



Witness Statement of Akan*

Name: Akan
Place of Birth: Sanandaj, Iran
Date of Birth: June 17, 1992
Occupation: Student

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)
Date of Interview: June 17, 2013
Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Akan. It was approved by Akan on December 30, 2013. There are 46 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.

*The witness's last name is withheld for his protection

Statement

Background

1. My name is Akan. I am from Sanandaj, Iran. I was born on June 17, 1992. I am 21 years old. I am a [female to male] transsexual. Actually I am a transgender as I still have certain surgical procedures left [to make the full transition]. I was a student before leaving Iran.
2. I had a boyish temperament and disposition since childhood. I always rode a bike. Even when we gathered together with friends to play dolls, I always played the role of the family father. I would go bring food and snacks. This was the case until I grew up and went to middle school. Interestingly, from childhood until I reached puberty, my father and family were always proud of me because I wrestled and did boyish things. They called me a “lioness.” But once I gradually discovered my identity and felt different from others, they no longer approved of it in any way. In fact, they felt ashamed of my boyish temperament. They imposed restrictions on me, and they wanted me to stop behaving like a boy. They even beat me.
3. While my friends in middle school wanted to find boyfriends, I would fall in love with my classmates and I wanted to be with them. This was both scary and interesting at the same time. The only person I was close to and felt comfortable with was my mother.

Psychologist Visits

4. I discussed this issue with my mother. They took me to a psychologist. I think I was about fifteen years old at the time. I went there and talked to a psychologist. The psychologist suggested that if I got a boyfriend and started a relationship with him, my issues would be resolved. I thought about it for a while and realized I really couldn't bring myself to do it. I was a boy myself. How could I be with a boy? I mean no insult, but I was really disgusted by the idea of being affectionate towards a guy.
5. The psychologist would say that I could not be a boy. When I inquired as to the reason, she showed me her hands and said, “These two middle fingers of men are equal to each other, but you are not like that.” Instead of helping me, she was trying to box me in. I was quite adamant and told her, “I like one of my classmates. You should inquire to see why I like her and what I should do.”
6. I went to see her for a few sessions, but after a while the only thing she said to me and my mother was that I was a transsexual and that I should undergo surgery. We told my father this. My father said, “She's full of it. Everything she says is wrong.” He said, “I will go to the psychologist's office right now and shut it down.” He also gave me a good beating for going there, even though it was his idea for me to go there. He said I did not have the right to see a psychologist. He punched and kicked me, and he beat me in any way you can imagine. The strikes were severe. For instance, he would bang my head against the wall so hard that it would leave a dent in the wall. My father always beat me up really hard. Now I sometimes wonder how I was not brain damaged by this.
7. I found out I was a transsexual through that psychologist. I went on the internet and used other resources to find out what transsexual meant. Then I realized there may be a lot of people like me. I showed these articles to my mom and told her I could be a man, but fearing my father, I was

afraid to bring it up with him. This went on until I was in the eighth grade, but fearing my father I no longer saw a psychologist.

School Years

8. In school I was always watched by the principal and the vice-principal because of my boyish temperament. Though in elementary school, my mother was the principal at our school and I did not have many problems. At that time we lived somewhere else, where my father was transferred for work, but later during middle school we came back to Sanandaj. During middle school my mother was no longer the school principal.
9. Ever since elementary school, whenever I left school for home I took off the school uniform and wore the shirt and pants that I liked. Our school principal and vice principal told me I shouldn't be like this. They asked why I acted that way. My only response was, "I am not like this in the school environment, but you cannot tell me what to do when I leave the school." Some of the kids liked the way I was and showed affection toward me.
10. I had girlfriends. I sometimes got on their nerves, because we would stop talking over something childish or get into an altercation in school. They made fun of me and said, "It is not even clear if you are a boy or a girl." But my physical education teachers always liked me because of my combativeness. I played basketball from middle school until the first year of high school, and I was always the key player in the basketball team.
11. I didn't have many problems in middle school, but I was grown up by the time I was in high school and I wanted to have a serious relationship like everyone else. I fell in love with one of my friends, Neda, who was friends with me since she was six years old. I cared about nothing besides her. A lot of times I held her hands and would not let anyone bother her. I even stood up for her against the teacher. We were friends since childhood, but we became classmates in high school. In school they would ask me, "Why are you so friendly with Neda? You should not be like this." They asked our family to come and the officials expelled me from the school during the first year of high school because of my relationship with Neda.
12. My father beat me up and said, "You have no right to do this. Why are you close to Neda?" This turned into a family quarrel. My father went to [Neda's family's] doorstep and said, "Your child has done something to arouse my child's feelings."
13. Two months later I went back to the same school after making numerous pledges [regarding my behavior]. They did not let me sit next to Neda. They didn't let me participate in any group activity. For instance, I used to be the captain of the futsal team in school.¹ This time they wouldn't let me participate in athletic competitions, saying I shouldn't be talking to girls. They told me to sit in a corner during the breaks and not have any contact with the rest of the kids. This was all done by the school principal. The kids laughed at me.
14. The only person who always felt sorry for me being lonely was Neda. She would not hang out with the rest of the kids in order to show her sympathy to me. When I expressed an opinion at school over an issue, such as going camping, other kids would say, "You be quiet. It is not clear if you are a girl or a boy." These things made kids see me as someone who was violent, because I

¹ Futsal, or indoor soccer, is played between two teams of five players on a hard court surface.

would get offended and had to confront them physically. My schoolwork and grades were always good, and I liked studying, but my grades went down because of this issue.

