

February 4, 2015

4032 12th Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN

Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain:

We are writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh, a strong community leader who has dedicated her life to the empowerment of the Palestinian people and to women in particular. As trade unionists, we understand the history of political repression against those who organize for economic and social justice, and because of that, we have long been on the frontlines of defending freedom of speech and freedom of association. We believe that Rasmea Odeh is the subject of political persecution for the work that she has done in organizing on behalf of Palestinian people, and in particular for Palestinian and other Arab immigrant women. Justice will not be served by a harsh sentence of Ms. Odeh.

Rasmea Odeh 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.

Ms. Odeh has already suffered from extreme torture at the hands of the Israeli government, including being forced into a confession while being subjected to physical and sexual torture perpetrated in front of her now deceased father. As a survivor of torture, engagement for the betterment of her community in Chicago is critical to her emotional health; the isolation she endured while recently incarcerated was a great hardship and may have retriggered her Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

It is very clear that Ms. Odeh is a deeply loved and valued member of her community, for whom she has worked tirelessly. A harsh sentence for Ms. Odeh will not only punish her, but will also punish the 600 women who rely on her for leadership and inspiration. It will also have a chilling effect on all who organize for social and economic justice.

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.

Respectfully yours,
Cherrene Horazuk, President, AFSCME 3800
Patrick Kearns, RN, President, AFGE 2547
Mark Froemke, President, West Area Labor Council, MN AFL-CIO
Joe Burns, Labor Negotiator and Author
David Riehle, Local Chairman, United Transportation Union 650 (retired)
Gladys McKenzie, AFSCME Council 5 Field Representative (retired)

