

Dear Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh, whom I know well as the Associate Director of the Arab American Action Network (AAAN) in Chicago, and as the best community organizer I have ever met. She is the one who created the AAAN's Arab Women's Committee (AWC), the community project that changed my life and the lives of hundreds of other Arab immigrant and Arab American women.

My name is Maysoon Gharbieh. My family and I participate and benefit greatly from the AAAN and AWC. I first met Rasmea when she held a meeting for parents to discuss the challenges that our children were facing in school. I learned about the AAAN's programs that empower families, and my whole family became members and participants that very day. My teenagers joined the high school youth leadership development program; my youngest joined the after school homework assistance and tutoring program; and I joined the AWC, as well as registering in English as a Second Language classes.

Rasmea provided a safe environment and family atmosphere that is based on mutual understanding and respect, helped me and the others to protect our children from the risk of joining gangs or other dangerous activities, and helped us to better communicate with our children. She structured the AWC to provide leadership development for us, as well as promoting self-reliance and self-esteem. She helped us understand how to work with our children to help reduce the cultural gap between immigrant parents on one hand and the American-born children on the other. All of this is training for us to become active and productive citizens of our new country.

Rasmea is a valuable and lovely icon for us and for the entire community. She works hard without reward or personal profit. All she cares about is supporting and protecting us and our families. Her ultimate goal is to help develop families that are educated, active, and effective in contributing to keeping the community and the country safe for all who live here.

Honorable Judge Drain, Rasmea helps everyone who needs it, and even those who do not ask for it. She is almost 68 years old and has major health issues, which worry us who love and respect her. She has suffered greatly, faced torture and rape, and in spite of that, she converted her cruel experience into humanitarian work in our community. None of us would have been able to accomplish what she has if we had lived her history.

Rasmea suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and being locked in an isolation cell, when she was arrested last year, aggravated the physical and psychological symptoms of her condition. She may face deportation, which would mean the end of her relationships with her family, friends, and the women of the AWC. This punishment alone would bring her a significant amount of suffering. Please do not add to the suffering with jail time.

We know that Rasmea and her legal counsel plan to appeal her conviction, so keeping her out of jail while that happens would allow her to continue her valuable work for all of us and extend her positive impact on our country. She is no threat to society; she is an incredible person who has empowered all of us as immigrants to be the best residents and citizens of the U.S. that we can be. Please show her leniency in your sentencing.

Respectfully yours,

*Maysoon M.*  
Maysoon Gharbieh  
February 16, 2015

