



Witness Statement of Ahmad Khalili*

Name: Ahmad Khalili
Place of Birth: Ahvaz, Iran
Date of Birth: January 24, 1981
Occupation: Industrial Turning Technician

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)
Date of Interview: October 8, 2012
Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Ahmad Khalili. It was approved by Ahmad Khalili on June 3, 2014. There are 52 paragraphs in the statement.

The views and opinions of the witness expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center.

*A pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the witness.

Statement

Background

1. My name is Ahmad Khalili. I was born on January 24, 1981; I am 31 years old. I was 26 years old when I left Iran; it has been about seven years that I have been living outside of Iran. I lived in Syria for two years, in Lebanon for three years, and in the Netherlands for [the last] two years. This totals seven years of living outside of Iran. Before leaving Iran, I received a certificate in industrial turning mechanics.

Experience as a Child of a Political Prisoner

2. Due to several political issues, I experienced a lot of hardship and deprivation [growing up]. Our family had a reputation for being in opposition to the regime. Since I was the child of a [political] prisoner, while at school, in the streets, and in the neighborhood, I was constantly seen as the son of a criminal by the regime's adherents. People's view-points have since changed. Now, when a political prisoner is released from prison, people welcome him; it was not like that 10 years ago.

3. The [political] problems and deprivations did not allow us to live in Ahwaz, so we lived in the countryside of Ahwaz in a small village. People in those areas did not understand the meaning of a political prisoner and the reasons for imprisonment. There was a lot of discrimination. I could not be friends with anyone because of my father's reputation as an anti-revolutionary.

4. This discrimination occurred even during the month of Moharram¹ when they denied us necessary food². When I was a child and my father was in jail, they gave food to our neighbors but not to us. If there was any reason to provide food rations, it should have been for people in need, like my sister and I, who were starving. But they treated us this way because my father was a political prisoner and an anti-revolutionary.

5. The first [home] invasion I experienced that I can remember was in 1993. I was about nine or ten years old. I was young but I understood what was happening. My father trusted me and I witnessed many things. One night around 2:30 or 3 am, they invaded the house by coming up from the door. They were filled with contempt. They were from the Ahwaz Intelligence authorities. I was young, but I noticed they were wearing sports clothes, had guns, and wore ordinary hats: they were not in official uniforms. They had a warrant but they did not show it to me. They asked me about my father, but I did not tell them he was in Khorramshahr, I told them he had gone to Dubai.

6. Later on, in Khorramshahr, my father had seen the warrant himself. They separated us from the women. First, we did not know what was happening. At that time, everything was forbidden and my uncle had a video player. We thought they had come for his video player, but later we understood that was not the reason. After the first inspection, we figured out what they were looking for. They searched all over. I

¹ The holy month of Moharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar. It is considered to be one of the four sacred months of the year. On the day of Ashura (10th day of Moharram), during the Battle of Karbala, the Prophet Mohammad's grandson, Imam Hussein, was killed.

² The month of Moharram is generally considered a month of mourning. Religious ceremonies during the month include food offerings to the poor called, *Nazri*.

can remember they showed the warrant to my uncle because he had asked for it. Then, they took two of my uncles. They also dragged my grandmother on the ground for about 40 to 50 meters.

7. Of course after my father had been captured in Khorramshahr, the Intelligence authorities released my uncles and sent them home. I was very affected by this incident, especially because I was so young. I had never seen a gun before. I had probably seen guns at weddings when they would fire shots in celebration; but I had never seen a gun pointed at somebody's head. This happened to my uncle while they disrespected him: they laid him on the ground, and handcuffed him from behind. The women, including my mother, sister, and kids, were all terrified. I wasn't alone; we had all experienced trauma.

