

SUMMARY OF LETTERS IN SUPPORT OF YASSIN AREF

1) Dr. Shamshad Ahmad, President of the Masjid As Salaam Mosque, writes (emphasis supplied), “I was born in India and was raised there. In July, 1979, after completing my Ph.D in physics at the Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, I moved to Albany to join a research/teaching position at SUNY Albany. ...In 1999, I founded Masjid As-Salam, a mosque on Central Avenue in Albany, and have since been its president and in charge of its overall affairs. Mr. Yassin Aref arrived in Albany around the same time the mosque was being established and its building was being renovated. He joined me in this effort from the first day and participated physically with total devotion and commitment ... all voluntarily. ...[H]e spent long hours with me, each and every day without interruption for eight consecutive months. At that time he worked as a janitor at Albany Medical Center. ...Eventually he was appointed the Imam of this mosque in August, 2000. Since then he spent literally all his time in the mosque conducting five daily prayers, giving sermons, counseling the members and interacting with me in administering the mosque and handling the affairs of the Muslim community. Thus I can say that Yassin had more personal contact with me than with any other single individual while staying in Albany. I, therefore, think that I have been able to understand him, his personality, and his thought process extremely well. I was at odds with him and in disagreement on many aspects of life including several religious interpretations as well as the mechanisms of running the mosque. *But we had a total agreement that respecting the law of the land and that its obedience is an integral part of our religion, and acts of terrorism in any shape or form are against it.* I always envied Yassin’s care and love for his wife and children. ... His care, concern, and generosity for the members of the Muslim community were enormous so much that many times I considered it excessive. Many members of our community used to exploit and misuse his generosity by requesting help in the form of charity or loan. And he used to rush to fulfil their request himself, if he could, or request others to do so if they could. He never hesitated or thought of asking detailed questions. Coming from a third world country myself I know very well that taking and giving loans among the friends, acquaintances, and the needy of the community is a very common practice. ... Over the years Yassin arranged 18 different loans from me, ranging from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand dollars, to various members of the community. ... All these loans were interest-free and had written agreements. He had arranged similar loans between some other members of the community as well. For a Western person it might sound abnormal but for us Muslims from third world countries it is a perfectly normal practice. Knowing Yassin Aref, his personality, and his involvement in the affairs of the Muslim community, I am fully convinced that the ‘loan arrangement’ he witnessed between Mr. Moshareff Hossain and the government informant, in his mind, was nothing but a kind of loan he had arranged or witnessed between various members of the community so many times. ... Your honor, I hope and pray that my honest words in this letter outlining one aspect of Yassin Aref’s selfless involvement in the Muslim community will find your consideration when you finalize the sentencing of this case...”

2) Jeanne Finley writes, “...I am a professional writer and editor , and I am writing [on Yassin Aref’s] behalf because I have a unique relationship with him. Several weeks ago, I was asked by his volunteer lawyer, Stephen Downs, to edit [also as a volunteer] a memoir in progress that Mr. Aref is writing about his life... Mr. Aref has said he is writing it so his four children will ‘know where they came from’ if he is sentenced to a lengthy prison term, as well as to help readers

understand the Kurdish culture and political conflicts that marked him and his generation... In my years of editing both fiction and non-fiction manuscripts, I have never encountered a voice like Mr. Aref's - a moral and just voice incapable of telling a lie, in both the literal and literary sense, a voice that cannot help but speak the truth because that is the guiding principle of the real man behind the voice. The capacity to live and see and think like this is made possible for Mr. Aref by his embrace of the moral principles of, and his faith in, Islam... If there is a 'theme' to this book, it is that of the individual always asking, 'How shall I live now?' ...[T]his man not only lives by moral principles, but has the strength of character and the ability to guide others to adhere to these principles as well. His grandfather and uncle were famous imams ... he found from an early age the same 'calling' in himself... It is my belief that Mr. Aref's character, as evidenced by his own words on the page, his testimony throughout his arrest and trial, and his actions, makes him incapable of the sinister and illegal acts of which he was convicted. ...As a literary editor, I know how easy it is to twist words for the desired effect; and it is my belief, having informed myself as fully as I could from as many sources as possible about the whole case, that this twisting of the intent of a moral man is the grave injustice that has been done to Mr. Aref. I understand, however, that you are deciding his sentence, not his guilt, which has already been legally decided. So, with respect, I urge you to consider Abraham Lincoln's words, 'I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.' and I offer the whole of this letter as an appeal to you on behalf of Mr. Aref's wife and four children for the most lenient sentence possible. Mr. Aref told a jail visitor (one of the group of people that has been helping him and his family) in December that what truly torments him is not the prospect of a prison term, but what that long separation will do to his children..."

