

The campaign to change Caterpillar's human rights policies

Mary Ann McGivern | Jun. 1, 2012 NCR Today

Ten years ago, Caterpillar Inc., known for farm tractors, became known in human rights circles for the D-9 bulldozer with a gun turret and reinforced steel siding. Israel used the D-9 in 2002 to bulldoze parts of the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank, leaving about 4,000 people homeless. Human Rights Watch reported that a bulldozer buried a paralyzed man alive in his house, despite pleas from his family for time to evacuate him.

Then, in March 2003, 23-year-old American student Rachel Corrie was struck by a D-9 bulldozer or hit by falling debris while trying to protect a house in Gaza. Israeli human rights groups say 7,000 Palestinian homes have been bulldozed, making more than 50,000 people homeless.

These D-9 bulldozers are sold by Caterpillar to the Pentagon and transferred to Israel through the US Foreign Military Sales program under the Camp David Accords. In other words, they are part of the arms trade, not agriculture.

In 2003, Jewish Voice for Peace asked me to explain to some of their members how to file a shareholder resolution with Caterpillar about the D-9. Six of us met at the home of one of the board members.

I explained that a resolution proponent had to have owned \$1,000 worth of shares for more than a year. The resolution was limited to 500 words. It had to be submitted roughly five months prior to the annual meeting. The proponent had to agree to be present to move the resolution at the meeting.

Regarding content, resolutions cannot be about the ordinary business of the corporation. I told the Jewish Voice for Peace members that probably transfer of "weaponized" bulldozers lifted the D-9 above ordinary business. Two ready routes of proposals were disclosure of corporate actions and establishment of new corporate policy.

Jewish Voice for Peace had purchased some stock, and Loretto held some in our retirement fund. That was the beginning of a shareholder campaign to pressure Caterpillar to stop selling D-9s to the Pentagon.

This year the meeting will consider the following resolution:

RESOLVED: shareholders request the Board of Directors to review and amend, where applicable, Caterpillar's policies related to human rights that guide international and U.S. operations, extending policies to include franchisees, licensees and agents that market, distribute or sell its products, to conform more fully with international human rights and humanitarian standards, and that a summary of this review be posted on Caterpillar's website by October 2012.

The meeting will be at 8 a.m. June 13 in San Antonio, Texas. For decades the meetings were in Chicago, but last year it was in Little Rock, Ark., and three years ago it was at a private club in the far western Chicago suburbs. Shareholder accessibility does not seem to be a Caterpillar value.

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