

US Judge Sentences US Citizen Based on Israeli Military Documents

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Al Awda sponsored a picket outside the Office of Homeland Security in New York City demanding that immigration fraud charges against Arab-American organizer Rasmia Odeh be dropped on October 20, 2014. (Photo via [a katz / Shutterstock.com](#))

In September 2014, Truthout reported on 67-year-old Rasmia Odeh, a Palestinian woman who sought refuge in the United States more than 20 years ago after having been tortured horrifically by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) personnel.

The story, titled "[Tortured and Raped by Israel, Persecuted by the United States](#)," outlined how Odeh, who has now been a US citizen for more than a decade, was essentially framed by the Israelis when she was a victim of a mass detention exercise that took place in the wake of a supermarket bombing.

After testifying to the UN at Geneva, Switzerland, about her treatment at the hands of the Israelis, detailing how she was beaten with metal rods, sexually assaulted, kicked, threatened and abused in other ways, Odeh eventually managed to join her father in the United States, where she has lived in Chicago, working as a productive community member and activist for Palestinian rights.

In 2013, Odeh was indicted by the US government and charged with immigration fraud, a charge stemming from other charges pulled from her then 35-year-old IDF file. The first judge in her case had to step down, due to an overt and strong pro-Israel bias.

On March 12, stunningly, Odeh was sentenced to 18 months in prison, fined \$1,000 and had her US citizenship revoked.

Unfair Conviction and Trial

Odeh's lawyer for the case against her in the United States is Michael Deutsch with the People's Law Office in Chicago.

Deutsch told Truthout he believes Odeh's indictment is an attempt to "criminalize her," and has advised her not to speak with the media out of concern something she said might be used against her, given the politically sensitive nature of her case.

"In 2010, the Arab American Action Network (AAAN, where Odeh worked) was investigated by the FBI, and the FBI wanted more information on Rasmia's background and sent a request to the Israeli government to pull her file," Deutsch explained.

“Everyone refused to testify at the grand jury; no indictments were made and possessions seized during the home raids were returned to people,” Deutsch said. “But it was during this that they learned of her history in the occupied territories.”

Nevertheless, the US government claimed that Odeh had lied when she said she had never been arrested, convicted or imprisoned.

“Our view is that she was asked these questions almost 10 years after coming to this country, and on one level they pertain to the US, and so she said no because the question is ambiguous,” Deutsch said. “She thought they were asking her [if she’d been arrested during] her time in the US.”

The Trial

According to [The Electronic Intifada’s Ali Abunimah](#), who attended Odeh’s trial on March 12, the government argued that her sentence should be particularly harsh because Odeh failed to disclose, on her immigration application, a 1969 “terrorism” conviction in an Israeli military court.

Odeh has consistently maintained that after weeks of the aforementioned prolonged torture and sexual assault by Israeli interrogators, she was forced to confess to involvement in two bombings at a supermarket in Jerusalem.

During the recent trial, Assistant US Attorney Jonathan Tukel showed a video and slide presentation that he claimed contained, “absolutely conclusive proof that [Odeh] was involved in the SuperSol supermarket bombing.”

What Tukel showed included short clips from film documentaries made in 1993 and 2004 that the government claimed showed Odeh’s associates making statements that implicated her in the bombing.

However, Abunimah said, “None of the clips played by prosecutors, in Arabic with English subtitles, offered any such clear proof as far as The Electronic Intifada could see or hear.”

The Electronic Intifada [reported](#) that Tukel claimed that captions added by the filmmaker to one of the videos had identified Odeh as taking part in the bombing, despite the fact that none of the clips shown at the trial showed Odeh taking credit for the supermarket attack.

“She’s maintained she was not involved,” Deutsch told Truthout of the bombing. “Even though they all said they’d been tortured and recused their confessions. So she’s saying whatever she said [at the time of her detention] was a result of torture and she was not involved [in the bombing].”

Deutsch made a statement about these portions of the trial, and said that Odeh had been part of a political struggle and it was no more incriminating for her to talk to Leila Khaled in a documentary about the history of that struggle than it would be for South African liberation heroes Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu to reminisce about their past.

To Appeal

“The attack on Ramea was made based on information obtained through torture at the hands of Israel nearly 20 years ago,” Hatem Abudayyeh, the executive director of AAAN,

told Truthout. “Although the prosecutor was allowed to present Israeli evidence, Rasmea’s defense team was prohibited from entering any evidence in her defense from that time.”

Abudayyeh sees the persecution of Odeh as part of a broader attack against the Palestinian community in general.

“There is Islamaphobia, and it’s moved from being a personal tool of oppression to structural and institutional,” he explained. “Even non-prominent Muslims are being caught up in law enforcement entrapment on both coasts now. The majority of the prominent Muslims caught up in that net have in common that they are Palestinian organizers, and are challenging US foreign policy as it relates to Palestine specifically.”

Deutsch drew a stark analogy.

“From 1969 to the present, the IDF tortures people and we have plenty of evidence of this systematic torture,” he said. “If you have Nazi courts, would they put in a conviction from a Nazi court in a US court?”

Abudayyeh strongly believes the entire trial is politically motivated.

“We know historically in this country that every social justice movement that has been effective has come under attack by law enforcement, and we believe very strongly that this is what is happening to Palestinians here now,” Abudayyeh said. “We are winning some battles now, and Palestinians around the world are winning this battle against Israel for the hearts and minds of the world, with the [boycott, divestment and sanctions movement](#). So, this is how the US and Israel are reacting ... they are attacking us by trying to criminalize us. So if they can take down a community icon like Rasmea, then they think they can criminalize the movement as a whole.”

Deutsch told Truthout he was not surprised at the pro-Israel bias of the US government.

“I’ve seen in other cases I’ve worked on, a close collaboration between the US and Israeli Justice Departments, and I think the Israelis are more than happy to cooperate with that and condemn her and have her thrown out of the country,” he said.

Deutsch has appealed the recent ruling, and Odeh is currently free on bond after the judge rejected a US government request to impose a lengthy five to seven-year sentence of jail time on her. The appeal is expected to take at least six months.

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Dahr Jamail, a Truthout staff reporter, is the author of [The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan](#), (Haymarket Books, 2009), and [Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches From an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq](#), (Haymarket Books, 2007). Jamail reported from Iraq for more than a year, as well as from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Turkey over the last ten years, and has won the Martha Gellhorn Award for Investigative Journalism, among other awards.

His third book, [The Mass Destruction of Iraq: Why It Is Happening, and Who Is Responsible](#), co-written with [William Rivers Pitt](#), is available now on Amazon. He lives and works in Washington State.

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