



Witness Statement

Full Name: Arash Sigarchi

Alias/Nickname: N/A

Date of Birth: 4 Aban 1357 [October 26, 1978]

Place of Birth: Rasht, Gilan Province

Occupation: Journalist, Former Editor-in-Chief of *Gilan-i Imruz*

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

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Place of Interview: Arlington, Virginia USA

Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

Witnesses: IHRDC Staff

This statement has been compiled in 54 paragraphs and 18 pages pursuant to an interview with Arash Sigarchi conducted in Arlington, Virginia on October 23, 2008.

1. My name is Arash Sigarchi. I was born on October, 26 1978 in the city of Rasht, Gilan Province. I was a journalist and the Editor-in-Chief of a newspaper in Gilan, called *Gilan-i Imruz*. I was responsible for monitoring the quality of the news and articles that we published. Naturally, censorship exists in Iran, but in 2000 a new trend was introduced where the regime¹ shut down a lot of newspapers and weekly journals. This became very costly for the government; if you can imagine, they would shut down 40 newspapers in one day. So they had to come up with a solution to cut costs. They resolved to tame the journalist in hopes of controlling the content of newspapers, and preventing them from writing about “dangerous” topics. Ultimately, such policies prevented journalists from writing freely.
2. Only two newspapers were courageous, *Hayat-i Naw* and *Bahar*, which the regime had already shut down. Some newspapers were not closed in that period and survived the mass closure of 40 newspapers. However, they were finally all closed. The reason I say courageous is that after May 1997, with the opening of *Jami'i* Newspaper, a new form of press was created that did not fear retaliation by the government and provided information defiantly. In fact, I would go a step further and say that it was such newspapers that removed the fear of imprisonment, torture, etc. from the heart of journalists. I myself feared retaliation by the regime but after seeing the example of Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, who always had a bag ready to take with him to prison, my fears disappeared.
3. Back to *Hayat-i Naw* and *Bahar* - these two papers survived the closure of April 24, 2000, making them the only newspapers left. Not long had passed when on the 19 of July of the same year, an amendment to the press law was discussed in the *Majlis* and the leader issued a verdict. *Bahar* reported the opposing views of some of the *Majlis* representatives and was shut down the next day. This was after *Bahar* had managed to stay open for two months after the mass closures. *Hayat-i Naw* did not fare much better. Although the paper was owned by the [Supreme] Leader's younger brother, Hadi Khamenei, it was closed after a year. It is noteworthy that the Leader's younger brother belonged to the reformist group.
4. Under such conditions, I was the Editor-in-Chief of a regional newspaper. It was a quality newspaper with high circulation. However, I received word from Tehran through circulars from the National Security Council, instructing me not to publish certain news. For example if the teachers demonstrated, we were told we shouldn't

¹ Here regime refers to the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Based on a discourse prevalent amongst officials of the IRI, this term is used instead of the term government. This is due to the complex government structure of Iran. Generally in a lot of other modern countries when you say government you mean the entire governing body of that country. But in Iran, government refers to one of the three branches of power, the executive, legislative and judicial, which function under the supervision of the Supreme Leader. Hence when you talk about Iran, you can't say the government of Iran because that is part of a whole, while the term regime refers to the Supreme Leader and the three branches of power beneath him.

publish anything about it. Or if the laborers demonstrated we were told we shouldn't write about it.

5. Towards the end of March 2002, I started blogging. Blogging has a particular definition; it is like the journal you keep when you are a teenager. When I was young I had a journal like this and I knew how to write. Everyday in my blog I would write my daily memoir if it was important.
6. On the November 29, 2002, a series of telephone poles were installed in Rasht. In appearance they were cell phone towers, but in reality they served to interrupt the reception of satellites, so people couldn't watch satellite TV. One of those poles was placed in front of a girls' school, which could affect the fertility of the girls. I did some research on this issue and prepared a controversial report that was to be published by our newspaper. The night before distribution, the general manager removed the story and said if it was published we would be shut down. I retorted that reporting on the news was a worthwhile cause to be shut down for. When I couldn't run the report, I put the article on my weblog that evening to spite the general manager of the newspaper. Immediately, other news agencies picked up the report. Other cities began to realize the same thing was being done in their area, and understood what the real situation was. From that point on, whenever my general manager disagreed with me, I resisted fighting him on it – I would just put the article on my blog.
7. In 2004, during the same time that tensions were high at the in country, the student movement was galvanizing and their activities were increasing. Rasht is a city where student and political movements always start, and an important gathering took place there. So I began to cover the student movement. When this happened I reported the news pertaining to the student movement constantly. News agencies, such as RadioFarda, Radio Français and BBC news contacted me saying that they wanted me to give testimony of the situation as a journalist. Due to my duty as a journalist, I did exactly that. I remember at the time, NI-TV reported that in Rasht 10,000 people were demonstrating. As a witness to the event I clarified that there were only 2,000 people there, 500 of which were intelligence agents and law enforcement officers. What I mean to say is that, as a journalist, my reports were accurate and realistic.
8. But the Ministry of Intelligence didn't understand this. They called and informed me that I was not permitted to give interviews. I responded that since there were no laws banning me from giving interviews, I would continue to do so. Two weeks later, I received a communiqué from the National Security Council which had previously been sent to newspapers in Tehran stating that I was not permitted to give interviews. The Intelligence officers only showed me the communiqué which was a letter that had the words "Confidential/Secret" on the top of the page. In the communiqué it was emphasized that all of the country's officials, including representatives, commanders,

regional officers, chief directors and their subordinates were banned from giving interviews to “hostile” media outlets, such as Radio Israel, Radio Freedom, RFE/RL, Radio America, Radio Français, Radio Germany, etc. Of course, this circular had other provisions. Although the circular said nothing about newspaper journalists, my interrogator said that I was subject to its content. The interrogator further added, “The regime trusts you and has kept you as a journalist. If you were not trusted, you would have been eliminated [as a journalist].”