3) Dr. Michael Rice writes, "I write to ask you to exercise your utmost leniency in the sentencing of Yassin Aref, whom I regard as incapable of knowingly seeking the harm of any human being, or even of knowingly violating a law, even if he may have been guilty of a technical offense. ...My empathy is engaged ...[with Yassin and his family] because, like the Aref's, I am here as a refugee - they from Saddam Hussein's Kurdistan, I from Hitler's Germany. My Jewish mother and I were fortunate to be granted refuge in the United States ... in 1941 (when I was eleven). ...I remember embarrassing incidents where language and cultural differences left me unable to understand or be understood. I rather believe that Aref's mentality would not have known what to make of "laundering" money! After starting our American life in extreme poverty - I was able to ...go on to earn a doctorate in physics from Harvard, to teach college for 21 years, then obtain a law degree and pursue a career in state government service in science policy analysis. In Mrs. Aref, I see a more disadvantaged version of my mother, struggling to survive... In Yassin Aref, I see a version of myself, quicker to adapt to the surrounding culture, trying to support his family... My sensitivity to being a despised and misunderstood minority is born of being a Jew in Nazi Germany. I believe it would have been extremely difficult for an American jury...to distinguish between their duty as citizens to reach a verdict 'beyond a reasonable doubt' and their duty as citizens to protect the nation from potential terrorists unless they found not even a possibility that the defendants might be terrorists. I believe that Aref's entire history bespeaks of his being a genuinely religious man... This is, of course, in sharp contrast to the principal witness against him, who had been deeply involved in a life of

crime. As a religious man myself, I was especially offended by this criminal's sacrilegious effort to worm his way into Aref's confidence by pretending to seek religious instruction..."

4) Salih Abdullah, a former student of Yassin Aref, writes, "...I am a 22 year old Muslim who was [formerly] a student of Imam Yasin. I moved to Albany, New York in August of 2003, prior to my arrival in Albany I was not a practicing Muslim despite being born and raised Muslim. Not knowing anyone from Albany I decided to seek out the only familiar environment I knew - the masjid. One of the first people I met while at the masjid was Imam Yasin. His presence was the first thing that impressed me. His humility and character was something rarely seen in individuals. I began attending the masjid more often and became closer to him [taking] from the vast amount of knowledge he possessed and good character he embodied. I was immediately touched by his sincerity and his balanced leadership. Through his presence I began to love Islam and practice it faithfully. He advised me to continue to study Islam and strengthen my ties with my family whom I was having problems with during that time, both of which have improved significantly. I decided to study Arabic and Quran overseas in Egypt for one year through his advice and guidance. Imam Yasin was one with sound understanding and good intentions and I am sure that what has transpired was not from his intention and those accusations against him were false despite the jury's verdict. I implore you to carefully consider the hundreds of people who were positively affected by the beautiful presence of Imam Yasin. Please consider the unjust act that has taken place in our community and please be just with the final authority that you have in deciding this man's fate and the fate of this Albany community."

5) James Fulmer writes, "I write to you on behalf of Mohammed Hossain, Yassin Aref and their families... I have been involved in the last few months with the Muslim Solidarity Committee and in that time have had the opportunity to meet and get to know (a bit) their families. I am currently working with both families as a [volunteer] carpenter and general fix-it man to help with the upkeep of their apartments and property. I want them to know that America is compassionate and conscientious. I'm afraid they've lost faith in these concepts as a result of the FBI sting against their fathers and husbands. It seems that in our country's intense desire for security, these two men (and their families) have also become victims... Can we show the Muslim community and the world that we are not driven by fear, that we are motivated by the ideals that brought the families here? Isn't the time these men have already served, and the anguish this sting operation has caused these families, enough? In your heart of hearts, do you think these two men are capable of terrorism? If you're convinced they've broken (a) law(s), would you consider leniency, based on all the facts of the case? Either way, I want you to know how deeply my heart goes out to these two families, and I will continue to support them in any way I can. Perhaps as a matter of security and lawfulness, we could all be best served by considering a higher law in this case: God's law. Would it be best served by putting these men away interminably? ..."

6) Sarah Birn, Esq. writes, "For the sake of justice and respect for our judicial system, I urge the most lenient sentence available for Imam Aref. I recently retired as a member of the Albany law firm of O'Connell and Aronowitz, PC, and had the luxury of attending many significant days of

