

Israeli military uses U.S.-made bulldozers to hide bodies of dead Palestinians in Gaza

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Photo taken from Israel's southern border with the Gaza Strip shows Israeli bulldozers behind an armored vehicle rolling along the border with the Palestinian territory in April 2024.

By Sharon Zhang / TRUTHOUT

Gaza City, July 11 (RHC)-- As Israeli forces indiscriminately massacre Palestinians across Gaza, they are using U.S.-made heavy equipment to maul people and hide bodies in an apparent effort to obstruct the death toll and prevent photos of decaying bodies from circulating online, a new report finds.

An Israeli soldier told +972 Magazine and Local Call that Israeli forces clear out Palestinians' bodies using D-9 bulldozers, provided to Israeli forces through the U.S. government and manufactured by Texas-based company Caterpillar.

The soldiers are clearing bodies from routes used by aid convoys and designated as "safe" humanitarian areas by the Israeli army — areas where soldiers are, despite the routes' designation, instructed to shoot Palestinians on sight. The purpose of clearing the bodies is to prevent aid workers from seeing them and reporting on them, the soldier said.

"A D-9 [Caterpillar bulldozer] goes down, with a tank, and clears the area of corpses, buries them under the rubble, and flips [them] aside so that the convoys don't see it — [so that] images of people in advanced stages of decay don't come out," one soldier said, given the pseudonym S. by +972 and Local Call.

Another soldier, D., said his brigade, stationed near a route for aid convoys and another route for civilians forced to flee from northern Gaza, created a policy of "green" areas, which were okay for civilians to enter, and "red" areas, where soldiers would kill Palestinians regardless of whether or not they appeared to be civilians. It is a war crime to fail to distinguish between civilians and combatants when engaged in combat.

The soldiers added that many of the people soldiers have killed were likely civilians, some of whom entered the "red" areas in search of food or other materials that may have fallen off an aid truck.

"I saw a lot of [Palestinian] civilians — families, women, children," S. continued, per the report. "There are more fatalities than are reported. We were in a small area. Every day, at least one or two [civilians] are killed [because] they walked in a no-go area. I don't know who is a terrorist and who is not, but most of them did not carry weapons."

The investigation also pointed to recent testimony by an IDF soldier before the Israeli Knesset who said that, while he was behind the wheel of a Caterpillar bulldozer in Gaza, his crew would run over "hundreds of terrorists, dead and alive."

The soldiers' reports line up with those from Palestinians who say that Israeli forces often run over Palestinians with bulldozers, on top of using the bulldozers to illegally demolish and seize property as part of Israel's genocidal ethnic cleansing campaign in Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor noted in March that Israeli forces have regularly used tanks and bulldozers to run over and kill Palestinians in Gaza in recent months. Israeli forces have previously admitted to burying Palestinians' bodies with bulldozers amid the Gaza genocide, seemingly in efforts to prevent the carnage from being reported on. In at least one case, reports have found evidence that Israel bulldozed sites of mass graves after it carried out massacres at a Gaza hospital.

Israel has long used Caterpillar bulldozers to advance their violent expropriation of Palestinian land; in one particularly infamous example, an Israeli officer operating a Caterpillar bulldozer ran over and killed U.S. pro-Palestine activist Rachel Corrie in 2003, as she was protesting the Israeli demolition of Palestinians' homes in the occupied West Bank.

As a result of Israel's extensive use of Caterpillar equipment, the company has been targeted by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement for many decades. Recently, Norway's top private pension fund divested \$69 million worth of shares and bonds in the company due to their equipment allegedly being used by Israeli forces to commit myriad human rights violations against Palestinians.

The use of the bulldozers to mutilate and bury Palestinians' bodies is a potential war crime, which could also make it a violation of U.S. law for the government to continue sending bulldozers and related equipment to Israeli forces responsible for such acts.

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