

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**March 14, 2010**

Autopsy doctor admits to violating court order in Rachel Corrie autopsy

Today 14 March 2010 the Haifa District Court saw the second full day of testimony in the civil lawsuit filed by Rachel Corrie's family against the State of Israel for her unlawful killing in Rafah, Gaza. Rachel Corrie, an American human rights defender from Olympia, Washington, was crushed to death on March 16, 2003 by a Caterpillar D9R bulldozer. She had been nonviolently demonstrating against Palestinian home demolitions with fellow members of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), a Palestinian-led movement committed to resisting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land using nonviolent, direct action methods and principles.

In today's hearing:

- Dr. Yehuda Hiss, the former head of the Israel Forensic Institute who conducted the autopsy of Rachel Corrie at the request of the Israeli military, admitted that he violated an Israeli court order requiring that an official from the U.S. Embassy be present during Rachel's autopsy. Hiss also stated that his policy was not to allow entrance to the autopsy to anyone who is not a physician or biologist. Dr. Hiss stated that he spoke by phone with the US Embassy after receiving the court order and was told they would not be sending a representative, and that the Corrie family had agreed to the autopsy. Dr. Hiss admitted there was no documentation in his file of this conversation with the Embassy. The U.S. Embassy has repeatedly told the family that this was not the conversation that occurred.
- Dr. Hiss also disclosed that he had kept samples from Rachel's body for histological testing without informing her family. Dr. Hiss admitted that he did not inform the family about their right to bury the samples and that the samples were likely to have been buried with other body samples from the Institute, but he was uncertain. This was the first time that the family of Rachel Corrie received confirmation that the Israeli Forensic Institute had indeed kept samples of her body, despite prior attempts to receive this information. Dr. Hiss has been the subject of a prior lawsuit in Israel brought by families for whom he did not return body parts and samples.
- The judge granted the Corries' request to expand their punitive damages request, to include the failure to ensure that a U.S. Embassy official was present during the autopsy. In response to the State's demand, the judge requested that the Corries specify the amount of claimed punitive damages. The Corries set the punitive damages at the symbolic amount of \$1, stating that the court's pronouncement of accountability and preventing future harm to others was more important to them than money.
- The judge granted the Corries' motion to allow into evidence the medical report of Dr. Ahmed Abu Nikera the Palestinian physician who pronounced Rachel's death in

Rafah, Gaza. The State agreed to the admission of this report only after the judge granted the Corries' earlier motion to allow Abu Nikera to testify via video conference from Gaza. In Professor Hiss's testimony, he stated that Abu Nikera's medical report was consistent with his findings, including the statement that Rachel had arrived dead at the hospital.

Today's hearing also included the conclusion of Tom Dale's testimony, a fellow ISM activist and eyewitness to Rachel's killing.

Today's hearing was attended by several observers, including Andrew Parker, the U.S. Embassy Consul General and human rights representatives, including Lawyers without Borders, and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI).

Testimony will continue on March 15 from 9am-1pm, and on March 17 from 9am-4pm.

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