the trial. Although my attention to the case was drawn by the secrecy of government evidence and the Court's opinion on the Motion to Dismiss, I attended with an open mind. The horrors of terrorism are not lost on me: my daughter was in NYC on 9/11 and I appreciate the government's burden and duty. I urge leniency because I heard no evidence of the Imam's guilt of the conspiracies charged and no evidence that he could even sympathize with terrorism. The other shoe just never dropped. ... More importantly for sentencing purposes, trial testimony, the secretly recorded conversations and the Imam's lectures in Kurdistan revealed the Imam as a sincerely devout, non-political person dedicated to performing his religious duties with honesty, integrity, and an understanding of the pastoral guidance needed by Muslims living in America. His reputation for honesty was confirmed to me by e-mail from persons responding to my letter to the editor. The members of his mosque need him, his family needs him, and through his services, the greater community needs him. Our government created the crime for which the Imam and his family were torn apart. The jury found him not guilty of the charges based on the only which could have linked him to a terrorist plot. Proved cultural and linguistic misunderstandings in the case were only the tip of the iceberg in which language and customs barriers confused the Imam himself, the government and, most likely, the jury. As the wife of an American diplomat living in India for almost three years, I learned how hard (but how important) it is to appreciate the difference in mindset and assumptions of people from profoundly different cultures. Had the FBI and prosecutors had the sophisticated cultural, historical and language skills necessary to investigate this case, I'm convinced it never would have been brought. That leaves the onus on the Court to grant the Imam the justice he deserved. The terrorists are weakened when our justice system works the way it is supposed to. Granting leniency in sentencing the Imam is just, and it is vital to show the integrity of our judicial system."

7) Steve Trim writes, "...I am a New York State retiree (twenty five years with the Office of Mental Health) who followed [this] case with interest and, through a mutual friend, was able to visit [Yassin Aref] in jail. ...As we talked, I formed three strong impressions concerning the man. First, Iman Aref is sincere in his religious beliefs. Second, he is convinced that, as a follower of Islam, he must never hurt others, nor support those who do. (And that, as an Imam, it is his obligation to tell the truth in all circumstances.) Third, that at least co-equal in importance with his devotion to his faith is his love for, and devotion to, his family. ... [Yassin said that] after all he and his family had gone through in order to find a sanctuary from violence, he would not jeopardize their well-being by becoming a terrorist or a supporter of terrorism... I wanted to believe him and yet, I had to wonder, was he over-stating his commitment to a nonviolent interpretation of Islam and was he exaggerating his love of family in order to manipulate me? ...Before I could speak up for him, I had to get a better "read" on Iman Aref's sincerity and authenticity. Utilizing our mutual friend who, like the Imam, is Muslim, I was able to meet many Muslims who live in the Capital District. From them I heard innumerable stories about the Imam taking his children on weekly visits to the library, helping them with their studies and supporting them at school events. I was told again and again that when he was not busy with spiritual duties ... he was always and invariably with his family. In other words, the Imam's self-portrait was confirmed by those who had day-to-day contact with him. ...I'm convinced, based upon my face-to-face conversations with him and his community's long-held positive assessment of his

character and values, that whatever behavior was elicited as the sting operation unfolded, Imam Aref was not knowingly supporting terrorism....In light of all this, I believe there are grounds for imposing a sentence that is lenient. ...”

8) Cathy Callan writes, “...As a non-Muslim member of the greater Albany community, I have come to know many of the members of the Masjid Assalam Mosque... In getting to know this group of good, honest and humble people, I have come to realize how much Imam Aref is missed at the mosque. In conversations with some of these folk, Imam Aref’s name comes up regularly as an important member who offered wisdom, comfort and support to anyone who came to him. ...Further, I have come to know his family: Wife Zohour and four, rambunctious, fully Americanized children, and see with dismay and sorrow the damage this entire affair has brought on this young family. Imagine, a young man, his wife and (at the time) three children fleeing the hardships and threats of their own native land, being taken in, with open arms mind you, by the land of the free and feeling that they can finally let go of their fears of imprisonment, torture and death, only to be singled out by our government and being flung blindly back into that dehumanizing state once again. Zuhour is not well; this entire episode has left her barely able to take care of her own family. She is fortunate only in that she has the mosque family to look after her and her children. Her children do not understand why their father is in prison, nor do they fully understand that he will not be coming home any time soon. Each day brings this family closer to the brink of lost hope and despair. ...”

9) The Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany’s Commission on Peace and Justice writes, “...Based on all the information we have received, the undersigned members of the Commission on Peace and Justice of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany have serious reservations concerning the convictions of Yassin Aref, and Mohammed Hossain. ...We believe that the jury may have been caught up in the current climate of fear of Muslims and the mention of ‘classified evidence.’ Under these circumstances, the jury may have decided on a guilty verdict more out of a fear that the defendants *might* be guilty, rather than a real belief that they *were* guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. ...If there are other reasons you know why the defendants should be convicted but cannot share with us at this time, we urge you to exercise the utmost leniency when it comes to sentencing. We consider both the defendants to be .. hard-working, honest, religious, and devoted to their families. They have never been in any trouble with the law in the past. Furthermore, from all of the evidence we have seen, we see no indications they would engage in any kind of terrorism. We pray that Yassin Aref and Mohammed Hossain will be returned to their families and the community, which will hold up for all to see the values of American justice. ...”

