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Dear Honorable Judge Gershwine Drain:

I am writing with great urgency to urge you to apply compassion in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh.

Ms. Odeh is a highly respected leader in the international struggle to empower women and end violence against women. She has been active nationally (strengthening vibrant communities through her work developing women's leadership in Chicago) and internationally (importantly providing testimony to the United Nations about the sexual torture she experienced and survived). Additionally, she has built the Arab Women's Committee, an organization that empowers women through creating safe culturally sensitive spaces from violence within refugee and immigrant communities where isolation can otherwise have a devastating impact on women and their families. These organizations have a tremendous impact on immigrant and refugee women's lives by providing them the opportunity to be safe and build successful and independent lives in the United States. As Chair and Professor of the Department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Minnesota, I greatly respect Ms. Odeh's contributions to American society. I know that many of my students aspire to do just what she is doing in transforming the lives of vulnerable immigrant and refugee women.

Ms. Odeh and her legal team have said they plan to appeal her conviction for Unlawful Procurement of Naturalization. So long as there is a possibility of her conviction being overturned on appeal, keeping Ms. Odeh 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.

If Ms. Odeh is not successful in an appeal, I understand that she will likely lose her citizenship and face deportation. To be uprooted from her home and community in Chicago will be devastating. I urge you not to compound the punishment of this traumatized 67-year old woman, a survivor of sexual and physical torture, by sentencing her to prison. The risk to Ms. Odeh's physical and emotional health would not serve the cause of justice.

In hopes that Ms. Odeh does not spend one more day in prison, I ask you for leniency in her sentencing. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully yours,


Jigna Desai, PhD

