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Clerk Meldrum
205 William Street
Melbourne 3000**

**His Honour Judge Chettle
County Court
250 William Street
Melbourne 3000**

10 September 2005

Dear Judge,

I am providing this letter in support of Mr. Azzam Ahmed who is pleading guilty to very serious charges of trafficking before you. I am fully aware of the contents of the briefs of evidence against him and I have appeared for him on various occasions since his arrest in September 2003.

On 24 July 2004 I suffered a stroke.

I live by myself and had woken up alone with a headache at about 8.30am. As it was a Saturday my only plan was to go to work as I had a conference arranged for 12.00 with a client. After taking pain relief I tried to go back to sleep but could not get rid of my headache. I had gotten dressed and ready to go to work when Mr. Ahmed rang me. It was not unusual for him to contact me on weekends as he knew he would always find me at work but it was very unusual for him to call at that hour. I answered the phone (mobile) and could not speak. I could understand what he was saying but I could not respond. I can remember vividly the nightmare of trying to speak and not understanding why I couldn't. At the time the last thing I thought was that I had suffered a stroke. He hung up and called back. I can't remember clearly how many calls he made but I recall my hysterical crying during the last call and him asking where I was and whether I needed the Police or an Ambulance. I still could not speak. I am forever fortunate that he came and drove me to the [REDACTED] Hospital.

I was admitted immediately and whilst it seems almost surreal now, my arrival there was difficult as the staff asked Mr. Ahmed questions about my health, medical history and movements that morning, none of which he was capable of answering. Eventually I communicated with doctors by writing after being

sedated. Ultimately, I was moved to intensive care later that day upon being diagnosed. I was heavily affected by drugs and still unable to speak.

Mr. Ahmed took it upon himself to contact my friend and his solicitor, James Valos and he then called [REDACTED]. I understand that he spoke to various members of my family and went to my house and brought personal items to the hospital. As I was in intensive care and very ill at the time I am fortunate that he was there to help.

He later spent considerable time and demonstrated great compassion with my [REDACTED] upon hearing the news but did not arrive here until Monday 26 July 2004. He was particularly patient and caring toward my mother who is nearly seventy and has her own medical problems.

Upon my discharge from hospital I was not able to drive at all and returned to work for half-days. Again, Mr. Ahmed assisted me by driving me home on a number of occasions.

My treating neurologist regards my recovery as miraculous. The first words he said to me were that I'd suffered a stroke to the part of the brain controlling speech and that he hoped I'd recover enough to be able to work again as a barrister. Had I not received a phone call that enabled me to realize that I could not speak and that something was wrong, I would have driven to work as planned. My neurologist's view is that had I driven I may well have killed myself or others.

I regard Mr. Ahmed as a lifesaver and will be forever in his debt. In the time since his second arrest in August 2004 I have spoken to him regularly and have provided him with support and encouragement; there have been times (on the phone) when he has cried and expressed suicidal thoughts. He remains someone who in spite of his criminal history and high level offending, is in many ways naïve and easily taken advantage of due to his overwhelming need to feel "wanted" by others. I have seen him gradually cut himself off from those from his past and withdraw into his own world.

Given his lack of support while in custody, and the fact that he has no friends (as everyone he ever knew and regarded as a "friend" was someone with whom he shared only one interest, namely drugs) I intend to continue to support him and assist him in the future.

Yours Faithfully,

Nicola Gobbo