10) May Saffar writes, “...I met Mr. Aref when he first came to the United States in 1999. Aref and I share the history of having lived in Iraq under the tyrant Saddam Hussein, and seeking liberty and freedom in the United States. ... As an English second language speaker as well as a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL), I can understand how language misunderstandings can create problems... I attended some of the trial and followed all of it. ...Aref is a father of four beautiful young children. ... I have been in contact with the family since

Aref's arrest and as a mother of three, my heart aches every time I see Aref's kids growing up away from their father. Aref is a very loving, caring and involved father. The oldest daughter who is 11 had taken so many family responsibilities as she understands her mother's helplessness. Zohour is still in a state of shock, extremely depressed, and dysfunctional. ...From my interaction with Aref's children, I also realized how intelligent these kids are. They asked me to bring them a chess game, and books. ...Zohour is still traumatized from the impact of the maltreatment of Saddam to the Kurds in Iraq, and the way the FBI raided their residence when her husband Yaseen was arrested. I hold a degree in Arabic-English translation and I teach Arabic language and culture at Hudson Valley Community College and the College of St. Rose. I witnessed many crucial language mistranslations during the court sessions. Words such as "Jihad" which means to struggle, "Madrasa" which means school, and the word "Mushrik" which means a worshiper of other than God, or a worshiper or someone else besides God. ...In conclusion, I plead with you to treat this religious man with compassion and leniency and use your position to narrow the gap between us (Muslims) and the West as a step toward peace. ..."

11) Dr. Alice Green writes, "I am a criminologist and long-time director of the Center for Law and Justice, Inc. Located in Albany, New York. As a community-based civil rights organization, we have worked across the state with criminal justice advocates, legislative bodies, law enforcement agencies, the courts, and correctional facilities for nearly 25 years. ... This Fall, I had the opportunity to attend much of the trial of Iman Yassin Aref along with a number of community residents, some of whom often prayed with and participated in very positive and constructive community activities with him. I remain deeply impressed with this man of faith who is an outstanding neighbor, socially responsible leader, and loving husband, father and community member. His roles of loving husband and father stand out for many of us because of his deep devotion to them. Since his arrival in Albany, we have known of his background, hard work, faith, and love for his new country. From him we learned much about difference cultures, religions, and languages. He has been a true asset to our community. ...I beg for extreme leniency for this wonderfully sensitive, intelligent and loving man who should be allowed to care for his family and raise his four beautiful children. ..."

12) Walter A. Wojtowicz writes, "...I have followed this case in the newspapers and on television. In general I do not consider myself an activist. However as this case evolved I learned about the individuals involved, their background, their struggles, and their involvement in the 'sting' operation, the trial, I felt I must speak out. When all the facts of this case are examined, it is virtually impossible to place the label of potential terrorist on Imam Aref. I plead with you, Judge McAvoy, to have leniency on Imam Aref and thus on those who depend on him at home in the Capital of our state... Please reflect on how our community will best be served I hope you will conclude, as I have, that, for this man in this case, the greatest justice will be the least punishment. ..."

13) Rashid Abdulhaqq Hamza, a member of the Masjid As-Salam Mosque, writes, "The first time I met Imam Yassin, he didn't see the "Brownness" of my skin or any "Differences." He extended his hand, smiled and said "As Salaamu Alaikum". ... Imam Yassin taught me the

Qur'an is not something just to recite beautifully, but is a Guide given to us by our CREATOR to be implemented into our daily lives. ... He said of the suicide bombers it is not from Islam to do this and all the Scholars of Islam agree. ... Imam Yassin taught this community to respect the laws of this country and always be truthful in our dealings in all mutual transactions with everyone we deal with, Muslim or non-Muslim. ... I would be the first to help this government put Imam Yassin in prison if he was the person the government described. Imam Yassin is a decent hard working family man who expends a helping hand to anyone. He still believes this judicial system will give him the justice he deserves and reunite him with his family and his community. Your Honor Judge McAvoy harshly sentence all terrorists, they are a threat to my security as well as the security of this great land we all live in. Imam Aref is not one of them; please allow him to come home with his family and community. We all need him. ...”

14) Women Against War writes, “We are writing to you as [8] members of the Steering Committee of Women Against War (WAW)... We are writing to ask you to use your judicial discretion to provide the most lenient sentence possible for Yassin Aref. Mr. Aref is a refugee from the persecution and war he suffered as an Iraqi Kurd.... Mr. Aref’s wife, Zuhour, and his four children depend on him for their financial, emotional and spiritual support. ... In time, he became the imam of a Capital District mosque, where he has been a source of spiritual guidance and support to an entire religious community. As women working to reduce the suffering brought about by war, we know that women and children are the most frequent victims of war and violence, including the current ‘war on terror.’ We see the traumatic shock experienced by Zuhur as she deals with yet another sudden disruption of her life and family structure here in the United States where she and her family relocated, hoping to be free, safe and secure. Since 2003, WAW has been working to support Muslim Americans in our community as they have experienced increasing discrimination based on the prejudicial climate in the aftermath of 9/11. ... We value these families as our neighbors and as respected members of our communities. ... We ask that you consider the consequences that your sentencing decision will have. The effects it will have on Mr. Aref, his family, the members of his mosque, the Muslim community, the family’s friends and allies in the Capital district and, ultimately, the quality of justice and freedom for all United States residents. ...”

