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AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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Judge Gershwin A. Drain  
Theodore Levin U.S. Courthouse  
231 W. Lafayette Blvd., Room 123  
Detroit, MI 48226

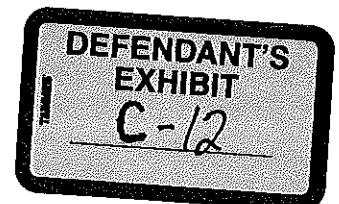
February 1, 2015

Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Junaid Rana and I am an Associate Professor of Asian American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I write today to request leniency in the case of Rasmea Odeh in the March 12 sentencing. Before I met Ms. Odeh I knew of her for many years through her reputation as a community activist with Muslims and Arab Americans in Chicago.

In the last couple of years I have had the honor of getting to know Rasmea and the network of friends and intimates that surround her. I can say without any exaggeration that Rasmea Odeh is a formidable and vital part of this community. The work she has done as a community organizer has touched many Arab Americans in the Chicago area. I have deep respect and admiration for Rasmea. I write as an acquaintance and as someone who has studied and researched ethnic and racial groups in the United States and their struggles to achieve equality and respect. Having sought the refuge of democratic freedom, Palestinians living in the United States know all too well the disparities of not being treated as equals in their ancestral homelands. Rasmea has been a central part of bridging these difficulties in the Arab American community and is an indispensable part of the mission of the Arab American Action Network where she is the deputy director. Additionally, she established the Arab Women's Committee, which has some 600 members and serves an essential function of providing a space of empowerment for Arab immigrant and refugee women. This principled work is a hallmark of the role that Rasmea has come to play in the lives of so many. By helping others through her civic engagement she has become a much beloved pillar of the community.

For some 10 years Rasmea has been an active and productive member of Chicago's Arab and Muslim community. Working with refugee and immigrant women from the Arab world who often face specific issues and problems, the role that Rasmea fills is irreplaceable. She has valuable knowledge and skills learned through her own experiences of escaping brutality and cruelty. Foremost is the fact that Rasmea has devoted her life to others, to ameliorate their condition and aid in the transition often from harsh conditions. She is a survivor of torture and has been diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder in the aftermath of the horrific treatment she received while in Israeli detention and prison over a 21-day period. The appalling handling



included electro-shock and rape with clubs. This is a necessary and difficult part of her specific case history that must be considered.

Having been a victim of a mass arrest as a young student and forced to face an Israeli military court that rarely affords Palestinians just and fair treatment, to now sentence her to further prison time and potentially strip her of American citizenship is to add cruelty to injustice. Let me be plain, Palestinians living under occupation in their own land face a system of apartheid in the legal and criminal system that views them as less than human. It pains me to think that Rasmea must further suffer even here in the United States. Only compassion can prevail in what has already been a harrowing experience. The evidence of her contribution through her devoted service work to those in need in Chicago is, I hope, a strong case for leniency.

After being convicted of 'Unlawful Procurement of Naturalization' in November of 2014, Rasmea was immediately detained for a month in which she was placed in solitary confinement for 3 weeks. Imprisoning a 67 year-old women in ill health any further while this case is on appeal can serve no productive purpose. I urge you to consider allowing Rasmea to continue to do her community work and serve those who will benefit most from her contributions.

Judge Drain, I plead for you to provide leniency in a case that has already been filled with tragedy and difficulty. Rasmea Odeh is an active contributor to the good of society and has provided an important service to Muslim and Arab Americans in Chicago. She has received awards for this civic duty and has been commended for her outstanding service. At this juncture, to allow her to continue to do her work in Chicago while her case is on appeal would yield the greatest benefit for all those concerned.

Respectfully,



Junaid Rana  
Associate Professor