8. My father was arrested and knew nothing about his whereabouts for nearly six or seven months. He later discovered that he had been kept at Ahwaz's Ministry of Intelligence detention center. He was in solitary confinement [at first]. Later, they contacted us to come and visit him. There was a high [Intelligence] security room where prisoners were blindfolded and moved to for visitations. We entered the room my father was in. At first, I entered and left because I did not recognize my father. He was robust and tall with long hair before he went to prison. The person I met in there was a wreck, with red eyes and whom appeared to have fallen from a building. He could not talk. I did not even recognize his voice when he said hello to me. That scene was more shocking [for me] than when Intelligence authorities invaded our house. I regretted visiting him. He had lost so much weight and was so feeble he could not talk. My family suffered so much. They always told me that the regime imposed great affliction on us. But I never personally witnessed an armed militant kill someone with his own gun.

Life's Problems

9. Our main problem was that the authorities considered us to be anti-revolutionaries. My father was one, which is true, but we were kids and my mother was innocent. My grandmother did not even know that my father was in prison. When my aunt went to Khorramshahr to visit my father, they mistreated her.

10. My school teachers [used to] spit on me. Some of them had been injured during war and some of them had been prisoners during the war. These were our worst teachers. For example, at school teachers were not allowed to speak to students in Arabic, even if they were both Arab. One of my teachers was Arab and used to beat me up.

11. Additionally, another teacher, who had been a prisoner of war in Iraq, jabbed a pen in my body out of hatred, as if I had killed his father. This was not an educational lesson; this was because he hated my father and me.

12. There was a tradition in the Arab region which is on one day of *Eid al-Fitr*³. This is an official religious holiday where everyone puts on new clothes and eats good food. Children carry a bag and go to neighbors' houses to get candy. We could not go out for the festival visits, for we were the children of an anti-revolutionary. They [neighbors] would turn us away from their houses. We did not have decent clothes to wear or good food to eat.

³ An important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims around the world, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting.

13. Not having any money, we used to walk two km to get to school in the winters. I was young and the road was not paved. I did not even have rubber boots to wear; and this was also the same situation for my brother and sister. Two of my younger sisters are not aware of the conditions and psychological trauma our older siblings faced.

14. After this, my father's imprisonment became a means of pride in the neighborhood. People's reasoning changed over the last ten years and they [started to] understand how a person like my father could be. He was a person that was forced to abandon his children, was forced to walk that road, and did something "wrong" [in the eyes of the authorities].

15. During my military service I was working during the daytime, I was nineteen-years-old at the time so I was able to obtain a high school diploma by studying at night. When my father went to prison, it felt as if the whole family had become imprisoned. Not having my father to advise me on my studies, I did not continue my education.

16. Unemployment was another problem as a result of the Islamic Republic. I have a legal right to work. Later, I worked in one of my Arab friends' shops in Khoramshahr, but I still could not afford to get married. When I requested a loan for marriage, the bank did not offer me a loan and provided no further explanation. Of course, they did not tell me directly that the reason they denied the loan was because my father was an anti-revolutionary. After constant denial, I gave up on trying to get a loan. I do not understand what the difference was between me and a person whose father was not an anti-revolutionary. I am a citizen of Iran, an oil rich country. Banks receive money to offer loans to individuals from oil profits. Why should I not be entitled to this share of national oil profits if I am a citizen, too? Even though I was poor and desperate, I never stole. I just wanted a loan, but discrimination deprived me of this asset.

17. I applied for a job; my situation remained the same. I took the industrial turning mechanics test at the National Iranian Drilling Company [based in Ahwaz], provided my [identification] documents and was admitted for an interview. The first question they asked me at the interview was whether my father or my uncle worked at the National Iranian Drilling Company. I told them no and that I did not know anyone who worked for the company. They told me that based on this, they could not offer me a position. This was obviously an excuse. I asked why I could not work. I told them that my house was close to the company. I fussed a little bit and they threatened to bring a security guard to escort me out. I answered that I just wanted my legitimate right and I was defending my legal rights.

18. I was discriminated against both for being an Arab, as well as the son of a political activist/prisoner. But it was useless; and based on these circumstances we were forced to leave Iran in 2008. I did not want to relinquish my country, but they did not leave us any other choice. Why should I serve foreigners and not my own country? The regime's devotees pressured us to leave our homeland.