9. He was right, because a few months later, as he put it, they “eliminated” me. What’s interesting is that BBC news was not amongst the listed news agencies that I was not permitted to talk to. Radio America, Radio Israel, RadioFarda, Radio Français, and a few Swedish radios were on the list. I specifically asked the interrogator about doing interviews with BBC news and he did not give a clear answer, at which point I assumed I was allowed to do so. So I only did interviews with BBC news. In addition, I made a new arrangement with my old colleague who now worked at RadioFarda. We decided that I would give interviews to RadioFarda using a pseudonym and distorting my voice. I picked the pseudonym Kambiz Karimi.
10. Throughout the summer of 2003 I continued to cover the news on my blog using my own name. In 2004, due to increased pressure from the Ministry of Intelligence, I began engaging in more and more self-censorship. I repeatedly saw cars following me with passengers who were clearly from the parallel intelligence agencies. While I attempted to spread freedom of speech, I was also very anxious because I didn’t work in Tehran. Working outside of Tehran is much more dangerous. With this in mind, I conceded to engage in marginal self-censorship. In my opinion, I was addressing the issues and balancing them out. When political issues were being censored due to added pressure, I would write boldly about non-political issues. For example, in one story we pursued a serious cultural critique of provincial officials. We would critique and challenge the officials on issues pertaining to social and recreational activities. I remember I was working on AIDS statistics that were confidential at the time. I went to the deputy minister in charge of this issue and published controversial articles. This was the first time a newspaper had announced that there were 7,000 patients infected with AIDS, over whom the government had no supervision. The topic stirred so much controversy that the Ministry of Intelligence summoned me. They reprimanded me and asked why I like to stir up trouble. I responded, “You told me not to criticize the Leader, not to criticize Rafsanjani. If I don’t write about AIDS, then I might as well report on the fluctuating price of tomatoes.” I was very outspoken during this time. In general, we were somewhat cautious in preparing reports and articles, which would only be explained as self-censorship. For example, there was a news story about the *Imam Jum’ih* of a city wasting millions of *tomans*. To avoid being shut down, we covered the issue without pointing directly to that person, writing a vague title such as “Wasting of money by officials.” In this manner, we would draw attention to the news and avoid being shut down by the government.

11. Two circumstances led to my coming to blows with the government. On August 26, 2004, I decided to write on the controversial topic of the 1988 massacre in Iran. I had adequate information about a specific person from Gilan, who was the deputy of Massoud Rajavi, leader of the *Mujahidin-e Khalq* and I wrote an article about him.
12. The second situation was an event that occurred beyond my control. I did only one interview with RadioFarda under my real name and that was about the student demonstration in Rasht. The rest of my interviews were done using my pseudonym. On August 27, 2004, which was a Friday, I did an interview with RadioFarda as “Kambiz Karimi” regarding the laborer’s demonstration. At the time, RadioFarda broadcast from Prague until midnight Tehran time which was 4pm EST. After 4pm EST, it was broadcast from Washington D.C. RadioFarda employees made some sort of mistake, because at midnight when the news was rebroadcasting from D.C. it was announced that an interview with Kambiz Karimi regarding the laborer’s demonstration in Rasht was to air. But they mistakenly broadcasted my old interview regarding the student movement in 2003, using my real name. I think the Ministry of Intelligence compared these two interviews together, and used high tech equipment to decipher the distorted voice, and concluded that “Kambiz Karimi” is the same person as Arash Sigarchi.
13. That Friday I put the 1988 massacre article on my blog. On Saturday, August 28, 2004 at 11:30 am, I was in the provincial office when someone called me and told me to “bring [my] lazy ass” to the Intelligence prison. It was clear to me from his tone of voice what kind of situation I was walking into. Of course at this point I didn’t know about the RadioFarda broadcast and thought the summons was about the article I had put up on my blog. I immediately called a few of my friends with whom I had discussed the possibility of getting arrested, and informed them of the situation. My mother then called me to see what was happening. I told her that I had been called and summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence prison. She sounded nervous and informed me that some officers had been at our house. I told her I would return home as soon as I coordinated with Mohammad Kazim Shokouhi-Rad, the general manager of the paper, so that he could prepare bail and provide my legal defense.
14. Apparently, while I had been at the provincial office that morning, four officers from the Ministry of Intelligence and a fifth, who was a judge, raided our house and turned it inside out. They took everything with them, including my writings, computers and books. I didn’t know their names as they didn’t introduce themselves, but they showed my mother a warrant, which was all legal and by the book.
15. At 12:30 p.m. I went to the prison. It was a small prison at the center of the city with a few wards. It was more of a detention center than a prison. It didn’t have the intricacies of a prison. For instance, upon entry to a prison, a prisoner’s is usually registered, photographed and fingerprinted. There are also different sections inside a

prison. But this Intelligence detention center was not like that. It was a short hallway with cells on either side. It was the same place where they held our monthly interrogations, or “Q and A’s.”

