

## Rachel's Words Live On: Each Palestinian has a special place in their heart for Rachel Corrie.

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Each Palestinian has a special place in their heart for Rachel Corrie. She symbolized strength, perseverance, and self assuredness. Conversely, she was labeled an enemy of Israel, a nuisance of the American government and a target of ridicule by pro-Israeli propagandists. Fifty-eight years ago, my grandparents were dispossessed from their land in Palestine and this energetic little white girl from Olympia, Washington traveled half the world to try to fulfill their dream: the fruition of justice in Palestine.

On March 22, a congregation of ardent supporters gathered to commemorate Rachel's life and spread her words, the very church Martin Luther King first chastised the war in Vietnam. This event came out of controversy. The critically acclaimed play *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, which chronicled Corrie's work with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) in Palestine through email and letters (and had two sellout runs in London), was canceled by the New York Theater Workshop (NYTW). Just weeks after the cartoon controversy and the mass trumpeting of free speech worldwide, Rachel Corrie was being silenced. The New York Theater Workshop attempted to crush her memory but her words live on. Other theaters have already expressed interest in putting on the show.

A list of brilliant speakers came out to show solidarity in the name human rights and justice. *Democracy Now's* Amy Goodman opened, "Welcome to this sanctuary of dissent. Dissent is what makes this country great." Arab American Institute president James Zogby professed, "She [Rachel], not George Bush was our liberator." Actress and activist Kathleen Chalfant declared, "There is hope that this will turn into a triumph. [This will be] a model for political action."

Rachel Corrie fought for the realization of peace and the defense of those who couldn't protect themselves—those unprotected by outside governments and the "civilized" world. Legendary poet, memoirist and actress Maya Angelou extended words of solace, "I love peace. For all peace lovers I send my condolences." Angelou went on to elucidate Corrie's valor, "I think we develop [courage]...Rachel had courage. Please develop that courage."

New York State Senate hopeful and Jewish activist Jonathan Tasani exclaimed "It's our duty to speak out against human rights [violations]...One sided policy that ignores human rights and international law. It must stop now!" This message was reiterated throughout the night. Huwaida Arraf, co-founder of the ISM, argued that this was not about "Muslims vs. Jews." It was simply "Occupation vs. Freedom." She pressed, "We must believe that we can challenge and defeat the 3rd or 4th strongest military in the world with our hearts and minds." Many of the speakers were touched on a personal level. Actress Najla Said,

daughter of the late Edward Said, expressed amazement at Rachel's ambitious and steadfast mentality, "She went to Palestine...I've never stood in front of a bulldozer."

The night eventually turned to the subject of censorship with speakers relating their stories to the NYTW's refusal to show *My Name is Rachel Corrie*. Comedienne Maysoon Zayid spoke about the first time she was censored. Zayid was supposed to be on 20/20 with John Stossel along with a group of other comedians. It was just after the death of Rachel, so Zayid wore a shirt with a picture of Corrie on it to show solidarity and pay homage to her memory.

Problems arose when Stossel realized Zayid didn't fit into America's concocted image of covered, oppressed and subordinate Muslims. Stossel, clearly annoyed by her t-shirt, barked at Zayid in the interview, "You could never say what you say in your country." Zayid snapped back, "What do you mean John? I say it everyday in my country. I was born in Jersey." He replied, "No I mean in your ancestor's country." Again she came back at him, asserting that she had performed "Live From Palestine," a comedy show performed throughout Palestine, seven or eight times. They went back and forth on the issue; Stossel just couldn't believe that Palestine was anything but a haven for repressed, rock-throwing miscreants. When the 20/20 episode aired Zayid's whole segment with Stossel was edited out.

Throughout the evening numerous speakers spoke of the courage, love and strength possessed by Rachel's parents, Cindy and Craig. Others offered their condolences and words of hope. Punk singer Patti Smith sang a song she wrote for Cindy and Craig parents via video, "Your tears were not in vein. But we both know we'd never be the same." She ended with a reminder, "The meek will inherit the land."

As the show winded down Cindy and Craig took center stage. I was extremely moved listening them speak. These two spirited people have visited Palestine, continue to tour the country, and are relentless in getting the message of their daughter out to the world. Cindy voiced that Rachel would "want to tell you the stories of Bil'in...the demonstrations...the Israelis that came to the wall to resist...the Palestinians in Gaza that are running out of food." Craig passionately appealed to the crowd, "Speak out, let it be known...at home...at work...in Congress...let them know!"

\*Visit [www.Rachelswords.org](http://www.Rachelswords.org) for more information and upcoming events

\*\*This article first appeared on Electronic Intifada

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