Backtracking to the Intifazeh of 2005

19. Working in Khorramshahr, I was not active in the Intifazeh, but towards the end, I participated in it in Ahwaz. When I got to Ahwaz from Khorramshahr, I noticed the conflicts and protests. I witnessed participants in the Intifazeh burning a car tire, but I did not actively participate in protests. After diffusing the crowd, they concentrated on famous political figures. They could not be active [the famous political

figures], because otherwise they would have been captured and 50 people would have gone to jail. Instead, Intelligence authorities controlled and monitored them and their friends. This is how it was in our region.

Military Service

20. During my military service, they mistreated me and did not grant me furlough. At the end of my training, they told us that whoever participated in combat operations would receive seven days of furlough. I participated in a combat operation, and not only did they deny me the promised days of furlough, they sent me to the worst part of the region; the Iran-Iraq border near Rafiyeh, Bostan and Hoveizeh. I was in the Special Ground Forces.

21. When I returned from Kamin around 7:30 or 8 in the morning, I was accompanied by two soldiers from Shiraz. We saw two native girls who brought their herd of sheep to nearby pastures. They had permission to do so. One of our duties was to prevent unpermitted traffic. We asked the girls if they had the appropriate permit [to graze the pastures]. While I was checking their permits, the two other soldiers attempted to rape the Arab girls in front of me; so I drew my gun on them. My action resulted in an army inspection and eventual military detention.

22. The mission of the army is to protect its citizens and the country from foreign invasion. If I, as a soldier, raped my brethren, what is the difference between me and a foreign rapist? As a soldier, I objected to their actions and they put me in wrongful detention.

23. Those two soldiers had reported that I had drawn a gun on them. Someone came and took me to the army inspection [office]. I was in a room for 3-4 hours without interrogation. Later on, they took me in for an interview. There was a bearded man with an army uniform on. He told me he did not want to create trouble for me and mentioned that I would serve [in the military] for longer. He listed off all of my father's activities and told me there was another person from our family who was in a different military camp. He suggested I cooperate with them by providing information about my father's friends and their activities, in order to remove the [potentially] prolonged military service. He told me that I was commanded by a colonel, the colonel by him, and he by the master. The master he referred to was Khamenei. He told me to help them and they would shorten my additional service time in the military [from having drawn my gun and other minor penalties]. I replied: if my father had been guilty, he had already paid for his conviction. I did not accept his offer and they penalized me by extending my military service.

24. I relocated to Rafiyeh. There, they told us some drug dealers wanted to traffic a shipment of hashish to Iraq. They were not drug dealers but rather landowners whose lands were confiscated by the government. First, the landowners had been permitted to plant wheat but later, they were told that the region was military property and agriculture was forbidden. They consequently destroyed the wheat farms. The government does not employ them, there are no companies in those regions and everything is forbidden. They are forced to work as drug runners. As a result, they take hashish to Iraq and smuggle alcohol from Iraq to Iran. There was a soldier from Shiraz who smoked opium with them [the drug runners]. He knew about their deals [over the border with] Iraq. In an effort to spare himself extra military service that he had

accrued, the soldier reported the information to the head of garrison, Colonel Qorbani. Consequently, we were sent to that region.

25. They had gathered so much artillery for such a small operation; it was if they were ready for war with Israel! That soldier deluded them [the drug runners] and brought them into our trap. Without warning, we were commanded to shoot them. After an explosion of illuminating mortar, we learned that there were four people, two donkeys, and a 12 year old boy. They were all from Rafiyeh and surrendered. The Colonel, Jamshidi, told us not to arrest the traffickers, just straight shoot them. I witnessed one of them rebelling by swearing at the the Islamic Republic and telling them [the solders] that they were not [real] Muslims. I was silent until all of them fell. I asked if there was still anyone alive. There was still a boy who was alive. He could not speak Persian well, and he told me he was just a child who had accompanied them. I told him to come to us and he told us that his foot was shot. Suddenly, Colonel Jamishidi threw a grenade at the boy and it exploded. I hit Colonel Jamshidi with my gunstock.