16. As I said before, the Ministry of Intelligence had a project to control and limit the ability of professional journalists to report the news. In order to do this, they would take the professional journalists once a month, or sometimes once a week, to an office called *Sitad-i Khabariyih Vizarat-i Ittila't* [News Agency of the Ministry of Intelligence]. This agency, which has an office in each province, acts as a public affairs office and was established so the general public can raise concerns over matters pertaining to the Ministry of Intelligence. In reality though, no one wants anything to do with this office; people are usually summoned there. Throughout the three years I was the Editor-in-Chief of the paper, I was summoned there over fifteen times, about once every 30 to 40 days. The first time I received a phone call from the agency summoning me, I refused to go and demanded to be sent a written summons. They then sent two officers who told me that if I didn't leave on my own volition they would throw me into a sack and take me. From that point on, each time I was called to go I obliged. They wouldn't say it was an interrogation, but they kept a written record of all of the conversations and sent the record to their superiors. They would serve refreshments to keep it friendly. They insisted that it was a consultation, although I had nothing to share with them since “befriending” an Intelligence officer is poison to a journalist's career.
17. Abdul-Hosseini Samadi was the officer in charge of my case file. He summoned me to the Intelligence office, usually once a month, and was in charge of giving me “guidance.” He was a short young man. After six or seven months and a few months before I was detained, I felt that these meetings were becoming more of a collaboration. For example, my newspaper published an article that was about a government director embezzling funds. Mr. Samadi, my interrogator, called me and complained that I hadn't coordinate my activities with him. I told him I wasn't aware that I was supposed to coordinate with him. He responded that we are comrades, and I made it clear that we were not. From that point forward, there was some tension between us, which became more evident when he called me a few weeks later. He said, “Even in America the CIA and Newsweek journalists collaborate and give news to each other.” I disagreed, replying that there hadn't in fact been any collaboration because I gave information but I didn't get anything in return. I also noted that the CIA doesn't ask personal questions, such as whether my friends or I have satellites in our houses, or if we drink. After this we had limited communication and our relationship soured. I was aware that Mr. Samadi was economically helping the other journalists who were being cooperative. However, after my interview with RadioFarda, he made it a point to remind me that he intended to help me like he did for others, but that I clearly did not want his help. I told him that everyone had to choose their own path and that I had chosen mine.

18. It was late August and extremely hot when I was summoned to the detention center. Nonetheless, I was made to stand outside, under the sun for two hours. It was around 2:00 or 2:30 p.m., when two soldiers took me inside the detention center and placed me in a cell, leaving me there for another 2 hours. It was a really small cell, about 1½ m x 2 m, which I later realized was a palace compared to the cells I would eventually be placed in. They called me around 4:00 or 5:00 p.m., blindfolded me and took me to a basement. They slapped me around for about two hours and broke my glasses and watch. They splashed me with water and hit me some more – enough to make me cry. The beatings weren't anything like what I had heard about before. They went on for three to four hours. I think it was around 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. when a few people arrived, but I wasn't able to see them. One of them said, "Is this him? He will be dealt with! We'll make him talk, he has to say what the hell he's been up to." You could tell by his accent that he was from Tehran. While they were talking amongst themselves, I recognized Samadi's voice and asked if he was in the room. From behind, I heard them say, "Who is Samadi... who the hell is he? How much were you paid for spying?" I gave them straightforward answers. Their questions were irrelevant and unacceptable. They had no expertise in the field of journalism and insisted that I had spied. I emphasized that I was only a journalist. They asked me why I had contacts with foreign radio stations. I replied because I was a journalist and my job was to report the news. Eventually, they left and returned me to my cell.
19. It was perhaps 2:00 or 3:00 a.m., when they took me out of my cell and blindfolded me again. I heard Samadi's voice, and I asked him to identify himself. This time he responded with a "Yes." He began to interrogate me. At this point I had gathered what was going on. Up to this point, I had thought that I was being detained for the piece I had written on Friday. I wondered why I had been detained so soon after its posting because there was usually some lag time between blog entries and interrogations. In this instance, however, when I heard the questions I realized that the problem wasn't just about my recent blog entry but about other important matters such as my collaboration with RadioFarda.
20. They removed my blindfold and I realized that I was facing the wall and that Samadi was behind me. I turned my chair around and we started talking. The questions revolved around RadioFarda and he never raised any issues about my blog. He accused me of have taken trips to Sanandaj and other places for the purpose of spying. He added that I had received some sort of training. I was interrogated until the rooster crowed and the sun came out. I think the interrogation lasted about six to seven hours. Before they returned me to my cell, I complained that they had beaten me and mistreated me. Samadi responded that the beatings were a mistake, and that they had confused me with someone else.
21. Samadi tried to befriend me after that. They changed my cell to one that had an air conditioner and a bed. I slept. Around noon they called me again. I changed my

clothes and I found that they had prepared rice and kabob. At the time, I used to say my daily prayers and I requested permission to say my prayers first. They obliged. In fact, the officer in charge of my case came and prayed next to me. After lunch they continued to interrogate me but the vibe of the interrogation completely changed and became friendlier. Samadi wrote his questions and I replied in writing. He told me that he wanted to help me. He asked a few questions about the political affiliation of my family and told me that they knew that my uncle was a *Mujahid*, to which I replied, "Oh, so that's the problem?! So the RadioFarda issue is just to confuse me!"