15) Joanne Mann & Eight other Members of Schenectady Pax Christi write, “As a Peace Community based in Catholic Social Teaching, Pax Christi Schenectady chapter’s first and particular concern is for the two local members of the Muslim community, Yassin Aref and Mohammed Hossain, targets of the recent FBI sting. ...We are also concerned for the immediate needs of the families of these men which are deprived of the support of two hardworking husbands and fathers while this case, in these particularly polarized times, is sorted out. ...We hope that you share our concerns, Judge McAvoy, and in your sentencing, take into account the honest work ethics of these men, their love for and support of their families and also the praiseworthy legal system, which used to be the last hope of the minorities...”

16) Wilhelmina R. Downs writes, “Since early springtime I have become involved with the family of Yassin Aref. There are no words to describe the suffering that Mr. Aref’s imprisonment

has caused to his wife and children. I heard Mr. Aref's testimony in court and I left with a deep feeling of sadness that an innocent man was on trial for being a terrorist. Neither Mr. Aref nor Mr. Hossain is a terrorist. No one in the Muslim community believes it, and neither do many of the people who have worked with [the] community to help the families. ...I believe strongly that justice can still be done. I have personally come to know from visiting the family, and from the Muslim community, and from reading Yassin's manuscript, of Yassin's love for his community, his advocacy for non-violence, his generosity, his love of children and his intellect. ... Growing up during World War II in the Netherlands I know from my own experience how devastating persecution can be. ... I ask you to free Yassin and Mohammed so that they can go back to their families and raise their children peacefully in a free society. They are no threat to us, but their convictions are a threat to our self-respect as a country, and to our commitment to the law and to justice. ..."

17) Vera Michelson writes, "...I do not know Yassin personally. I do know people who know him well. I was able to attend the trial and I find myself compelled to write on his behalf. At the trial I was struck by Aref's calm and thoughtful demeanor. ...He talked about his aspirations, eventually coming to the United States full of hope. I saw a man at this trial (Aref) who was deeply religious and scholarly. ...As I speak to others who know him, they confirm that Aref is a peaceful and honest man who is most concerned about the welfare of his wife and four children and their future without him. We are not talking about a militant individual, not at all. ...We are talking about a gentle individual who many people depend on for spiritual and every day advice. We are talking about someone that we should all be proud to have in our or any community...I urge you to hand down the most lenient sentence possible when you sentence Yassin Aref.."

18) David Capone writes, "I am a 62 year-old retiree, son of Italian immigrants, who was fortunate to be able to attend all but one of the Aref/Hossain trial sessions. My reason for attending the trial was that my curiosity was piqued because of early newspaper accounts in which U.S. Magistrate David Homer seemed to vacillate between whether or not to grant Yassin Aref bail, so I decided to see if I could ascertain for myself the guilt or innocence of these men. What would prompt such indecisiveness and lead this Judge to even go so far as to at one time criticize the government handling of this case? I had to see for myself. ...[F]rom where I was seated I was able to catch the honor and respect displayed by Abul Kashem and Mohammed Aziz, government witnesses, towards Yassin Aref through the slight bowing of their head and warm, cordial facial expression given when they glanced over at him. To me this indicated that they both had nothing but the most utmost honor and respect for Mr. Aref. I have to ask myself why would government witnesses show such affection? ...The prosecution from the very onset of this trial stressed the importance of belief and intent. That concept was hammered home into my cranium and stuck with me during the entire course of the trial. What was Yassin's belief and intent? What was Yassin's belief and intent? I kept repeating to myself over and over again. I saw nothing in the evidence and testimony produced that would indicate that Yassin Aref either before, during or after the government informant entered his life, was a terrorist or had terrorist tendencies. ...I consider myself to be somewhat a person of faith although these last few years that has been severely challenged. None the less I know you attended an Augustinian college and

me a Franciscan. What do you suppose Augustine and Francis would say about this trial? ... The trial is over, the verdict is in. Now Mr. Aref's fate as well as that of his family is in your hands. I implore you to search within the deep recesses of your soul to impart a fair, equitable and lenient sentence."

19) Joe Pliss writes, "...I do not have any personal relationship to Mr. Aref. However, the trial ... and circumstances of this affair have frightened me. From where I see things I'm very worried that as a community we don't over-react to our fears. It seems like, through history, we get ourselves whipped up into hysteria and then inflict the cruelest, most draconian punishments against whatever ethnic group is new to the neighborhood, only to look back on history and wince at what we've done. I pray that a generous spirit and hopeful spirit guides your sentencing. As a father who has worked hard to keep a steady job and keep a family together for over 20 years, I have some compassion for the trauma and fear that this man must have at losing his family. Already, the punishment has been severe. If there was a need to send a message to the people that we must be vigilant against subversive wooing, then I believe the arrest, the trial, the incarceration and depravation already inflicted have amply demonstrated this. A sentence that is excessive; a power that fails to demonstrate restraint or compassion; sends the message that as a society we are under siege and nearly out of control. This man is not a threat to society and I beg you not to make an example of him but rather to demonstrate the dignity and power of the state, though granting leniency. For my own sense of peace and order, I ask this as well. ..."

