

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of Rasmea Odeh and to suggest that decisions about her future should be based on a full understanding of her situation and, therefore should be lenient. I am a professor and scholar of criminology and my work has focused on issues of incarceration and criminalization of women who have faced abuse and torture. It is from that perspective that I offer this advice.

Ms. Odeh is an aging woman whose life has been characterized by tensions associated with political conflict and injustice. There are hundreds of thousands like her around the world (including in the US) in similar situations; entrapped and used as pawns in political dramas. In fact, it could be said that Ms. Odeh was "made an example of" to deter other Arab women from being involved in work to better their community in their home country. And then persecuted in the US. Despite her important work in Chicago with several social agencies and community based organizations, she was harassed and arrested for her involvement years earlier in Palestine prior to her arrival in the US. Not unlike other women of her generation who were active in that region, her treatment prior to coming to the US was characterized by physical, mental and sexual torture that resulted in a coerced confession for crimes that she did not commit. This kind of activity on the part of the police, the military and others who work for state governments is unfortunately not atypical. There is an impressive amount of data on just how frequently women are forced to confess to crimes or exaggerate their involvement in illegal activities during political conflict. In my own research, I have found solid evidence that women whose situation is like that of Ms. Odeh are filling jails and prisons NOT because of what they actually did, but because they are victims of aggressive force by police and/or the military. Her case is a clear example of how women are coerced and tortured. Still, she was found guilty and now facing punishment that is out of proportion to the risk that she poses.

Ms. Odeh is not a threat to public safety; in fact she is a model citizen who made important contributions to US society through her community work. She has strong beliefs and uses those to inspire others NOT to cause harm. She is compassionate, not dangerous. Ms. Odeh is an honest woman of strong character and deserves to have that taken into account at this stage in her criminal case. Excessive fines, further incarceration or sanctions, and/or deportation are excessive and unjust punishment. Instead, I am hopeful that she will be granted leniency at this point. She has suffered enough and there is no evidence that she will ever pose a risk or create harm in the future.

Thank you for your effort to interrupt the injustices that Rasmea Odeh has faced.

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Professor and Author  
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