



The Palestinian Youth Movement
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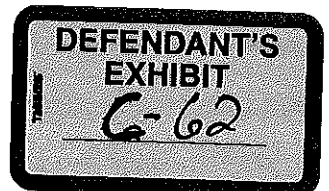
February 4, 2015

Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

We are a grassroots collective of Palestinian youth in the United States committed to justice, human rights and freedom for our people and homeland as well as for all people in struggle in our local communities and across the world. We are writing to request leniency from you in the March 12, 2015 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh who is a beacon of hope, strength, dedication, resilience and honesty for our community.

We have come to know Rasmea through her many years of community service both locally in Chicago and nationally. Her role as a social justice and anti-war activist, a violence prevention and intervention case manager, and a women and youth leadership mentor, has positioned her among the most respected, loved and cared for people in the Arab and Muslim community nationally. She is not just a community member. For many of us youth, Rasmea is family. We think of her in the same way we think of our mothers and grandmothers. She is someone to talk to when we are feeling alone, someone we can always depend on to defend us or even broker sensitive conversations in our very own families, and someone who always encourages us to explore our creativity and the opportunities afforded to us as a new generation.

As a new generation of Palestinians, we continue to witness the rapidly deteriorating conditions in our homeland, constant death, and the ongoing criminalization, censorship and alienation of our communities here in the US. We are a stateless people and even in our refuge here in the US, we are constantly reminded we do not belong. With these conditions, it is difficult to encourage our youth that they mean something and that if they work hard they have the power and opportunities to make change. Many elders in our community find it difficult to understand our struggles as second-generation youth in a post-9-11 US social and political climate. However Rasmea is unlike many others. She listens and understands our struggles. She goes out of her way to support and encourage us even if our cultural, spiritual and political practices stray from the traditions of our elders. Her experience as a woman, stateless person, survivor of gendered and sexual violence, and community service leader have all contributed to the unique



composition of her character. Her character is self-less, honest, giving, kind, principled and resilient.

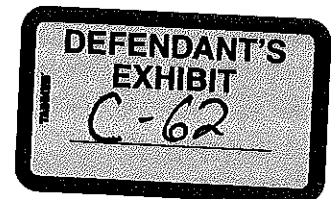
She has dedicated her whole life and heart to standing on the side of justice when others too often fear to speak truth to power. There is no one with more of a moral compass than Rasmea Odeh and the care that she demonstrates for her community and for the world should be celebrated and honored, not criminalized.

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.

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 incarcerated was a great hardship and may have retriggered her Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Without being lenient on her sentence, the US court system will demonstrate yet again a complete disregard for and failure in supporting women who are survivors of violence. A prison term sentence rather would demonstrate that US law and the judicial system at large willingly participates in the cycles of violence that have stolen the lives of so many women through history and today and in particular, women of color. Additionally, the poor treatment Rasmea received in the St. Clair County Jail highlights the complete disregard for accommodations made for survivors of violence and for senior citizens. Such state repression should be not tolerated and utterly unacceptable by a judicial system that claims itself to be fair and balanced.

Judge Drain, on your appointment to the United States District Court, President Obama made the following statement, "Judge Gershwin A. Drain will bring an unwavering commitment to fairness and judicial integrity to the federal bench. His impressive legal career is a testament to the kind of thoughtful and diligent judge he will be on the U.S. District Court." We are asking that you stand on the side of justice by offering your upmost respect and compassion for Rasmea Odeh. We are calling on you to support her conviction being overturned by an appeal. Keeping her engaged in her community would benefit all people in society and in particular the many immigrant and refugee families Rasmea serves daily. If her appeal were to be denied, Rasmea would lose her citizenship and thus face deportation. This would not only be devastating for her, but for all members of our community. It would be a stain on the legacy of our criminal justice system and an example of the structural injustice laced through our federal and immigration courts and policies. The community finds that these charges in and of themselves are completely unfounded, unfair and motivated by political bias and a racial social current that continues to demonize Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims in the US. The charges have already devastated Rasmea and our community and should absolutely not be compounded by adding a prison term.

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. By stripping Rasmea from our community, the US court system would be enacting a level of state racial violence and repression against a survivor of torture who despite all odds, remains the strong pillar that our community so desperately relies on in these trying times. A harsh decision in her case would not only be an unfair persecution of one individual, but also to the millions of people across this country from all backgrounds who see themselves and experiences in Rasmea's life and values.

Respectfully yours,

The Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM)