20) Maribeth Lynn writes, "...Yassin Aref is part of a hardworking but discriminated against immigrant community just as my grandparents were in the early part of the twentieth century. ... The situation of his wife Zuhour without his help and support is particularly dire. She is depressed and too frightened to move around without accompaniment. They have four bright, healthy children, Dilnia, a one year old, Azam, an 8 year old, Salah, 10 and All'a, 11. I had the pleasure of meeting the three oldest children this past week. Although they're delightful and articulate, they're upset by their father's absence and their mother's suffering. A long imprisonment for Yassin would tear this family apart and have severe effects on the children's continuing education and development. ...On the basis of his family's needs and his own peaceful behavior and teachings, I ask that you show mercy and understanding in sentencing Yassin Aref. His sentence will have far reaching effects on his family, the Capital District community and the health of our legal system."

21) Gerald J. Bolduc writes, "... served in the Army and I am a Vietnam veteran. ...I consider myself a patriot who comes from a family with a lot of experience protecting this country as best we could, and I believe strongly that Mr. Aref is a good man who should be allowed to return to his young family and to further pursue his dreams of raising his family in a free country...one where there is equal opportunity for all. I have never written in defense of someone before...that's how strongly I feel about it. To be honest, I'm ashamed.... As a Vietnam veteran, as a Christian...as an American citizen, I'm asking you to let this man go. ..."

22) John Fudjack writes, "...I have a number of misgivings about the government's behavior in

this case, but will limit myself to mentioning three concerns that I believe to be essential in describing what I see as the fundamental flaw in their approach. 1) It is clear that these two men had no prior convictions, and a history of positive relations with the community at large. ...Had the government not interfered in their lives, in a profoundly troubling fashion, they are likely to have continued to lead exemplary lives, as valued and contributing members of our community. 2) It appears that the government intentionally drew these men into a complex series of situations specifically engineered to make normal innocent behaviors (borrowing and repaying a small loan, and witnessing that loan) look like criminal activity ('money laundering').... 3) The government, by claiming to possess classified evidence against the defendants ... had the effect of biasing the jury - in a most questionable manner that undercuts a fundamental principle underwriting our system of jurisprudence: the assumption that individuals charged with a crime ... must be treated as innocent until proven guilty. ... What juror, taking the word of the government in good faith and at face value, would *not* balk at letting these men go free, despite the innocence they demonstrated in court? ...”

23) Maud Easter writes, “I am writing to respectfully request that you consider the needs of both the family and our Capital District community in your sentencing decision in the Yassin Aref case. ... As someone who has lived in two non-English speaking countries, I can attest that even without the trauma experienced by refugees, I found community expressions of welcome and support to be very important. So, I urge you to think about the needs of this entire family, which has already suffered so much, when you consider this father’s case. They are very dependent on him for emotional and economic support. I also ask you to consider the needs of our entire community. ... Because Mr. Aref is the respected imam of a Capital District mosque, it has been particularly frightening to the local Muslim community to see him swept up in this case. Leniency in sentencing Mr. Aref will affirm to everyone in the Capital District, including those in the Muslim community, that we are truly offering Muslim refugees a just and safe new home. ...”

24) Salaam Muhammad Akbar writes, “...To fall short in the eyes of the law when intentions are definitely not to destroy humanity in America, and possibly be sentenced to a long prison term because of pure speculation and some possible prejudices is wrong... The decision that you make will probably [affect] many Muslims and future converts throughout the Capital District who love America, but will feel that being a Muslim will be something to be ashamed of, because of the negative stereotypes of Muslims, when people of all faiths make bad decisions whether they are Christians, Jewish, Hindus, Buddhist, or atheist. The [e]ffects that I’ve witness[ed] in the Mosque where brother Aref played a vital role has taken a horrible ..[toll] amongst faithful Muslims who feel that they are being spied upon, when they come to their house of worship. ...”

25) Michael Lynch, Esq., writes, “...I feel that [Mr. Aref] was caught up in the climate of fear that enveloped this country after 9/11. I don’t believe that he ever was or ever will be a threat to anyone. I also don’t believe that he intended to commit a crime. All of the circumstances surrounding his conviction - being lured by a fellow muslim; the miscommunications caused by the different languages of the parties and the climate of fear affecting all Americans including, I

presume, the jurors in this case - have, I am afraid, caused a miscarriage of justice...”

