



Witness Statement of Maryam Sabri

Name: Maryam Sabri

Place of Birth: Tehran, Iran

Date of Birth: 1988

Occupation: Business

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: December 3, 2009

Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Maryam Sabri. It was approved by Maryam Sabri on November 9, 2010.

Statement

Background

1. My name is Maryam Sabri. I'm twenty one years old and worked for a boating company before leaving Iran.
2. I was admitted to Tehran's Art University in 2006 and became a member of the political council of the University. I did not belong to any specific political party and did not have vast political activities at the University. I participated in non-political programs and demonstrations on the campus. Nevertheless, the Protection Office of the University, an intelligence unit of the university, decided to expel me temporary from the university in 2007 and later stated in a letter that I did not have permission to attend my classes anymore. Thus, I was expelled permanently from the University a year after I was admitted.
3. I became politically active during the 2009 Presidential Election. After participating in the demonstration, I was arrested by plainclothes agents, transferred to an unknown detention center, where I was mistreated and repeatedly raped.

Election

4. I was hesitant at the beginning to vote in the 2009 Presidential Election. I was even advocating for boycotting the election. I believed that voting would imply that we were happy with the system, but when Khatami came forward and introduced Mousavi and asked people to support him, I changed my position. I became hopeful and thought if Mousavi gets elected; society will open up like it did in Khatami's reform era. Therefore, I joined the Mousavi campaign in Tehran and advocated for him. I was usually out every night when Mousavi had a debate. The passion and the enthusiasm among the people were promising. People chanted "Ahmadi, bye bye" because they were certain that Ahmadinejad would lose the election
5. Our hopes were crushed, however. The Islamic Republic used us as a toy. We voted but the regime had decided in advance who the winner would be. Voting was just a game that the regime played with us. We went to the street to declare that we had been robbed of our votes and to show our discontent with the election result. We urged supporters of Mousavi and Karoubi to come out and demonstrate that we were more than the number of people the regime claimed voted for Mousavi and Karoubi.

Demonstrations

6. I participated in all the demonstrations until I was arrested on July 30, 2009. I can't recall the dates that I participated in demonstrations but I remember the days.
7. On Monday,[June 15, 2009], we were supposed to start our protest from Enghelab Square and walk to Azadi Square but the plan changed and we started from Imman Hossein Square and went to Azadi Square. On Tuesday and Wednesday, [June 16 and 17], people got together in front of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) in Vali Asr Street and Haft-Tir Square. On Thursday, there was a demonstration in the afternoon and we gathered in Haft-Tir Square. On Tuesday there were two demonstrations. One was at Haft-e Tir Square and the second was at Tajrish. The demonstrators walked from Tajrish to Rah-e Ahan Squar at the end of Vali Asr. On Monday people again protested at Karegar Street.
8. We had one purpose in demonstrating and that was to voice our protest against the official announcement of the election result and to publically denounce the government for cheating. The demonstrations were mostly peaceful. We did not want to clash with the security forces, particularly with the plainclothes agents. We chanted but did not use violence. But sometimes the plainclothes agents provoked us into resorting to violence. For instance, our demonstration in front of Voice and Version on Tuesday and Wednesday was in response to Ahmadinejad supporters' demonstration held the day before. We went to the streets to show our strength, our popularity and that our supporters outnumbered the government's followers.
9. It was not easy to inform people about the demonstrations during those days. The SMS and mobile phones did not work. We called each other through land lines and used social networks like, Facebook, Yahoo 360, and weblogs that were not filtered during those days. There were many weblogs that activists run and we used them to inform others. Our slogan was that we were media and we could be powerful if we joined our voices together.
10. I usually participated at the demonstrations with four or five of my friends. Two of them were my classmates in Tehran. They are on the run now. The other two were arrested the day I was arrested. I have not heard from them and do not know their whereabouts.
11. The security forces that clashed with the demonstrators were the Special Forces of Tehran's Police, Basij and the Iran Revolutionary Guard Council (IRGC). All of the above-mentioned forces used violence against civilians and hit the demonstrators without mercy. They hit the boys, girls, young and old. They were all equally vicious.

