



January 19, 2015

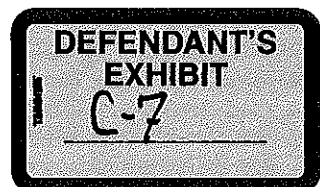
Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh.

I have known Rasmea Odeh since the mid 1980's, when I was introduced to her by prominent Jordanian attorneys and interviewed her for a US women's activist publication *WomenNews*. As a human rights advocate and scholar of Arab women, I sought to tell her story of sexual torture in a publication for US women activists who not only firmly opposed the use of torture but wanted to draw attention to the particular ways that women's bodies are abused by torturers. As we know, only by making visible the stories of the invisible can we hope to make positive change in our world.

I met Rasmea again when she moved to Chicago, as I knew many of her family members living there. I knew them because I have done extensive research and published widely on the Arab American experience, especially in Chicago. For this work I have received a Carnegie Corporation Award, a book award from the Arab American National Museum and an *Outstanding Contributions to the City of Chicago* Award from the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, presented by Mayor Richard M. Daley. I can sum up this section by saying that Rasmea comes from a stellar family of engaged activists, people whom I respect deeply.

I came to know Rasmea even more extensively when she began working for Chicago's Arab American Action Network [AAAN], an organization of which I am a long time member of the Board of Directors. With clear evidence that she is gifted with leadership skills, we hired her to work with low-income immigrant women to help in their positive adjustment to life in the United States. Over time, Rasmea became the Associate Director of AAAN because of her commitment to the organization's mission, her hard work among the Arab American Community, and her establishment of the 600 member strong Arab Women's Committee. Rasmea would eventually receive a city-wide award for this work. I should also note that at the same time as she achieved all of these accomplishments, she completed a masters degree in criminal justice. I clearly recall watching her writing her papers late in the evening, after her long day's work was done. Rasmea's work makes women stronger, which in turn makes their communities healthier and their children more resilient to the challenges they face in American society.



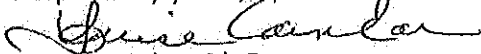
As a survivor of torture, Rasmea should not be punished in any way that may harm her mental health. The best medicine for Rasmea is to stay engaged in active work empowering low-income immigrant women, so they will never endure physical abuse, as she did. This type of work helps to heal her wounds, which will never completely go away.

Needless to say I was shocked when Rasmea was sent into detention after her conviction. She has a family, a community, and poses no flight risk. I was further shocked by her placement in solitary confinement. Rasmea is a 67-year-old woman who works every day caring for others! It is always sad when human beings are seen not for who they really are but as mere numbers.

Rasmea Odeh is a hard working, passionate woman whose life goals include improving US society to be more just, and improving the conditions of women and youth who live within in. I can tell you from all of my research that the discrimination and prejudice that Arab women and children [and men] endure make for a life that is not easy. For low-income families, the racism they face from others is compounded by a lack of economic means. These are the people Rasmea is building, strengthening, for their own benefit and for the benefit of our society at large. In light of her personal history and these facts of life in the Arab American community, I think Rasmea's sentence should be community service.

Rasmea is a noble leader and someone I admire very much. I often wish I had many of her talents. But alas, I am a scholar and a teacher and she is the person working in the trenches of difficulty. Please consider your utmost leniency for Rasmea. As I said above, the most appropriate sentence for Rasmea, and indeed for this country, would be community service.

Respectfully yours,



Louise Cainkar, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Sociology and Social Welfare and Justice  
Marquette University  
Louise.Cainkar@mu.edu

