

Bro. Brian McLaughlin, SVD
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Washington, DC 20017

January 28, 2015

Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh, who I know as a community leader in Chicago. She has been very much involved with the Arab American Action Network (AAAN) and she collaborated with us when I was at the 8th Day Center for Justice, a Catholic organization that works toward social change.

Ms. Odeh is a very respected member of the activist community. If she were taken from the community, she would be sorely missed by many people. She has worked tirelessly at the AAAN and has done much in terms of education and giving a voice for oppressed members of our society.

In November 2014, Rasmea was convicted of Unlawful Procurement of Naturalization. Compassion in her sentencing will serve justice in this case. She was detained for a month immediately following the verdict, including almost 3 weeks in solitary confinement, which was extremely difficult for her.

If Rasmea loses her appeal, she will likely lose her citizenship and face deportation. This will end life as she knows it, cutting all her ties with family and community in Chicago. This punishment alone is so devastating, it should not be compounded by adding a prison term.

Since there is a possibility of her conviction being overturned on appeal, keeping her out of prison would allow her to continue as a contributing and productive person, doing the work that is so critical to hundreds of immigrant and refugee women in Chicago's Arab and Muslim community.

Rasmea is an award-winning leader of Chicago's immigrant community who has dedicated 50 years of her life to serving refugees wherever she has lived. In Chicago, she built the Arab Women's Committee, with some 600 members. Because of Rasmea's work, immigrant and refugee women who came to the US from countries facing war and political crises – like Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, Syria, and beyond – now have a place to seek support, gain empowerment and community, and call their home.

Again, I ask that you please have leniency toward Rasmea Odeh in her March 12 sentencing.

Respectfully yours,

Bro. Brian McLaughlin, SVD

