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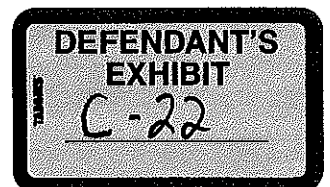
Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh. I am a leading expert in advocacy and activism focused on ending violence against women of color and immigrant women in the United States. I am a leading member of a major network of anti-violence advocates founded in 2000 with local chapters and affiliates across the United States. Our work brings together feminist activists working to collectively understand and address the ways gender and sexual violence impact women of color and immigrant women.

I became acquainted with Rasmea Odeh's story in 2005 when many activists working to end gender violence in the United States learned about the unprecedented efforts of Rasmea Odeh in producing new and creative solutions for the problems recent immigrant and refugee women were facing in Chicago (through her leadership in the Arab Women's Committee). My network then invited Rasmea Odeh to lead a workshop at a national conference, "Color of Violence (3): Stopping the War on Women of Color" in New Orleans, Louisiana (2005). We knew that her presence at this anti-violence conference would empower women participants especially since she herself survived sexual torture in 1969 followed by ten-years imprisonment (based on a forced confession) and still managed to continue playing a major leadership role that was transforming the lives of hundreds of immigrant women in Chicago. We also thought her strength and courage would positively impact conference participants since she is considered a pioneer in the international women's movement for having the courage to speak at the United Nations in 1979 about the sexual assault she endured.

In November 2014, advocates in the anti-violence movement were devastated to learn that Rasmea was convicted of Unlawful Procurement of Naturalization. As experts in advocacy on behalf of women survivors, we could easily see that her Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) had everything to do with the way she answered the questions on her immigration form about her previous imprisonment. We were also deeply concerned that after the verdict, she spent 3 weeks in solitary confinement and has since suffered from medical problems and worsening conditions of PTSD.

No woman should be punished for the after effects of sexual violence (that is, the PTSD that obstructed Rasmea from being able to read and think about questions related to her former imprisonment).



The time Rasmea Odeh spent in St. Claire County Jail made it more clear than ever that as a 67 year old woman with serious health problems, Rasmea's health will continue to deteriorate in prison and her future will entail more and more undue suffering. It is enough that if Rasmea loses her appeal, she will face deportation and will no longer be able to do the work that has helped her survive her past traumas. Imprisonment (and/or deportation) of Rasmea will also devastate hundreds of immigrant women whose needs cannot be met without Rasmea's leadership in Chicago.

Imprisoning Rasmea Odeh will send a terrible message to thousands of women advocates across the United States who are working to end sexual assault and to ensure that survivors receive the care and support they need to live a full and healthy life without fear or further attacks against them.

In fact, many advocates in the anti-violence movement have been counting on interacting with the distinguished and renowned Rasmea Odeh's at an upcoming national conference in Chicago March 26-29, a conference that will include over 1,000 participants, including leading figures in the anti-violence movement, young women, and representatives from nearly every racial, ethnic, and immigrant community in the U.S.

<http://www.colorofviolence.org/call-for-proposals.html>. Should Rasmea Odeh be incarcerated or deported by then, I am confident that participants at this conference will view her absence as a gap in our community of women leaders that cannot ever be filled and as a major blow against all efforts to end sexual violence and provide survivors with the care they deserve in the United States.

For these reasons, as someone at the forefront of the anti-violence movement who truly understands the realities and needs of survivors of sexual assault, I feel strongly that incarcerating Rasmea Odeh (on top of possibly taking away her citizenship) would be a crime against humanity and an assault on all survivors of sexual violence and I very sincerely request leniency in this case.

Sincerely,

Shani Mandisa Moore

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