12. In addition, there were plainclothes agents that clashed with the protestors. It was hard to distinguish whether they belonged to the IRGC or Basij. They were more aggressive and beat the demonstrators ruthlessly. Basij in Tehran have a very distinct look. They all have either beards or stubble, tight clerical collars that are closed all the way to their throats, baggy pants and shirts that are one size too large. Although Basij do not wear uniforms, their styles of clothing make them distinguishable from other forces.
13. Fadayan-e Rahbar (Special Forces of the Supreme Leader) were also involved in suppressing the demonstrators. We could distinguish between Basij and Fadayan-e Rahabr. In fact, they are a branch of the Basij but have a very strong commitment to the Supreme Leader and will die for him. They consider the Supreme Leader pious and an undisputed leader. If someone insults him, it is like insulting their loved ones. He is dearer to them than their loved ones.
14. It seemed like the security forces coordinated their activities with each other. I don't think we dared to ask the forces to identify themselves. They were very hostile to us and didn't answer any of our questions. They had come to beat us - not to help us. For instance, I saw them once beating a young man in Haft-e Tir Street. The man kept asking why they were beating him but they kept beating him without saying a word.
15. As the demonstrations continued, the size of the security forces increased on the street throughout the first week. I saw that NAJA brought more forces by buses and vans to Tehran. For example, I saw NAJA emptying two mini buses full of people at Vanak Square.
16. Most often before targeting us with electric and regular batons, the security forces used tear gas and pepper spray. They beat us, chased us, and arrested us. Sometimes we responded and they would get hit and run. It was like a cat and mouse game. The plainclothes agents chased the demonstrators into homes and hit them there. For instance, I was in Sadatabad in Kaj Square with a bunch of other kids on a Saturday night. Basij saw us and came after us. We ran to hide. They pulled some of the kids from apartments and arrested them. They also arrested the apartment owners who hosted the kids.
17. Sometimes, the security forces attack peaceful demonstrators to rile them up and turn them into an angry mob. For instance, on a Monday at Azadi Square, the public walked from Imam Hossein Square to Azadi Square and chanted a lot. We stayed for a while at Azadi Square and then decided to go back to Imam Hossein Square. We did not chant any slogans on the way back. We walked in silence and held some pictures in our hands. The *Basij* would come and insult people and start fights. They would come and instigate the guys. In Azadi Street close to Enghelab [Street], a group of them had come amongst the people and insulted the wife of a man who was there and started a fight. They were *Basij*, plainclothes, with batons at their belt.

18. On another occasion, I saw security forces beat individuals in groups and secret police using knives and razors in the crowds. I think it was Thursday when this incident happened in Vanak Street. We were at Vali Asr and going towards Park Way. The security forces and Basij attacked us at Vanak Square and beat everyone who came their way. One of them had a knife. I saw him pull a pocket knife from his belt and run towards the demonstrators. I was very scared for my life and ran. I didn't stop to see what he did with his knife.
19. I also saw the security forces shoot into the crowd in Azadi Square on a Monday. A young person died as a result of this shooting. He was shot in the back of the head. The shot was fired from the roof top of the Basij building. He was exactly in front of the Basij building in Azadi Street.
20. Also I heard shootings on a Thursday at Vali Asr. The demonstrators usually gathered at Vali Asr or Haft-e Tir on Thursdays. I was further up the street when the shooting began from further down towards the end of the line around two or three streets south of the place where I was. Everyone started to run. We were trying to find a hole to hide in. Later I heard that two people were wounded there that day. I think the plainclothes agents shot directly at demonstrators while the security forces that had uniforms shot in the air or used pellet bullets. I got hit by a pellet bullet. Half of my leg was bruised and hurt a lot for a while

Arrest

21. On Thursday, the 40th day of Neda's death, I was chanting slogans at Behsht-e Zahra.¹ Our slogans were "Our Neda is not dead but the government had died", "dictator resign," "Ahmadi have shame, let go of the people." We had flowers in our hands that day and chanted "Military brother! End the brother killing." We handed flowers to security guards. We threw petals in their direction. The guards did not have any interaction with the demonstrators. They were merely observers.
22. However, at around 5:00 and 5:15PM some guys shouted "run." When I turned, I saw that there were loads of *Basij* and *Sepah* behind us. There were around a hundred. I started running in the [cemetery's] sections, and after I was hit a few times while running, I fell to the ground in one of the sections. [By] the time I got up there were plainclothes men all around me. They started beating me with batons and kicking me. Then they took me away. There were five of them and they were all men.
23. They transported me to a white van that had no other signs. After a while, they blindfolded and handcuffed me in the van. I heard the footsteps of newcomers while I was sitting in the van. After a few minutes, the van moved. They asked a few questions such as my name and wrote them down in the van. Many other

