



Witness Statement of Maryam and Her Son, Siavash

Name: Maryam/Siavash (Pseudonyms)

Place of Birth: Sanandaj, Iran

Date of Birth: 1961/1992

Occupation: Home maker

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: April 12, 2010

Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an in-person interview with Maryam and her son Siavash on April 12, 2010. It consists of 22 paragraphs and 4 pages. The statement was approved on April 12, 2010.

Witness Statement

1. Maryam — My name is Maryam and I was born in 1961 in the city of Sanandaj. I have one son and two daughters. My son is 19 years old, my older daughter is 22 and my younger daughter is 16 years old. Because of the problems I faced in Iran – my husband’s political problems – I left Iran. My husband had problems with the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 2003, I converted to Christianity in Turkey. I have been living in Turkey for 11 years now. We have many problems in Turkey with immigration, the United Nations, and financial matters. My children are deprived of the right to education. My husband works 16 hours a day at the fruit section of the market starting at 8 in the morning. His wages are very low even though he is on his feet all day and suffers from rheumatism. In Turkey, we don’t have residence or work permits and my children don’t have the right to receive education or attend school.
2. Maryam — I converted to Christianity 7 years ago. In 2007, my children and I were interviewed several times by the satellite channel “Kalameh” about our conversion to Christianity. Our problems still exist, even after we converted to Christianity. Satan always survives.
3. Maryam — We first settled in Kastamonu, which is a conservative city. They wrote “dirty Iranians, leave this place” across our doorstep and we left that city. When kids around my son’s age found out that he has converted to Christianity, they broke his front teeth with brass knuckles. We are all depressed but it’s not possible to live with depression. I will definitely be in trouble if I return to Iran. After we spoke on the satellite channel, my brother-in-law, who had seen the program, started to threaten us. I don’t know where he is now.
4. Siavash — My father’s relatives had seen the program on the satellite channel. First they recognized my sister. Then they saw my mother and me and threatened us by saying that, if we return to Iran, bad things will happen to us. My uncle is in Iran and has many ties to the Intelligence Ministry. Depending on his goal, he can either help people or do so that they aren’t able to return. He has not spoken to us for two and a half or three years now. I don’t remember what time our last conversation was exactly but it was around the time our interviews were aired.
5. Maryam — He called constantly to say that, if you return, bad things will happen to you. He called us infidels, and told my husband that it is my fault that he converted to Christianity. He called regularly, sometimes even several times a day. He listed all the calamities that would happen to us if we returned. My husband’s cousin also called us. He told us not to return because he had witnessed my brother-in-law giving our names to the Intelligence Ministry. My brother-in-law work in the education field.
6. Siavash — My father changed his telephone number after a year because my uncle called from different numbers. We didn’t know which call was coming from him so we couldn’t screen it. My father’s cousin was very good friends with my father and liked us very much. He even told us not to stay in Turkey and move somewhere else because our uncle will continue to harass us. My uncle didn’t directly threaten us, but indirectly he said that bad things will happen to us. My father’s cousin said that if we return, we would be arrested at the border because our names had been given to the Intelligence Ministry.
7. Maryam — My life and my children’s lives are ruined. Everything is in shambles. I don’t have a job right now. We have many problems. We have not received a response from the United Nations. Everybody said that the United Nations will give you residence permits but it didn’t and our case was closed. My relatives live in Iran. I don’t talk to them because I am afraid.
8. Siavash — Whenever our relatives call, they speak in a secret code, as if their telephone lines are tapped. Not all of our relatives know that we have converted to Christianity. We are illegal

immigrants here. When we see the police, we run away like thieves. The United Nations and similar organizations have not helped us in any way. We don't have any paperwork to live on legally. We're in limbo, like a piece of wood that doesn't know if it's going to float on the water or sink!