26. After hitting the Colonel, they captured and handcuffed me. I did not resist, as disobedience to any superior warrants a court-martial and he could then do anything to me. They were armed and we waited until morning. An exploration group brought back the corpses. A boy's jaw was broken and his legs were twisted around his neck. Donkeys were fragmented from their shipment. Corpses of the dead had exposed flesh from the bullets. There were four men and a boy from Haj Taher Savari's family. This is something that was described to me, as I had already been sent for an inspection. I was taken to Hoveyzeh with that pain.

27. Due to my anti-revolutionary family, my case was referred for an army inspection at the Intelligence Unit of Ahwaz. Each case has its own procedure. For example, if someone steals cartridges, the sentence would be six weeks; but I had hit a colonel, my father was a political prisoner so my situation was different. I told them the colonel threw a grenade at a boy, but they told me I was a soldier and my duty was to obey my superior. So if my superior told me to kill someone, I should kill [that person] and they would try him [the victim] not me. He was a colonel and I was just a soldier. But this was not the problem.

28. When I was transferred to the Intelligence Unit of Ahwaz, they began asking me who I was related to and what my activities were. I was in Hoveyzeh for one day and then they took me to the Intelligence Unit of Ahwaz. It was out of the army's hands at this point, and also beyond [just a matter of] getting extra military service. They told me my father was a political activist and asked me who I was working with. I had not been active in political matters at all, nor did I have the record of being a political prisoner.

29. They could come torture me at any time. There was no routine time; it could have been at 1 pm or 2 am. I was kept in a solitary cell for two weeks. I was blindfolded during interrogations. They wanted to hear something they could use against me. For example, they asked if I belonged to a particular political party. If I said no, then they would beat me. They told me I should talk to save myself from further torture.

30. After a week, they informed me that I did not participate in any political activities and they sent me to a military court. I was sentenced to three months in prison and seven months of additional military service. That being said, instead of 18 months of military service, I served for 36 months. Upon finishing my service and defending our land, they told me that I had a prison record and required fingerprinting. As a result, I could not leave Ahwaz to return to Khorramshahr.

Immigration to Syria - 2008

31. Considering all the difficulties, I was sad when I went to Tehran in order to flee to Syria. My problems also followed me to Syria. My brother was captured there and interrogated by Syrian Intelligence agents. He was beaten by the Syrian Intelligence agents. He is younger than me. My brother and my wife were in Syria. We introduced ourselves as pro-government because the Syrian regime supports the Iranian regime.

32. One of my friends was betrayed and the Intelligence authorities came to his house. He subsequently came to me and asked me for help. I did not bring him inside my house, but I helped him hide somewhere. I contacted a trafficker to take him and his family to Lebanon. It was then that I found out that they were coming to capture me [too]. That night I contacted the trafficker and told him that we were three people and we intended to go to Lebanon. At the last moment, the trafficker told me he could only bring two people and not three. I left my brother behind but I told him to leave the house. That night, Intelligence officials invaded our house and took my brother to the Intelligence Unit. He was one year younger than me. This was in 2008.

Life in Lebanon

33. We had a certificate from the United Nations [HCR]. If we got in trouble and presented the certificate to Syrian officials, they would laugh at us. It was documented that we were Iranians and for them, that was a crime.

34. We arrived in Lebanon that night and my efforts to contact my brother were unsuccessful. Three days later, I talked to someone in Syria and found out that the Intelligence authorities had captured my brother. They had asked him where my wife and I were in Syria and if we were in Damascus. They thought we were still in Syria. They beat him so severely that there is a print of a ring on his body. They also broke his teeth. They were Iranian and spoke Persian. They beat him with a cable and a piece of wood. They beat his metatarsus, and then eventually released him.

35. He did not have any money so he borrowed some money from a friend and went to the UN[HCR] in Syria. He informed them about the Syrian Intelligence authorities having tortured him on his foot, teeth and back. The UNHCR [representatives] told him they could not intervene but advised him to leave Syria. My brother could not leave Syria through the trafficker though, because he was now under surveillance. But he could leave the country by mingling with some Iranian families in Zeynabiyeh.