22. On the second day of interrogation, at 5:00 p.m., Samadi said, "Technically we should keep you in prison, but if you cooperate with us we'll help you." I did not reply to him. They took me with a white *Paykan* to my home and dropped me off. I got home around 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. When I was about to get out, the interrogator asked, "What are you going to do with the mess that you've made of leaking information?" This was regarding the fact that I had informed my friends that I was going to be detained, and that news of my detention had spread fast. During my interrogations, they asked me why I had leaked information regarding my detention. I responded by invoking Zahra Kazemi's name, and telling them that given conditions in the country it was natural for me to be wary after being summoned. They didn't see it my way, and suggested that I write something on my blog to diffuse the situation. So I wrote something that basically said that I had been unwell for a few days and had gone to the seaside. Later, when I was freed and came to America, I kept the posting but made changes to it by striking through the previous text and noting that I had written the entry at the "suggestion" of my interrogator, and after two days of torture. The day of or the day after I was released was the Birth of Imam Ali or Father's day. I was arrested on August 28, 2004 and released the evening of the next day, August 29, 2004.
23. They didn't call me again until December 9, 2004. Nothing significant happened during this time. I went to the newspaper everyday and tried to perform my daily tasks.
24. Naturally, after my two days of detention and before my next arrest, they monitored my weblog more closely. Of course, they had been monitoring my weblog since I first started it. However, I had thought to myself that under these conditions, they would read every posting on my weblog in the worst light possible. Generally when someone is detained for a few days and then released, it is done with the intention of scaring him. If he were dangerous, they wouldn't release him at all. Realizing this, I tried to write more cautiously. My self-censorship intensified. The problem was clearly serious now. Prior to this, every time they didn't like a certain entry, they would contact me by phone. However, this time they had tortured me and raided my house. It was natural for me to be afraid. Moreover, I didn't want the paper to be shut down because of my actions.

25. Although I had certain journalistic standards, I could not resist the pressure the government was putting on me. Given the choice of having them censor my writing or not writing at all, I chose the latter. Prior to this point, I would have an op-ed published in almost every newspaper. But after those two days of detention I generally didn't write, and if I wrote a piece I would not put my name on it. Whereas before I would write ten pieces a month, I only wrote five during the next three months. And I would severely restrict the subject matter which I wrote about.
26. I know I was being monitored before I was arrested in August 2004 and that my office and home phones were being tapped. The truth is, not only did they tap my phone, but they had people spying on me in my work place. Going back and forth from the Intelligence office, I realized that *Sitad-i Khabari* had a wide network for receiving intelligence. Namely, they would use kiosk owners, taxi drivers, traveling salesmen, and even prostitutes to receive daily information. There were a few incidents that assured me that I was being spied on by people close to me. I had a colleague whom I won't name that I believe spied on the newspaper to the Intelligence Ministry. Once I went to Tehran to visit Amir-Entezam, upon my return I saw this colleague and told him that Amir-Entezam insisted that I marry his 21 year old daughter. In fact Amir-Entezam didn't have a daughter that age. The following Thursday when I went to the *Sitad-i Khabari* for a Q and A session, Mr. Samadi commented on my getting married. I joked back that my girlfriend still refused to marry me. He clarified that he was referring to my impending marriage to Amir-Entezam's daughter. I denied it and then casually noted that I was going to fire this colleague of mine that I suspected was spying on the newspaper. Mr. Samadi showed concern and asked why. I told him that he was the one who informed Samadi about Amir-Entezam's daughter, which I had not shared with anyone else. He told me, "You are mistaken for wanting to fire him. We have many different Intelligence sources." Then I informed him that I had made the whole thing up to test this fellow. Ultimately I never fired the guy, but he replaced me as Editor-in-Chief once I left the newspaper. Another time, I was drunk at a party with several close friends and in jest I used a broom as a guitar and pretended to play and sing. The following week during my weekly interrogations, the interrogator told me that it was not dignified for the Editor-in-Chief of a newspaper to hold a broom and dance. Two of my colleagues from the office were present at the family party. It is interesting that, to be cautious, I never allowed anyone to video tape our family parties and yet information got out. It was obvious that they had very detailed information about me.
27. I was summoned again in December 9, 2004 to *Sitad-i Khabari*. Two days earlier they had called and suggested that since it was a long weekend I should find some time to go to the *Sitad-i Khabari*. So on Thursday, December 9, 2004 at 10 a.m. I went there. Samadi and another man were there waiting. They only asked me about the *Mujahidin*. Samadi asked about my relationship with the *Mujahidin-e Khalq*, and suggested that I had given away information about Iran's nuclear projects. He also

insisted that I had received money from the *Mujahidin*. I think their strategy was to get confessions from me the same way they did from other bloggers. Prior to this, webbloggers were placed under pressure and tortured, and were made to eventually confess that they had received money from foreign countries. Their confessions were even televised. My interrogators had aimed to receive a similar type of confession from me; that I had received money from foreign countries. Mr. Samadi, who had attempted to gain my friendship and who said he wanted to “help me,” refused to help this time. He told me that unlike the promise of assistance he’d offered before, there is nothing he could do for me now because I had chosen not to cooperate with him. But I had reasons for not cooperating.