26) Priscilla Fairbank writes, “...From the first time I heard about the arrests of Yassin Aref and Mohammed Hossain, I was concerned that this new cloud of fear had interfered with our system of fairness and justice. I am reminded of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s caution, ‘There’s nothing to fear, but fear, itself.’ Today we look back with shame and apology at how we treated some of our immigrants at that time, due to fear and suspicion. ...I have read a poem written by Yassin as well as his New Year’s letter. I am struck by how deeply religious and peaceful and thoughtful he is. He expresses no anger. When I read his words, I hear a voice of healing and kindness. I believe it is immigrants like Mr. Aref who help make our country great through his love of our freedoms and values and his hard work. I have met his wife and some of his children - wonderful, bright-eyed, intelligent young people. These people I welcome as citizens and neighbors. I respectfully urge you, in your sentencing, to consider Yassin Aref’s wife, his children, and his community, as well as his life of learning and teaching. I ask you to consider him with compassion and leniency...”

27) Connie Frisbee Houde writes, “...I have traveled to Afghanistan three times in the last four years and have come to understand the huge differences in the American culture and the Muslim culture. ...I have learned of the extensive role that hospitality, generosity and humanity play in their daily lives. As I have gotten to know the Muslim community from the Masjid Assalam Mosque on Central Avenue I see this same importance in their lives to embody generosity and humanity in their adopted home of America. Imam Aref played a major role as their spiritual leader. In reading letters written since he has been in jail and from the contacts I have had I see a man of great humbleness who would not have chosen the path he is accused to have taken. He has a loving community and family who are representative of his life. As you consider this man’s fate ...please examine the facts of [his] character and I think you will find that [he] is not a terrorist.”

28) M. Jean Hynes writes, “I write to you to express my hope for your leniency toward Imam Yassin Aref as you are contemplating his sentencing. ... Through my work as a psychologist .. I have come to know students and young people of various backgrounds, including the Muslim religion. I have heard their stories ... of bias against them ... in this time of ignorance of fear of differences. I knew last year that the trial of Imam Yassin Aref and Mohammed Mosharref Hossain was an important event, happening right in my own community. I am sorry to say that I was slow to pay attention and learn all the details of their cases, but I have sought to change that over the past few months. ..The contact with other community members that this has afforded me, including members of the Muslim community, has been quite valuable in my learning. I have come to believe that Imam Yassin Aref was and is an important source of leadership and support to his mosque community. I have no belief that he is or was an evil terrorist plotting against the United States. ..I plead with you to have leniency on him...”

29) Joseph Lombardo writes, “I have never met Yassin Aref or Mohammed Hossain, but I did follow the news about their arrest and trial. I have since become involved with the Defense

committee for the 2 men. I am now the one who does the website for them and have had the wonderful opportunity of meeting their families and other members [of] the local Muslim community. I have learned that these are both men who are, and have been, law abiding. .. I understand the reasons for a government sting. When you know someone is doing something illegal and you don't have the evidence, you do a sting to catch them in the act. That is not what happened in this case. They were not doing anything illegal and they do not support terrorism. So, why were they targeted? ... Muslims I have met through my work on this campaign are frightened. Many have been intimidated at school, work and even in the streets. ... Our work has helped build a bridge of trust and understanding between many Muslims and many non-Muslims. I ask for leniency in your sentencing of these 2 men. ...”

30) Dr. Donald R. White¹ writes “I have no personal knowledge of Albany’s Arab community or any of its members. I am a PhD physicist retired after a good career doing research in GE’s corporate laboratory... I am a veteran of WWII, have served on the Shenendehowa School Board, and have been Chair of Trustees of two Methodist churches. I am ashamed of what my government appears to have done in the Aref/Hossain case. I have in the past and will again with this letter contribute to their Family Fund....”

31) Philip T. Cortese, M.D., writes, simply, “I hope you will make a good decision for Mr. Aref.”

32) John Bousman writes, “...I think the prosecution did *not* prove their case ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’ but used scare tactics to influence the jury. It was fairly clear that translations from the Kurdish were not the prosecution’s strong point and their understanding of Muslim society and mores weren’t much better. The primary witness for the prosecution certainly had a vested interest to shade truth and interpretations of his actions to present both defendants in the worst possible light. I have noted that Yassin Aref has been making the best of a sorry situation (sitting in jail) and has learned a considerable amount of English. I have noted that he also spoke in his own defense at trial and appeared cogent and trusting in the eventual triumph, in our system of law, of justice over hysteria. I share with him this view - and call upon you, in both your power and in your responsibility to use it wisely, to mitigate the flawed jury decision. ...PS. My Bonafides: I am an Army veteran - 1st Lieutenant US Army Alaska. I am a, now inactive, Professional Engineer in the State of New York ... I am 68 years old and have traveled all over the world, including lived in Muslim countries (Morocco). I am an American patriot who abhors injustice.”

33) Lyn Miller-Lachman writes, “...Although I am Jewish rather than Muslim, I know the important role that the spiritual leader plays in the life of the congregation. He is the person who leads the congregation in prayer, visits the sick, comforts the bereaved, and mediates conflict among congregation members. From all I have heard, Imam Aref was a beloved spiritual leader who taught the ways of peace and submission to God. He is greatly missed at the Masjid Assalam

¹The original of this letter was sent directly to the Court by Dr. White

Mosque.... I urge you to spare Imam Aref more prison time and to allow him to return to his young family so that he can take care of them. ...”