- people were arrested with me including a girl, whom I didn't know and don't know where she is now, a friend of mine whom I said in the van that I didn't know her. There were about five detainees in the van I was placed in. In addition, there were many other cars around that were loaded with detainees. I personally counted 7-8 cars loaded with demonstrators. The reason for our arrests was participation in the demonstration. The government labeled us as rioters.
24. I didn't understand where they took me from there. A long time transpired between the time they arrested me and the time I was dropped off. I guess I got off the van at a yard which was not very large because after a few steps, I reached the stairs. I went down the stairs to a basement. After a few steps down in the basement, a metal door opened. I was pushed into a room and my blindfold was removed. It was a very small square shaped room. I couldn't lie on the floor. I could only sit and stretch my legs on the tiled floor. It did not have any windows and was completely dark. I couldn't see anything. It was very dirty and smelled really bad.
25. I was not registered at this location. I could not see the guards because they kept us blindfolded when they took us out for restroom and interrogations. When I was not blindfolded, the guards covered their faces with masks that only showed their mouths and eyes.
26. I guess all prisoners were held in solitary cells there. There was absolute silence when I was taken out of my cell to the bathroom. The bathroom, however, was horrible. If I slipped, I would fall into the toilet hole. It was like an old bathroom in a remote village where people dig a hole on a steep side with a triangle shape on top. I was allowed to use the bathroom 4-5 times daily.
27. I was in this location for 14 days and heard a lot of screams, crying, and cursing. I think a day and half after my arrest, they took me for interrogation. I did not have one interrogator. Different people interrogated me but none of them explained my charges. I didn't see any of my interrogators apart from my last one who took off my blindfold and let me saw his face. He was a tall person and had light color eyes, fair skin, light hair, and a broken nose. He had a detestable look- a look that I will never forget until I die.
28. At the interrogation, they asked me questions like who my leader was, who I take my instruction from, how I coordinate my activities, where I go and where I meet with my friends. My first interrogation session lasted about two and a half hours.
29. The second and third interrogation sessions went like the first one. My interrogators, who had changed, asked me the same questions as before. At the end of the third session the interrogator got very angry and threatened me with harsh consequences. He said, "You are asking for trouble for yourself. If anything happens to you, you are responsible. You should only blame yourself. Perhaps you will open your mouth the next time. You did not cooperate with us; we will

deal differently with you next time.” This was the threat I received from my third interrogator. Then I was sent to my room. I didn’t understand the meaning of the threats.

Repeated Rape

30. The fourth interrogation session started like the other ones. He asked the same questions. Then he said, “Apparently you don’t want to talk, no?” When he saw that I said nothing, he said, “You don’t want to cooperate? No?” I said nothing. He said, “OK, fine. You wanted your vote? I am here to give your vote back. I will give you your vote now and you can see if it is any good.” I felt him grab my shoulders. He had never grabbed me this hard while he beat me. He got me up from the chair and took off my clothes by force. I was screaming and crying. I begged him. I swore to everything he believed in. He laughed and said, “I don’t have a God or prophet. Don’t bother yourself [with it].” I was crying and saying, “Please, for God’s sake, I will do whatever you want, whatever you say.” He said, “No, you didn’t cooperate in the beginning and now I want to give your vote back. Why are you upset? Why are you crying? No need for tears. You were being brash and wanted your vote, and I am going to be brash and give your vote back. Don’t cry.”
31. Then what should never had happened, happened. He raped me. After that I was almost half conscious when I was taken to my cell. They acted as if nothing had happened. They threw me in my cell. I didn’t understand how much time passed. For me, every moment was like years.
32. The fifth session of interrogation was conducted by a different person. The interrogator asked me the questions I’ve already been asked. Then he said, “Apparently, you won’t open your mouth. Ok, fine. We’ll deal with you in the manner you understand.” He started to take off my clothes again. I was screaming and he was laughing. Then he said, “Even if you kill yourself shouting here, nobody can hear you”. Then he raped me a second time. I was sent back. I went to bathroom and then to my room.
33. The same thing happened during my sixth interrogation session. The only difference was that I didn’t cry and didn’t scream and beg this time. The interrogator was laughing and saying, “Why don’t you beg me? Beg me, I may feel pity and let you go. Cry, cry, so I let you go. Maybe I feel pity for you.” But it was like I knew what would happen and didn’t care anymore. I did not cry and did not beg because I was sure what was going to happen. I was sent back to my cell.
34. The next time when I was taken for interrogation, the interrogator asked me the same questions and then raped me. He opened my blindfold and I saw his face. He sat in front of me and started talking. He asked, “Do you want to be let go? Do you want to stay alive? Do you want to see the outside again?” I cried and said,

