

Relatives of a US activist, killed when an Israeli army bulldozer demolished a Palestinian house in Gaza, are to sue the machine's manufacturer Caterpillar.

Rachel Corrie was killed during a demonstration against house demolitions in Rafah refugee camp in March 2003.

The action alleges that the firm broke international law by selling specially armoured bulldozers to Israel knowing the machines would endanger lives.

A Caterpillar spokeswoman said the company had no comment on the action.

The Corries have also filed actions in Israel against the state of Israel, the Ministry of Defence and the Israeli Army.

'Brutal death'

In a statement released by their legal representatives in the US - the Center for Constitutional Rights - Rachel Corrie's mother Cindy said: "As we approach the two-year anniversary of Rachel's killing, my family and I are still searching for justice.

"The brutal death of my daughter should never have happened. We believe Caterpillar and the Israeli Army must be held accountable for their role."

Rachel Corrie was a member of the International Solidarity Movement - a Palestinian-led group which campaigns against the Israeli occupation using non-violence.

An Israeli army investigation concluded that the 23-year-old American activist's death was an accident while she was disrupting military operations on the ground.

Officials have said the driver of the machine could not see her - a claim activists have disputed.

Corporate responsibility

Caterpillar has recently faced criticism from Human Rights groups and UN officials.

UN Human rights official Jean Ziegler expressed "deep concern" over sales of bulldozers to Israel in a letter sent to Caterpillar CEO Jim Owens in 2004.

In total, Israeli soldiers have demolished over 4,000 Palestinian homes since September 2000, according to Israeli Human Rights group B'Tselem.

In a statement on its website, Caterpillar says it "shares the world's concern over unrest in the Middle East and certainly have compassion for all those affected by political strife".

But it has "neither the legal right nor the means to police individual use of its equipment," the statement says.

Campaigners have claimed that this is a direct contravention of corporate responsibility policy of the company, which last year made profits of \$2bn.