28. On January 6, 2005, the newspaper’s general manager called me to the office yard, which he often did when we wished to discuss private matters. He was working with the blessing of the regime and was therefore on good terms with them. He told me that I had to go to court the next day. I said, “So, it’s finally serious?” He told me that he tried his best to avoid a court summons, but was unsuccessful. He assured me, however, that it was nothing serious, and that he had a deed for bail. That evening I went to the newspaper and spoke to my colleagues and distributed my remaining responsibilities. The next morning at 9:00 a.m., I appeared in court. From 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Officer Samadi, the investigator in my case, was in the judge’s chamber while I waited outside. During this time a few other people went in and out of the judge’s office. One of them was the Chief Judge of the city of Rasht. The others were intelligence officials who went in to talk to the judge for a few minutes. The judge assigned to my case was Judge Eskandari, who was the Head of Branch 3 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Gilan Province.
29. Judge Eskandari was very clean cut and well dressed. He was an interesting character, who was rumored to have sexual relations with other men. While I was in prison, I heard from one of the inmates that he had been propositioned by Eskandari, which at the time I did not believe. But when I was released my parents and everyone else were saying the same thing. The truth was that Judge Eskandari had two problems to deal with. The first was that he was a homosexual and the other was that he used his position to acquire wealth. For example, if a person was arrested with a thousand kilograms of heroine that was worth say, \$500,000, Eskandari would suggest that in exchange for \$100,000, in place of execution he would instead sentence him to ten years’ imprisonment. Another example is that while I was in the public ward, there was a man who was given a two years sentence for the possession of one kilogram of opium, while another man had received the same sentence for possession of 100 grams of opium. Eskandari would also share these monetary gains with other judges and intelligence officials and that is why, my case file was sent to his branch so he could do as the Intelligence Officers wished.

30. At 12 p.m., the judge finally called me in to a small room where he was sitting behind a table and officer Samadi was sitting behind another table. As I came forward he asked if I was Sigarchi, after which he began speaking to me in French. He went on for 10 minutes in French and then said “Don’t you understand what I’m saying?” I said “No.” He then suggested we speak in English, and went on in English for a while. I understood a bit and responded to what I could. After having waited four hours, though, I felt justified in complaining to him. So I sarcastically asked if they had summoned me to court for foreign language lessons. He scolded me: “Shut up you piece of garbage! What kind of spy are you that doesn’t know any other languages?” He then gave my case file to the guard and told me to get lost.
31. After another two hours they called me back in again. They presented me with a few articles that my newspaper had published and accused me of having written lies. I replied that if they wanted the documents to corroborate the stories I had written, I would provide them. But Judge Eskandari insisted they were lies. When I would argue with him, he would send me out of the room and then call me back again. This went on a few times. After a while I suggested that if the crimes they are accusing me of were press violations, I should be entitled to legal representation and a jury according to the law. I added that I have nothing left to say. He snapped, and ordered one of the guards to handcuff me. They handcuffed me and took me out of the room and left me for another hour or so. At 3 p.m., Mr. Eskandari called me back and told me return to the next day at 9:00 a.m.
32. I went straight back to the *Gilan-i Imruz* office. My colleagues were very worried about me. I delegated the remainder of my work and told them that “the road on which I was about to tread had no return.” They insisted that I should apologize and repent. I told them that the judge I was dealing with was unpredictable and there was no point in trying to apologize or repent. That evening, some of my friends came over and said they would help me escape the country. We weren’t that far from the border – about three hours. Although they wanted to help me escape, I felt I hadn’t done anything wrong, so I didn’t go. Later that night, another set of friends called and told me that my case was very serious and the Ministry of Intelligence would really harass me. I acknowledged their concern, and told them that the end of the road is execution which I do not fear. I was once again thinking of what had been done to Zahra Kazemi. But I didn’t try to leave; I stayed home that night. Of course even if I had wanted to leave they wouldn’t have let me. I’m sure I was being monitored.
33. In the morning I went back to the court groomed and well dressed. The court proceedings began. My charges were read one by one. I can’t remember what they all were because they never gave them to me in writing. I was charged with fourteen different crimes but ultimately was convicted of four. I remember that one was that I had insulted the Leader (*Rahbar*). They said that I had written in my blog that “Mr. Khamenei is going to drink the cup of poison just like Imam Khomeini drank the cup

of poison. And just like Imam Khomeini died a year after that, Khamenei will also die a year later.” I corrected them and said, “I wrote in my blog and recommended to Mr. Khamenei that since the world has threatened Iran regarding Iran’s nuclear activities and war is looming, it is best to drink the cup of poison before it is too late.” But I never wrote “Just like Khomeini died a year after that, Khamenei will also die a year later.” He insisted that I had written what he said. I responded that if they had the documents to prove their position, I would willingly go to prison. He replied that they also had “other” charges against me.

