the results to the United States. On March 19, 2003, in a U.S. Department of State press briefing, Richard Boucher said in reference to Rachel, “When we have the death of an American citizen, we want to see it fully investigated. That is one of our key responsibilities overseas, is to look after the welfare of American citizens and to find out what happened in

situations like these.”

Through tenures of both the Bush and Obama administrations, high level Department of State officials have continued to call for Israeli investigation in Rachel’s case. During our twelve year journey for accountability, we met with Lawrence B. Wilkerson (Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell), William Burns (then Under Secretary of State) and Antony Blinken (then Deputy Assistant to the President and National Security Advisor to Vice President Biden) - all who have acknowledged lack of an adequate response from the Israeli Government in Rachel’s case.

In a letter to our family in 2008, Michelle Bernier-Toth, U.S. Department of State’s Managing Director of Overseas Citizens Services, wrote, “We have consistently requested that the Government of Israel conduct a full and transparent investigation into Rachel’s death. Our requests have gone unanswered or ignored.”

In March 2005, at the suggestion of the Department of State and to preserve our legal options, our family initiated a civil lawsuit against the State of Israel and Ministry of Defense. After a lengthy Israeli court process, in February of this year, the Israeli Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that said Rachel was killed in a “war activity” for which the state bears no liability under Israeli law. In response, Human Rights Watch wrote,

“The ruling flies in the face of the laws of armed conflict...The ruling grants immunity in civil law to Israeli forces for harming civilians based merely on the determination that the forces were engaged in ‘wartime activity,’ without assessing whether that activity violated the laws of armed conflict, which require parties to the conflict at all times to take all feasible precautions to spare civilian life.”

Our family’s legal options in Israel are nearly exhausted, but our search for justice for Rachel goes forward. Back in Washington DC, we have come full circle. We ask again that U.S. officials address their responsibility to U.S. citizens and to all civilians whose lives are impacted and cut short by military actions supported with U.S. taxpayer funding. We ask that they determine what to do when a promise from a key ally’s head of state to our own goes unfulfilled. March 16, 2003, was the very worst day of our lives. Our family deserves a clear and truthful explanation for how what happened to Rachel that day could occur, and to know there is some consequence to those responsible. Rachel deserves this.

She wrote, “This has to stop. I think it is a good idea for us all to drop everything and devote our lives to making this stop. I don’t think it’s an extremist thing to do anymore. I still really want to dance around to Pat Benatar and have boyfriends and make comics for my coworkers. But I also want this to stop.”

The failure of the Israeli court system to hold its soldiers, officers, and government accountable does not represent a failure on our part. Rachel, herself, went to Rafah looking for justice - a forward looking justice in which all people in the region would enjoy the freedoms, rights, opportunities, and obligations that we each demand for ourselves. The facts uncovered in our legal effort in Israel, and the clear evidence of the Israeli court’s complicity in the occupation revealed in the outcome, lay important legal groundwork for the future. As we look back at Selma fifty years ago and Ferguson today, we realize that our own civil rights struggle is not won in a single march or court case. It is ongoing. As our family continues our journey for justice, we thank those across the U.S., the world, and in Palestine and Israel who travel with us. Together, we will find justice for Rachel - both the justice she deserves and the justice for which she stood.

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