9. Maryam — Among my relatives, two of my sisters know that I have converted to Christianity but not everyone else. They may run into trouble if they find out. My sisters' reaction to the news was also unpredictable. It would be bad for some of my sisters if their husbands find out because they are like my brother-in-law.
10. Siavash — It is very hard for our relatives to digest that someone who was a Muslim has changed his religion to become a Christian. But they didn't react the way my uncle did. My uncle was opposed to my mother and father's marriage. That's why he doesn't keep in touch with my mother's family. Therefore, even though he has told everybody about our conversion to Christianity, my mother's relatives don't know. I remember that one year he came to our house during Norooz and my father wasn't home. We didn't let him in. He broke the door, came inside and beat my mother. He beat me too because I was standing up to him.
11. Maryam — I have forgiven him because I have faith now.
12. Siavash — My father changed his telephone number. If he hadn't, maybe by now all of our relatives would be threatening us, because they are all like my uncle. During that year when my uncle was threatening us, only my father's cousin, who was friends with him, called us to tell us what was happening. He said that they were talking about and insulting us a lot behind our backs. They didn't like my mother from the beginning anyway, but their hatred multiplied when they heard the news. We have many emotional problems. My father has a job, but we cannot attend school because we don't have a work or a residence permit. I wanted to work at a liquor store because I saw a hiring sign but the storeowner said that I had to bring him a work permit from the security office!
13. Maryam — I was working at a restaurant until I cut myself with a butcher's knife. I received five stitches and now one of my fingers is numb. My husband works in another city. His salary is 450 YTL (\$288.00) a month. We live in Ankara to be close to the United Nations.
14. Siavash — Members of the community found out that we were Iranians and Christians. One time, I went to pick up my sister from a play. The people who beat me up had harassed me a few times before. First they insulted me but I kept on walking. My sister and I were walking when they hit me from behind with brass knuckles. I was unconscious for a few minutes and my tooth broke.
15. Siavash — We go to church here. My older sister volunteers at the church. She plays the guitar and is in the church choir. The government doesn't bother or harass us for going to church, but our landlord doesn't treat us well. We don't ever see him other than when he picks up the rent check once a month. One time, our rent was ten days overdue. His wife came to our house and insulted us. She said that she would complain to the police. If she complains, we will be deported from the country. She said, "get the money however you can". We know she treats us such because we are Christians since they ask about our religion whenever we rent a place. They know most Iranians are Shiites.
16. Maryam — We have relations with pious Iranians at the church, but mostly at the level of exchanging pleasantries. We don't have a lot of relations with non-Christian Iranians. We never leave the house, except to go to church every Sunday. I am very depressed and don't like the daytime to come. One time, my younger daughter became very ill. She had pneumonia and a sinus infection. She still has asthma. We obtain her medications with difficulty.

17. Siavash — I don't know any Muslim Iranians in Ankara. I don't know how they would react to our conversion to Christianity. When we lived in Kastamonu, we knew a Muslim family that treated us with respect and didn't insult us. It was hard even for them to understand why a Muslim person would change his religion!
18. Maryam — We converted to Christianity because God entered our hearts. Developing a relationship with God is like falling in love.
19. Siavash — Before we converted to Christianity, we lived in darkness and our fates were doomed, as if God was asleep in our hearts. When we converted to Christianity, I think we were chosen by God. All of this is in the TV interviews and you can watch. My father's conversion to Christianity, I think, is a miracle. My father works a lot (16 hours a day). He can't even take a day off, and couldn't take one off to participate in the TV interviews. He says his dream is to be able to sleep in for one day. My father is fifty years old but he does things that even a young man like me may not be able to do.
20. Maryam — We are in such a financial bind right now that I get the things I want from the grocery store on credit. Of course, all of this is debt and must be paid off. My relatives in Iran don't send us money. We have never asked them for help anyway. I only ask God to provide for us and take my children and me from here to wherever he deems fit.
21. Siavash — My dream is to move somewhere where I can attend school with my sisters and have a legal status and an identity. Right now, we live like ghosts with no identity. The Turkish government doesn't give us the right to work or receive education or even a residence permit. We had a very good life in Iran. We came here because of my father's political problems. When we came here we had to start over, as if we had gone bankrupt. My father never asked for help from my uncle, especially since they were not on good terms.
22. Maryam — If we didn't have political problems, we wouldn't have sought asylum in Turkey to live in hiding. March 2010 marks eleven years that we have lived in Turkey. Norooz 1999 we were on the bus, on our way to Turkey. At that time my husband was in prison and we had a lot of problems, and my children and I came to Turkey. Even my husband, who was in prison, didn't know that we had decided to go to Turkey.