

Harvard Students Say Hands Off Rasmea Odeh!

Dear Classmates, Friends, and Comrades,

As Harvard students, we declare our utmost support for and solidarity with Rasmea Odeh, a Palestinian freedom fighter who is being targeted and persecuted by the United States government as punishment for her community activism.

In many ways, Rasmea's story is the story of the Palestinian people. Rasmea was born in Lifta, Palestine, in 1947—one year before the anti-Palestinian ethnic cleansing campaigns, known as the Nakba, began. During the first year of Rasmea's life, more than 75% of indigenous Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their ancestral homeland by Zionist militias in order to make way for the new state of Israel. The Odeh family was forced to flee Lifta when the Stern Gang and the Irgun, two groups who would later merge with the Haganah to form the Israeli Defense Force, occupied the village and chased out its 2,500 inhabitants at gun-point. Once one of the most prosperous villages in the Jerusalem region, Lifta had been continuously populated for over 2,000 years before the Zionist militias sacked and pillaged the city. Over the course of the Nakba, more than 400 other Palestinian villages were similarly razed to the ground. Rasmea grew up in the wake of this ethnic cleansing and imperialist oppression, and when she was old enough she became a freedom fighter and a community organizer.

As a result of her activism, Rasmea became a target for the Israeli government, and in 1969 she was arrested for a crime she did not commit. The Israeli Courts already convict approximately 99% of Palestinian defendants who come before them, but Rasmea's treatment was far worse. For weeks, she was tortured and sexually abused by Israeli interrogators. Rasmea eventually signed a false confession, but only after the IDF arrested her father, a U.S. citizen, and threatened to force him to rape her. Rasmea spent the next ten years of her life locked in the occupier's jail before she was finally released during a prisoner swap in 1979. In 1995, Rasmea moved to the United States to be closer to her father, and to avoid further persecution and abuse. Rasmea also began working as a community organizer with the Arab and immigrant community in Chicago, where she quickly became a role model for marginalized women, and an important feminist and anti-imperialist leader in her community.

Early on the morning of Tuesday, October 22, 2013, Rasmea—who was then 66 years old—was arrested at her home in Chicago by DHS agents, and was charged with immigration fraud. The attorney general argued that Rasmea had hidden the fact that she was a political prisoner when she filed her citizenship application, and asked the court to give her up to 10 years in prison followed by deportation. The charges against Rasmea must be understood in the context of severe repression of anti-war activism in the United States. In 2003, for instance, the FBI raided the Brookline home of an Arab community organizer named Amer Jubran, because he was active in the Palestinian solidarity movement. After the court dismissed the charges against Amer, the FBI assigned twelve full-time agents to spy on him, and eventually charged him with immigration fraud in an attempt to force him out of the country. The charges in Rasmea's own case only came to light following an unconstitutional FBI raid on the homes of 23 anti-war organizers in 2010. It is therefore crucial that we understand Rasmea's case in this larger context of government repression and persecution of Palestinian and Arab community leaders.

Rasmea is a survivor of brutal sexual torture, and her ongoing abuse at the hands of the U.S. immigration and criminal justice system is representative of the feminist struggle against anti-Arab racism, violence against women, and the rape culture that enabled judge Gershwin Drain to silence Rasmea and prevent her from speaking out about her sexual torture in court. Rasmea's struggle is rooted in a Palestinian collective identity that is shared by Arab feminist activists like Lina Khattab and Khalida Jarrar. Lina Khattab is an 18 year-old

Palestinian student and dancer who was arrested, abused, and imprisoned by Israeli officials for defending the rights of the Palestinian people. Similarly, Khalida Jarrar is a Palestinian feminist, politician, and human rights activist who was unjustly imprisoned for six months in administrative detention as punishment for her political activism. Women of color around the world have consistently faced similar politically motivated prosecutions, and the famous African American civil rights advocate and former political prisoner, Angela Davis, who has long championed the cause of marginalized political prisoners, now stands firmly behind Rasmea in her fight for justice.

We the undersigned student organizations demand that the Attorney General drop all charges against Rasmea immediately. Rasmea has done nothing wrong, and is being victimized for her fearless leadership in the struggle against racism, misogyny, and imperialism. There is no legal justification for preventing Rasmea's expert witness, Mary Fabri, from testifying about the lasting traumatic effects of the torture and sexual abuse Rasmea suffered at the hands of her Israeli captors, and this prosecution has been purely political since the very beginning; it is yet another instance of white supremacist governments targeting and abusing women from oppressed nationalities in an attempt to silence them. We will not sit idly by while our own government perpetuates this anti-Arab, misogynist, and imperialist violence. Hands off Rasmea Odeh! End the political persecution of Arab women! Free all political prisoners!

Until Land and Liberation,

Harvard National Lawyers Guild
Harvard Law School Justice for Palestine
Harvard College Palestine Solidarity Committee
Reclaim Harvard Law School

Harvard Islamic Society
Harvard Law School Students for Inclusion
Unbound: Harvard Journal of the Legal Left



Harvard Law Says
Hands Off Rasmea Odeh!
Drop the Charges!