34. The interrogator pointed out other arbitrary issues. For example, he raised an issue about an article published in my paper. My general manager had decided to allow a third party, who was very *Hezbollahi* [conservative], to put together the entire issue every Saturday. The Saturday before the Leader came to Rasht, the group placed an article on the front page titled “Countdown [*shumarish-i ma’kus*] to Leader’s Arrival.” The interrogator said the second issue of insulting the Supreme Leader was using, as he put it “the accursed term countdown [*shumarish-i ma’kus*],” rather than “reverse counting [*shumarish-i varunih*].” In fact, I had nothing to do with that issue of the paper and had no part in writing the article at all.
35. My other charge was publishing lies. What was publishing lies? The interrogator said, “You wrote lies in the news about Babak Mehdizadeh.” Babak Mehdizadeh was the paper’s political reporter. He was summoned to the Intelligence Ministry and interrogated. I wrote about this in my blog. The interrogator argued that Mehdizadeh had not actually been summoned, and that I was spreading lies. I responded that I had a letter from Babak himself saying that he had been summoned, and that if it was not true then he was the liar. I just reported the news based on his letter. The interrogator also raised the issue of another journalist, Farshad Ghorbanpour, who was the paper’s economic reporter and had been detained. He accused me of lying when I reported that Farshad had been imprisoned. Again, I replied that, as a matter of fact, Farshad had been detained by *Sepah* for a week. He retorted that Farshad had been “detained” and not “imprisoned.”
36. He also told me that I insulted Imam Khomeini. Now, what did insulting the Imam mean? The interrogator said that I had written an article suggesting that Khomeini was a dictator. I said that I had never written such a thing, that I was a journalist who knew the boundaries in Iran very well. If I had written such a thing, I would leave myself vulnerable to their attacks.
37. When they confiscated the newspaper’s computers they found a series of photo-shopped pictures, such as Khomeini’s head on Jennifer Lopez’s body. The interrogator said that this was insulting to Imam Khomeini. I pointed out to him that they weren’t my pictures. In our newspaper, 12 people had user IDs and could log

into any computer. The pictures were not necessarily mine. Furthermore, as the Editor-in-Chief, I was smarter than to save such things on my computer.

38. Another charge was “propaganda activities against the regime.” The interrogator noted that in my blog I had written that ‘Hosni Mubarak, the President of Egypt, had “put [Iran] to shame.’” He was referring to an article that I had written about Hosni Mubarak giving general amnesty to all the prisoners in August of 2003. I had written that Iran should learn from him. The regime’s position is that Mubarak is a dictator and his elections are a formality since he gets 100% of the votes. But I believed that Iran must learn from Mubarak’s actions. Why did we have political prisoners? At this time Mashallah Shamsolvaezin and Emadeddin Baghi were in prison. They told me that what I had written was propaganda against the regime.
39. There were a lot of other charges but the one that took up most of our time was in connection with interviews I had conducted with RadioFarda under my pseudonym. They accused me of being a CIA spy and collaborating with RadioFarda. They claimed that because Colin Powell is on RadioFarda’s executive board, is active military, is part of the “leading council of the CIA,” I was an effectively an employee of the CIA. I denied that I had ever worked for the CIA or RadioFarda. They responded that they had transcripts of my radio interviews. I told them that I had only conducted one interview, but they noted that I had in fact conducted many more under the pseudonym of “Kambiz Karimi.” Then I saw the intelligence interrogator open a file containing dozens of interviews of Kambiz Karimi, along with analysis of the interviews by the Iran desk at the Intelligence Ministry. The Ministry of Intelligence in Tehran has established different desks for monitoring different activities. At the time, RadioFarda had its own table. The Ministry also monitored the activities of certain websites and weblogs which had their own special desks.. RadioFarda’s desk had written a report for all my interviews and had taken the voice files and compared them. They had done a lot of sophisticated things to put this analysis together. They produced a CD of all my interviews and asked if I wanted to hear them. I told them that the CD doesn’t prove anything because I was a journalist, and according to Iranian Press Law, use of a pseudonym is a journalist’s right. I also chastised them for forcing journalists to use pseudonyms by creating unsafe working conditions for journalists. When I said this, the officer got up and said, “Arash cooperate with us. It is to your benefit to do so.”
40. I noticed that I couldn’t get through to them, so I repeated what I had said the day before which was that I wouldn’t talk until my lawyer was present. They asked who my lawyer was and I said Mohammad Seifzadeh. They responded that Seifzadeh was “another jack-ass worse than [me]!” At that point, their behavior and attitude towards me became completely offensive and hostile. The judge told me to get out. It was close to 1:00 p.m.

41. There were few other rooms and judges at the court house. I stood in the corridor for three hours. The Revolutionary Court has jurisdiction over drug and security related crimes. Many of the people who were also waiting in the corridor with me were drug addicts who were sitting on the floor. I didn't want to sit on the floor like them. I considered it a defeat, so I stood there for the duration of the time.
42. Judge Eskandari called me back into the court room. He explained fourteen charges against me; insulting the Imam Khomeini, insulting the leader, insulting the sources of emulation, insulting the holy faith of Islam, propaganda activity against the regime, spying for the CIA, disclosing intelligence, insulting the head of the Expediency Discernment Council, and many other similar charges. He further added insulting individuals such as President Mohammad Khatami, Head of the Expediency Council Hashemi Rafsanjani, Nategh-Nouri – he just kept adding names. He then told me to sign the charge sheet. So I wrote: “I, Arash Sigarchi, in the right state of mind and health, having in mind Article 25, 26, 66, and 138 of the Constitution and other articles, announce that this court is closed and is in session without my lawyer and a jury. And I do not accept any of the charges against me.” Eskandari read my writing and said, “with this signature you have dug your own grave.” He then told me to get out.
43. After a few minutes, two plainclothes intelligence officers came and called me. As they came in, they pushed back their jackets to show that they were armed. The judge ordered them to cuff me and take me away. One of them flashed his gun again and said, “handcuffs won't be necessary...” as if to suggest that if I were to run away he would shoot me. The officer was much taller than me but I tapped him on the arm and informed him that had I wanted to run away, I would have done so a long time ago. My charges were then explained to me. I was afraid of what they were going to do to me. According to the Iranian Criminal Code, bail had to be set so the accused could put up the money and avoid going to prison. I saw the Judge write 200 million in my Bail paper. I asked him why they intended to send me to prison and said that I can put up the bail. He asked me if I knew how much the bail was. I said 200 million *rials* (\$20,000). He then said that the bail was 200 million *tomans* (\$200,000). At this point I got a little scared. Prior to this, the only other case where the bail was set as high, was that of Hashem Aghajari, who was sentenced to death for insulting the Imam's. Even his bail was set at 50 million *tomans*. My bail was four times the amount of his. What were they going to do to me – execute me four times over? While I was thinking this, the judge explained, “Don't even think about collecting this amount. Because I figured that your supervisors in the CIA will provide this money for you, I did not set bail for you so you won't be able to be released whenever you have the money! I issued detention order so that you are held in prison for as long as the interrogators and I want to hold you. In fact, you should stay there until you rot!”