36. Our house was in Marjeh square in Damascus. We left Syria and thought our problems were over and we could relax. We had forgotten that the Lebanese Hezbollah is part of the Iranian and Syrian regimes.

37. In Lebanon, Hezbollah supporters of the Iranian regime kept us under surveillance. The UN[HCR representatives] told us to introduce ourselves as Iraqis. Even now they know me as Ahmad Iraqi in Lebanon. I could not tell anyone my nationality because of Hezbollah. The UN[HCR representatives] told

us we could only reside in a Christian parish. Iranian consulate [officials] came to that region too and attempted to take my sister, mother and wife. The women resisted and they left them alone.

38. We faced many problems in Lebanon, because it was touristic and expensive. We were forced to work. One of our friends was looking for a Persian translator so I told him I knew Persian and could do the work. I worked as an Iraqi for Iranian tourists in Lebanon. They tested my Persian to verify my language skills. Eventually, I started working there, but not having the correct passport or permit, they provided me with very limited benefits.

39. One day, I was in a hotel and someone came to me and asked me about a hotel in Persian. First, how did he find out that I knew Persian? Second, why didn't he ask the receptionist? They told me they did not want to stay in the hotel, and they asked me to help them find a villa instead. First he asked me what my job was there and I told him I was a tour guide for Iranians. He told me to go with them and show them different regions in Lebanon. I replied: I can't because I work for the hotel.

40. I asked him what he was doing and he told me he had rented a car and wanted to roam. Usually a rental car has a green license plate, but his car's was white. This means it was clearly a personal car. I asked a friend about the [license] plate number, and he told me it was related to the Iranian embassy. Working in tourism, I had established many Iranian friends.

41. In Lebanon, I was captured by Hezbollah's forces. Power is divided between the Sunni, Shi'a, and Christians in Lebanon. For example, the president is Christian. The important sectors such as airport security and police are Shi'a. I was captured by Shi'a at the border of Albaqa. I cannot confirm that they were from Hezbollah but the ring he [the one man who captured me] had was indicative. He beat me with hatred. He revealed that I was Iranian and anti-regime. I told him I was Iraqi and a war victim, and that I had a UN[HCR] certificate [to prove it]. He replied: your UN[HCR] certificate means nothing. According to the Shi'a tradition, they wear 2 to 3 silver rings which hold different symbolic meanings. Most of them have Sharaf Alshams' name on them, and the ring is silver with a red or black opal. The person who beat me had a necklace with the Zolfiqar sword on it.

42. That same day, my sister intended to come to Lebanon from Syria so I rented a car and drove to the border to pick her up. I stopped at some places and [the agents] saw me. Some of them were Iranian and someone had informed them that I was Iranian and not Iraqi. I was captured at the border. They should have asked me for my driver's license and registration, but they did not ask me anything. They just told me to park the car and get into their car. I told them I had a UN[HCR] certificate, driver's license, and a Syrian permit. I also added that I had rented the car and it was legal. They told me that I was lying, that I was Iranian, and that I was pretending to be Iraqi. They had police uniforms on. They accused me of committing serious crimes.

43. Since I worked with Iranians, I had some Iranian money on me, and they were convinced that whatever money I had, had an exact exchange rate to dollars! They told me that I was a drug dealer, an arms merchant, and that I was there for a bombing. I replied that the money was nothing and that they could ask a bank to verify. They then opened a case [against me] based on illegal border crossing, and I was sent to prison in Zahaleh.

44. When I arrived at the prison, I noticed the other prisoners' convictions were drug-related crimes and most of them were Lebanese Hezbollah. They took me somewhere and reported my illegal border

crossing. The main problem occurred when I got to prison. I noticed that 90% of the prisoners were from Hezbollah; they welcomed me because I was Iranian. Someone with an Iranian flag on his garment came to me. His crime was drug-related. I asked him where he got the clothing and he told me soldiers provided money and clothes to them and they distributed money and clothes to the southern villages of Lebanon. He told me the Iranian army had been supportive and added that their Friday Imam was from Isfahan.

