

2/3/2015

Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

My name is Nadia Tonova and I am the Director of the National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC) based in Dearborn, Michigan. NNAAC is a consortium of 23 independent nonprofits in 11 states serving the Arab American community. I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh, who I know as a community leader and senior staff member at a NNAAC member organization, the Arab American Action Network in Chicago.

Over the course of the past eight years doing empowerment and capacity building work with Arab American organizations across the country, I have been inspired by the work of Rasmea, specifically with her effective programming for women victims of domestic violence and immigrant women who find themselves alienated and marginalized in a new country. Rasmea has made such a tremendous impact on thousands of U.S. women, and as an elder in the community has inspired many young women to follow in her path. We have looked at some of her programming as models for other organizations.

Rasmea has never been less than an inspirational, motivational, positive-thinking, award-winning leader of Chicago's immigrant community. She 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, many immigrant and refugee women have become engaged, empowered, and productive citizens of the U.S.

It would be a great hardship not only for Rasmea, but for the Arab American community nationally, if Rasmea would be stripped of her citizenship, imprisoned and/or deported. 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.

I hope you take my request for leniency for Rasmea Odeh into great consideration.

Respectfully yours,

Nadia Tonova

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