44. I was imprisoned for two months before I was finally released on bail when my detention order was changed to order of release on bail. The first twenty days I was in solitary confinement, fifteen of which I was tortured. I was placed in a cell that was 1m x 1m, so there was no room to sit or sleep. It was winter in Rasht, which made my cell cold and humid. Day one, they beat me. Day two, a group of soldiers beat me some more. Day three, my interrogator, Mr. Samadi, arrived and when I complained he said that he had no authority at the prison. He said that a man named Alami was now in charge of my case file. Later I realized that Alami was in charge of the Rasht Prison's Protection Office. In prison there are two units for supervision. One is an investigating unit that supervises everyone, like prisoners, social workers, and officials. The other is the prison protection unit that supervises everything including the work of the prison protection unit.
45. On the fifth day, they hung me from a fan. There was a pole attached to an engine on the ceiling that would propel me around the room. My arms were attached to another pole, as if I was on a cross. The two poles were connected. When the engine was turned on I literally became a human fan. On the sixth day, in the middle of the torture session, they told me that my mother was coming to visit. She came but it was a very short visit and I wasn't allowed to talk. They threatened to torture me if I did. On the seventh day, they made me stand outside in the bitter cold for three hours. On the eighth day, they gave me a photocopy of *Kayhan* newspaper which read: "Arash S, who was collaborating with the CIA in the north of the country, is sentenced to one time execution." On the ninth day, I was taken to a room where the floor was covered with feces. Around 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., they took me out to bathe and sent me back to my cell. I was there for 2-3 hours when they came in and bastinadoed the soles of my feet. On the tenth day, they took me to a room where there was a noose and a video camera. They told me that they would either execute me or film my confession. On the twelfth day, they pulled both of my big toe nails out. That same day, they imposed a form of torture that was literally called *Jujih Kabab*, or grilled chicken. They tied my wrist between my ankles and put a rod through it. Then they fastened my arms and legs to the rod and suspended me upside down.
46. On the thirteenth or fifteenth day they took me to court and I found that my all my family and relations were there. My parents and brothers were in the judge's chamber. The judge said, "Come here and sign this," and gave me a piece of paper that listed ten to twelve crimes for which I was to be executed. I consented and wrote, "I have no objections." This is what Aghajari had done as well. I was sure that they would not actually execute me. The judge read what I wrote and said, "you want to become a 'hero'? I won't allow it!" During the same time, the judge was talking to my father. I heard him tell my father that I am "a brave kid," and that I would be pardoned. Then he told his secretary to tear up the paper I had just signed. In prison, they called this type of act a "horror verdict," meaning that it was not the real verdict but one designed to disturb and intimidate the prisoner. My brother, Ashkan, came

over and hugged me and placed a piece of paper in my hand that I placed in my mouth so the guards wouldn't find it. When I returned to my cell and opened the paper, I found that my brother had printed out all the titles of articles that were written about me in very small font. It was around 12:00 or 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon when I read this.

47. Around 4:00 or 5:00 p.m. my officer came to interrogate me again. He asked whether I was ready to confess in front of the camera. I quoted from the articles and said, "Did you know that 'Tomorrow is the day Arash Sigarchi is going to be released.?'?" He was really shocked. I informed him that all the media outlets had written about me and that Seifzadeh had accepted me as a client, and Shirin Ebadi was going to be my lawyer as well. He got angry, but I told him that I would no longer answer his questions. They sent me to another solitary cell for an additional five days. All together I was in solitary confinement for a total of twenty days. After that, they sent me to the general prison, amongst the murders, killers, and drug dealers.
48. What they ultimately wanted from me was an interview where I would confess that I received money from the CIA and that I had formed a team with RadioFarda in order to form a network of journalist for them in all the provinces of Iran. One of the more absurd charges they wanted me to confess to was that I had conspired to build a network against the Islamic Republic, which was based on my brief correspondence with a journalist in Shiraz whom I hadn't actually met. But I resisted, and they never got the confession they sought.
49. On February 11, 2005, my mother came to prison and informed me that my verdict had been issued. I had received 14 years in prison. Up to this point I had not yet seen my lawyers. Seifzadeh had accepted me as a client after I received my trial verdict which was around late February. However, they wouldn't allow him to pursue my case. Not until I received my verdict on February 7, 2005, did the courts allow me to obtain a lawyer. Since it hadn't been announced that Seifzadeh was to represent me, Shirin Ebadi expressed interest in representing me and joined my legal team. Another attorney, by the name of Parviz Jahangir-Rad ultimately joined the team as well.
50. My verdict was four pages long. In accordance with article 508 of Islamic Penal Code, I was to receive ten years imprisonment for collaboration with the hostile government of the United States through interviews with RadioFarda. In accordance with article 514 of the Islamic Penal Code, I was to receive two years for insulting Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader. In accordance with article 500 of the Islamic Penal Code, I was to receive one year for propaganda against the regime. In accordance with articles 512 and 610 of the Islamic Penal Code, I was to receive another year for creating confusion amongst the masses, creating anarchy and inciting the general public to revolt. I received the maximum sentence for all four of my indictments. The interrogator came to see me only once after I got the 14 years prison

