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USA

Rasmea Odeh's Sentence/Appeal

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Rasmea Odeh, a Palestinian activist and Chicago community leader who turns 68 in May and has lived in the United States for the past 20 years, faces 18 months in federal prison and deportation, following her March 12 sentencing in Detroit for "unlawful procurement of naturalization."

Odeh was convicted for not disclosing on immigration and citizenship applications her imprisonment in Israel in the 1970s for a fatal Jerusalem supermarket bombing in 1969. [1]

That makes it sound like a straightforward case of immigration fraud "just as it was presented to the jury in her federal trial last year" until you begin to peel back the layers. For example, Rasmea Odeh's account of 25 days of physical, psychological and sexual torture by Israeli interrogators to obtain her "confession" in the supermarket bombing was not allowed. Expert testimony that she suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, affecting her memory and emotional balance at the time of her citizenship application, was also excluded by judge Gershwin Drain.

These rulings, which effectively denied her the possibility of mounting a defense, will be the subject of the appeal to be mounted in the coming months by Rasmea's legal team, headed by attorney Michael Deutsch. It is a difficult uphill struggle, especially in the intimidating U.S. political climate around anything to do with Palestine, the Middle East, Arabs or Muslims. But that climate is exactly why her presence is so precious for Arab immigrant women in Chicago, among whom her community work is concentrated as associate director of the Arab American Action Network.

In a partial victory, judge Drain continued Rasmea's bond on her appeal, so that she was able to return home with the supporters who flocked to Detroit for the hearing. The fact that prosecutor Jonathan Tukel "who asked for a five-to-seven-year prison sentence" did not contest her appeal bond suggests to this observer some decision-making at a higher level in the Justice Department, reflecting the visibility that the defense campaign brought to this case. The judge agreed that "looking at Ms. Odeh's recent history, she's been involved in a lot of good works" and that he'd received numerous support letters from "people from all over the country."

Observing this trial and the sentencing, in an overflow courtroom filled with Rasmea Odeh's supporters, was an emotional experience that brought home the realities of selective and politically motivated prosecution. While a three-year U.S. investigation into her history appears to have been triggered by tips from an Israeli organization, her Israeli interrogators of course were never investigated, let alone charged "or even identified" for torture and rape. Israeli doctors who, in the course of their annual military service, have routinely signed documents stating that Palestinian prisoners beaten to death had suffered a "heart attack," can quite truthfully state that they were never arrested or convicted of a crime.

As Hatem Abudayyeh of the defense campaign stated, "We know there is a lot of work still to do and we will continue to educate people about the case, and about Palestine support work in the cause of liberation."

Information on how to support and contribute to the defense campaign are online [here](#).

[Against the Current](#)

[1] For an account of the sentencing and for background on the case, see Ali Abunimah, <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs...>, and David Finkel, <http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/4327> .