- “Yes. Whatever you say, I’ll do it. Whatever you want. Just let me go. Either kill me or let me go. Don’t hurt me like this anymore.” He laughed and said, “No, we won’t kill you yet.” He said, “We’ll let you go, but there is a condition, and that is that you have to go where we tell you and do as we tell you. Also, you can’t tell a soul about the events that happened here. If you do, we’ll kill you and won’t let you stay alive. We are following you constantly and won’t let you get out of our hands. If you do anything wrong, you won’t stay alive. Like many others who died and no one found out, you will die too.” I cried and said, “Ok, fine, just let me go.” Then he threatened me again and said, “You owe me. If you go out, you’ll do whatever we say.”
35. Then the interrogator said that they would take me to court and I had to be ready for it. He added that if I acted like a good girl, the court would release me and if I acted like a bad girl, I would not make it to court building.
36. I was released but it was on condition that I cooperate with them. In the end, I said, “I’ll do as you ask, just give me some time to heal.” He laughed and said, “You are fine. Maybe you have some body pain and bone pain, or maybe dislocation. But none of these are important. You are still alive.” I said fine. I was supposed to collaborate with them, participate in demonstrations, and take pictures and movies. Get to know the guys and get their numbers, give them their numbers. This was their plan, but I neither went to demonstrations nor cooperated with them after that.
37. They took me back to my cell. Sometime passed. Then they came and I walked up the stairs I had come down. I reached a yard and felt fresh air. They put me in a car and released me in Chitgar Park. It was dusk and somehow dark. I found out that it was August 14, 2009.

After Release

38. After I was released, they called me three or four times at my cell phones. I had two SIM cards (two numbers). I thought they knew only about one of them. I received a call and my interrogator said, “We’ll call you and give you the instructions where to go and what to do.” I asked where and he said, “It’s not your business. We’ll inform you when you must know.” Then he warned me that I should not turn my phone off, to be accessible and answer my phone and added “We’ll coordinate with you where to meet. We have something for you.”
39. I was very afraid. I turned my cell phone off and threw my SIM card away. After that I received a call one midnight. I was not expecting them on the line. My interrogator said, “You thought you can escape from us?” I said that my cell phone had a problem. He started cursing me and said, “Don’t make excuses!” I hung up and turned off my phone. A few days later, I turned my phone on to find out a friend’s number. As soon as I turned it on, the phone rang. It was him again.

He started cursing and said, "Why did you turn your phone off? Why don't you answer? Where the hell have you been? Why didn't you go home? Don't think we are joking with you." I hung up on him and threw my SIM card away.

40. Two day later, I left Iran and crossed into Turkey. I went to the UN office and filed an application.
41. I do not know who was responsible for my arrest. After my release I had a TV interview which mad the government to admit in an article that it was the IRGC that arrested me that day.
42. After I fled, they arrested my brother and father. My father was detained for three days. My father received summons to appear in a Revolutionary court. I do not know what happened to him. It's been five years since I've been in touch with my father or spoken to him. My cousin whom I was in touch via email updated me about the incidents that happened to my family after I left. He told me that my father and brother were pressured to ask me to return to the country and confess on TV that I've lied about being raped in prison.