term. I quarreled with him and demanded to know why I had received 14 years. From that point onward I told them not to contact me again. I was told that if I apologized for what I had done, I would be forgiven. But I refused.

51. At the end of my two month imprisonment, my lawyers met with me in prison. They appealed the terms of my sentence and my case file was directed to the appeals court. During the appeal process, I was released on bail on March 20, 2005. My appeal hearing was in June and we defended my case. There were three appeal judges: the hearing Judge, Qudrat'ullah Shamikhi, the advising Judge, Isma'il Hassanzadih, and a third judge who did not sign my verdict, as he dissented with the decision. Seifzadeh did not defend me well, he got up and said "Due to the fact that Mr. Shahroudi called for the release of the bloggers and for the law to exercise leniency towards them, I request that you release my client." When I witnessed this, I got up and defended myself. Mr. Seifzadeh spoke from 9:00-9:15 a.m. and once he was done, I got up and defended myself until 2:00 p.m. All together, we defended my case for a total of five hours. The decision of the appeals court came in November 2005. I was exonerated on the charge of 'collaboration with a hostile government' that carried the ten years imprisonment, as well as 'creating confusion amongst the masses,' which carried one year. For the charge of insulting Imam Khomeini and Supreme Leader, I received two years, and for propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran I received one year for a total of three years in prison. On January 25, 2006, I began my sentence..
52. According to Iranian law, I could appeal my case one more time before the Supreme Court. For this process, I kept Mr. Parviz Jahangir-Rad and retained Mr. Salih Nikbakht in place of the other two attorneys. On February 12, 2006, my brother who was *en route* to take the power of attorney papers to the Supreme Court for me died in a car accident. The next day I was given leave for ten days and received an additional seven days after that. So from the 13th of February to March 1, 2006 I was on leave. Throughout 2006, most of which I spent in prison, every two to three months I received five days of leave. During the month of September a sore appeared on the corner of my tongue. Since I had scored a few goals in the prison soccer tournament, they gave me a few days of leave, during which I checked out the sore and was diagnosed with cancer. From November 2006, I received three months of leave which counted toward the time served on my sentence. After that I received another 3 months and 2 six-month leaves which did not count as part of my sentence. Until May 18, 2008, I was on leave for treatment. Within this period, I had three months of chemotherapy, an eight hour surgery that took out half of my tongue and some of my lymph nodes, and another month of radiotherapy. I left Iran for treatment on January 10, 2008 and came to America.
53. I truly believe that Judge Eskandari wanted to use my case to please the intelligence officers. For this reason, he gave me the maximum sentence on all the charges issued against me. It is also important to note that security apparatus had just encountered

the weblogging phenomenon and wanted to paralyze bloggers with fear by dealing with them decisively. In truth, it did create fear. Everyone thought that if I, who was the Editor-in-Chief of a newspaper, was sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment for weblogging, what would happen to them? What was different about my case file was that the complainant was the Ministry of Intelligence, making it more official. For the other cases, the complainants were the parallel intelligence agencies of *Sepah*, who didn't have as apparent an identity. They were essentially outside of Khatami's government and were trying to portray his government as inept by creating problems for the intellectuals. My complainant, the Ministry of Intelligence, is in charge of the security of the Islamic Republic and is, after all, a ministry. Their interrogation sheets have a heading with the name of the ministry and the unit in charge of interrogation. However, in regards to the parallel intelligence agency, the summons were without a written order and very unofficial. The lack of knowledge regarding those detaining the prisoners, and the fact that the detainees did not know where they were and what organ arrested them, meant that the arrests were unofficial. I received and still have in my possession my summons and verdicts.

54. In my sentence, the Ministry of Intelligence requested that I be exiled to one of the central or southern provinces within the country due to my flight risk. In some instances in Iran, the accused is sentenced to exile in a city far away from where he resides. In the Iranian penal code, there are cities mentioned such as Izeh, Masjed Soleyman, Ramhormoz and others that are specifically considered in cases of exile. The person who issues the verdict can choose one of those cities as the place of exile for the prisoner. Since this was not possible, and I was not dangerous, this request was denied.

I, _____, do hereby assert that all the information I have provided in the above statement is, to the best of my knowledge, both true and accurate. The complete text of this statement has been read back to me in my native tongue and I am satisfied that it accurately reflects my testimony. In giving this statement to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) it is my intention that it should be made publicly available through the Center's Adel Database.

Signed: _____

Date: _____