34) Paul Deierlein writes, “I am writing to urge you to demonstrate both mercy and justice to Mr. Aref... I do not believe this gentleman is guilty of any serious crime; rather, it appears that he may be the victim of an intricate and intentional entrapment scheme predicated upon ethnic and/or religious profiling. Can you recall the McCarthy era, your Honor? I can. In my view, Mr. Aref is no more a “terrorist” than Lucille Ball was a “communist.” Please consider the words of Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, who said, ‘It is confidence in the men and women who administer the judicial system that is the true backbone of the rule of law.’”

35) Jack Pudney writes, “...I believe, based on the information that I have, that the greatest crime Mr. Aref and his friend Mohammed Hossain committed in this case was the sin of gullibility. If you also believe this to be true, then please, Your Honor, make the punishment fit the crime!”

36) Taras and Julianne Shepelavy write, “...We urge you not to use post 9/11 extremes in deciding on the sentence and to consider the prior behavior of Mr. Aref and the nature of his entrapment. Without the involvement of the government and Mr. Malik, Mr. Aref would have continued to be a law-abiding person.”

37) Stanley Blanchard and Johanna Peterson write (separately), “I want to express my concern about the trial of Yassin Aref. The methods of entrapment and coercion used by the United States Government seem out of line with everything that is good and grand about the way a government ought to conduct itself. Please show leniency in your sentencing of Yassin Aref.”

38) Carole DeForest writes, “I am writing as a reader of newspapers and listener to local news coverage. I do not know Imam Aref personally but noting his life as a hard-working and faith guided member of our community, I wish to speak in support of a lenient sentence and a return to his role as family man and his position as spiritual leader among us.”

39) John M. LaSala writes, “To my uneducated mind the law and justice are not necessarily synonymous with the search for truth. As a loyal American and lover of freedom I feel that Yassin Aref and Mohammed Hossain were unfairly entrapped by the FBI and led to slaughter by a crook named Malik, a low life, only interested in saving his own hide. Over the years I’ve come to believe that Judges have all the power over our lives and I can only hope and pray they seek the truth before the law because God can’t help us without the truth.”

40) Richard and Judith Arthur write, “We would like to appeal to you to be lenient in your sentencing of Yassin Aref. While closely following the ... trial, we found it very hard to conclude that he was guilty. Rather, we feel that this man was entrapped and during the trial, not really able to understand the charges he faced. We certainly don’t feel that he is a threat to this country...”

41) Anneliese H. Smith writes, “I followed the arrests and trial of Messrs. Hossain and Aref on regional television, in the Schenectady Daily Gazette, and on WAMC ... [E]verything suggested no greater guilt than naivete, especially in their readiness to accept ... a man who turned out to be a criminal co-operating in a sting operation to gain ‘points’ with the FBI to avoid jail and/or deportation. ...”

42) R.J. Tersigni and Susan Sommer write, separately, “...I strongly urge you to show leniency toward Mr. Aref at the time of his sentencing. ...I am ashamed of the tactics our government used to implicate him in a supposed terrorist act. He and his family have suffered enough! ...”

43) Michael A. Brennan, LPN, writes, “...Release this scapegoat Mr. Aref, back to the loving arms of his wife and children...”

44) Cynthia Bennekaa writes, “...[I]t is not too late, to turn this ship around. ...”

SUMMARY OF LETTERS RECEIVED BETWEEN JANUARY 25-29 2006

1) Jennifer Illenberg writes, "...As I read the facts of the case two things struck me. First, I am, not sure that, given the information Yassin possessed, I would have realized something was occurring beyond the seething anger of a man I was duty bound to counsel. ... And second, what would my children and I do if we found ourselves in Zuhour's predicament. ... Were my husband taken from our family, my children and I would be devastated in every meaning of the word. ... Today one of our community's families is standing on the brink of destruction. There is a time for harshness and a time for mercy. Yassin is not a dangerous criminal; he is not a violent man; he has no history of violating the law or common decency. He is a father, a husband, a religious leader who preaches peace and charity, and a stabilizing figure in his community. This case is a time for mercy...."

2) Marie Drislane writes, "...The two men brought to trial were Muslim and one was the leader of a mosque. ... Between [the] language problem and the very different culture that these two men were a part of, it seems that the possibility of misinterpretation of actions could be very possible. I am a second grade teacher and each morning at school I recite the Pledge of Allegiance and I sing My Country Tis of Thee with my students. I want to continue to feel that this is a sweet land of liberty and that we are all being protected and treated fairly. ... Please keep your heart open to the possibility that these men are not as vindictive and evil as they have been made out to be.... I ask you to have mercy on these men and their families..."