45. Later, I introduced myself to them as a Shi'a. I asked them if it was correct that Iran had oil and that Iranians were deprived from it. They told me that I was an infidel; why would the Iranian government do such things to us? I told them what they received were portions for Iranians. I added that the oil should have gone to the southern parts of Iran, too, places like Ahwaz and Khuzestan. I told him if he entered Khorramshahr, he would wonder how 27 years post-war, there were still some places which had not been rebuilt.

46. In Khorramshahr, people slept naked because they could not afford fans. They just gave us a cooler, a black-white TV, and a small carpet for newlyweds. My family could not visit me because if they came, they would be arrested [like me] for illegal border crossing. I was captured on June 2, 2010 and was held in prison for 3 months.

47. One day they told me that I had a visitor. I did not recognize any familiar faces. It was crowded but someone raised his hand and called me over. There were two people, one of them knew Persian. He told me what he had seen in prison. They knew my situation and my family's address and they came to warn me to keep quiet. I asked them what they wanted and they told me cooperation. They wanted to know where my father was and where my relatives were, who had since applied for asylum. I told them I would think about it.

48. I returned to prison and tried to contact my family by paying \$10 for packets of cigarette. I called them [my family] and asked them to leave the house and not tell me where they were going. I wanted them to save the number and let me know when they were leaving. After 15 days, my mother, sister, brother, and his wife had moved to a small room in Lebanon. They later called me and informed me. The second time [the agents] visited me, I denied everything and the officials threatened to kill me. Of course it was not official. They were visitors; later we found out they were collaborating with the Iranian Embassy. The actual threat was inside the prison: people were so dangerous that even over a hashish cigarette people had the potential to kill one another. Other incidents were with prisoners who were devotees to *Velayat-e Faqih*; they could kill anyone on Khamenei's order.

49. I told my father what had happened to me and he informed the UN and other human rights organizations. Mr. Hosseini wrote to the president of Lebanon and Mr. Baroud, Minister of the Interior. I have copies of the letters. This resulted in interference with the Intelligence Unit and the inspection agency of Lebanon. They came to visit me in prison. They asked who came and what the threats were. They told me they would protect me. They also assigned a soldier to protect me 24 hours-a-day. They informed me that the Iranian Embassy had been invasive to the State of Lebanon by their actions against me. He told me if I wanted to meet him at 4 am, he would come to visit me. With the help and support of the UN, some human rights institutes, and officials in Lebanon, my sentence was terminated and I was transferred to Amne Am. I never faced trial.

50. I should have stayed in Amne Am until the next plan. I had a ticket to leave Lebanon. A woman from the UN[HCR] gave me a travel document [green document], and told me I would fly to the Netherlands in

a week. At the same time I was informed that the Iranian Embassy had bought me a ticket to fly back to Iran. Prior to this, the Iranian Consul General came to prison and asked me if I needed money; he gave me \$100 in cash. He added that it was bothersome to come to the prison where I was located and he would buy me a ticket to Tehran. I told him that I would not come back to Tehran. There were two other people from Tehran and their request had been pending for 6 months. They also had money. They begged to get a ticket to return to Tehran. Was I the only Iranian amongst the prisoners? They were also Iranians and they were even more “qualified” than me because they were Persian and Tehrani. So why didn’t they buy tickets for them?

51. They wanted to take me to Tehran and kill me there. I told the woman from the UN[HCR] if she understood his spoken Arabic and if she had any issues with his proposal and she said it was fine.. I told her I would not go to Tehran, and she asked where I would go. I did not have any clothes, only shorts... So, she transported me in a UN vehicle to the UN[HCR] office and they gave me \$300. They told me to turn off my cell phone and not to contact anyone in Iran, Lebanon, or elsewhere. I had to pay a fine for my illegal border crossing, and they offered to pay it on my behalf. My visa was ready. I told them I did not know where my family was. They contacted them, got the address, and sent me there.

52. After many problems, we were able to leave Lebanon. I could not believe I was leaving the country until the plane took off.