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Palestine solidarity

Rasmea Odeh's Long Struggle

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A month after her conviction and imprisonment for “unlawful procurement of naturalization,” Rasmea Odeh’s release on \$50,000 cash bond was secured on December 11, 2014.

Observers and supporters of the 67-year-old Palestinian community leader were stunned immediately after a federal jury in Detroit returned a guilty verdict on November 10, following two hours of deliberation, when Federal District Judge Gershwin Drain ordered her jailed until a sentencing hearing that’s scheduled for March 10, 2015.

Odeh was handcuffed and shipped to the St. Clair County Jail in Port Huron, Michigan, 400 miles from her community in Chicago where she serves as associate director of the Arab American Action Network and director of the Arab Women’s Committee. [\[1\]](#)

In a poorly heated county jail that’s hardly suited for lengthy incarceration, Odeh was held in solitary confinement for 12 days and her health began to suffer due to high blood pressure and other conditions. The Rasmea Defense Committee launched an emergency letter-writing and phone-in campaign for the restoration of her bond.

On December 8, the judge reversed his previous ruling that Odeh has “no meaningful ties” in Chicago “flying in the face of her deep community involvements and her relatives living there” and recognized her eligibility for release on bond.

Prosecutor Jonathan Tukul immediately appealed, demanding a hearing and raising a series of political questions on the source of the money raised for Odeh’s bond, but withdrew the objection after a December 10 deposition [\[2\]](#).

A difficult, bitter and expensive battle lies ahead for Odeh and the defense campaign. The prosecution is demanding a minimum 21-month prison sentence “she could be sentenced to as much as 10 years” and stripping her naturalized U.S. citizenship, followed by deportation. She was convicted for failing to disclose, in her 2004 application for naturalization (and her initial application for legal permanent U.S. residency, filed in Jordan in 1994), her arrest and imprisonment in Israel 35 years earlier.

Rasmea Odeh was born in 1947 in the Palestinian town of Litfa outside Jerusalem, whose inhabitants were expelled by Israeli forces in the 1948 war. Living in the West Bank which came under Israeli occupation in 1967, she was arrested in a roundup following the 1969 bombing of an Israeli supermarket, sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court and served ten years before she was released in an Israeli exchange of prisoners with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Her indictment on immigration fraud charges followed FBI raids in 2010 on two dozen political activists in Chicago and Minneapolis, which have resulted in no charges but apparently led the Justice Department to undertake a three-year investigation of Rasmea Odeh leading to her arrest in October, 2013.

In her trial Odeh was not allowed to testify about torture under Israeli interrogation, nor was the defense allowed to present expert testimony that she suffers from post-traumatic stress that affects her memory. [\[3\]](#)

The arrest and trial of Rasmea Odeh has every appearance of a blatantly selective political prosecution. In the

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circumstances where virtually no defense case was allowed, the conviction was practically a foregone conclusion. The judge, after stating in pre-trial hearings that her claims of Israeli torture are “credible,” turned around and excluded them from her trial. And despite detailed expert testimony from University of Illinois-Chicago professor Nadine Naber on Odeh’s decade-long uniquely successful work among mainly Arab immigrant women in Chicago, he somehow saw fit to rule she had “no ties” to hold her there.

Her release on bond shows that publicity and pressure makes a difference, but a long uphill struggle remains. Follow the case at www.uspcn.org as the defense team develops strategies for the sentencing and appeals process.

[ATC](#)

[1] For background on the trial see “The Trials of Rasmea Odeh,” <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/n...>

[2] <http://uspcn.org/2014/12/10/despite...>

[3] On the torture she has recounted in detail see Joshua Ruebner, <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-bl...>