Family Life

15. I was always boyish. My father could never make me put up a feminine appearance. Ever since childhood I had a boyish appearance. In Iran, you wear a manteau and pants. I would go out in a manteau and pants when my father was looking, but I changed as soon as I was out the door or in the back alley.
16. People never saw me in feminine attire. I walked in the city without the *hijab*², but people knew me since we were a large [and well-known] family. They made fun of me and cracked jokes and we would get into fights. Despite all of this, I never left home wearing the *hijab*. I always considered myself a man. When relatives saw me around the city, they would call my father and he would beat me up [for this behavior].
17. I was beaten up every night. I don't remember not being beaten up a single day over this issue. For instance my father] would tie up my hands and legs and throw me into the bathtub. He did these things a lot, but this didn't make me wear women's clothes outside. My father beat me up a lot, but I couldn't say anything as he was my father nor could I hit him the way he hit me. I would cut myself with a razor and other things to reduce my anger.
18. I have three brothers. My oldest brothers lived separately from us, and my middle brother did not bother me much. But the youngest of my brothers, who is older than me and was born in 1988 or 1989, would beat me up. I would not beat him, and even if I was stronger, I would not like to insult someone who was older than me. I could not stand up to him. I was always respectful. My self-cutting was not too deep, but I still have the scars on my hands. I was under a lot of psychological pressure. My father did not understand that I must have an issue and I was not just doing this to get attention.
19. I was the kind of person who would never bother anybody. I wanted to be the way I was, but people always harassed me. While I was in high school, our neighbors would come to our door and say, "Why is your child going around like this?" This was none of their business. I specifically remember one of our neighbors who said, "You are corrupt and you are leading our kids astray." I never got into trouble in our city [or was] arrested by the police. They thought I was a boy.
20. Later the circumstances were such that I could only see Neda after school. My father would not let me leave the house. Her brothers also beat her up and said, "Why are you two in contact?" It got to a point where her sisters had to accompany her everywhere she went. I was very upset for having caused this problem. I was very upset over the fact that my father would not let me be comfortable.

First Suicide Attempt

² *Hijab*, or Islamic veil, refers to the dress code that women have to observe in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

21. I tried to commit suicide for the first time during the first year of high school. They would not let me see the person whom I loved. I think it was 2007 or 2008. I was under so much pressure that I took whatever pills I could get my hands on at home. I went to school after taking the pills.
22. At school, my classmates asked me, "Why are your eyes red? Why are you tired?" I kept falling. I fainted at school and they took me home. It was actually the night of Yalda.³ I was in a horrible condition that night. Only a person who has taken pills would know what I am talking about. Pills do not kill you, they make you suffer. I told my mother that I had taken pills. They took me to the hospital, but my father kept tormenting me on the way to the hospital. He said he would go to that girl's doorstep and beat her up. I could not say anything because I was in a bad condition.
23. They took me to the hospital and pumped my stomach. Being inexperienced, I had taken those pills one by one instead of taking all of them at once. The only thing that saved me was the large amount of water I had consumed. While at the hospital, my father didn't let my mother visit me, and even though I was not in a bad condition, he did not let Neda come and see me.
24. After taking me home, my father did not let me go to school for two weeks. He took my cell phone away. He took my computer away so I could not communicate with anybody. Later when I went to school, he personally came to pick me up and take me home. That is how I spent the entire year.

Relationship with Futsal Coach

25. Next year, the school officials did not let me stay at that school. I wanted to go to a physical education school because I was really passionate about sports. One of the teachers at my school also taught at a physical education school. They did not register me at the physical education school because she provided my background to them. I got into an argument with them and said, "If you actually saw me doing something wrong, then do not register me." The principal said, "I am not looking for trouble."
26. I think I would have been more successful if I went into physical education. The time for registration was coming to an end and I went into the art school to receive some sort of education. I pursued graphics, but I did not like this major. I liked my girlfriend so much that I always thought about her.
27. I was really passionate about being on the futsal team and I was focused on futsal. I took part in futsal competitions and even went to national competitions. The only person who could understand me there was my coach. I would talk to her even though she was five years older than me. I told her that I liked a girl and that nobody seemed to understand me.
28. I was born in 1992 and she was born in 1986 or 1987. I talked with her and we were intimate. My father would not let me be friends with any girls. Since my coach was older than me, my father did not think a relationship could develop between the two of us. In fact, I did not think so either. For this reason, my father would let her pick me up and take me to soccer. But our relationship gradually led to an interest between me and my coach and we liked each other. She would take me to her dormitory and we were always together. I always went there in boyish clothes.

³ *Shab-e Yalda*, or the winter solstice, marks the longest night of the year, and is celebrated by Iranians.

29. We were friends for about four years. After four years, my father found out about this relationship and, in order to punish me, he did not let me continue playing futsal. I think one of my coach's friends or one of my friends who knew about us blew the whistle. They fired the coach. I potentially may have been able to join the national youth team, and they took away that opportunity from me.

Second Suicide Attempt

30. I was studying for the university entrance exam at the time. My father did not let me take the university entrance exam that year. For this reason, I attempted suicide at home by slitting my wrist. My mother found me and wrapped my hand. My father's slap brought me to consciousness. Since my father worked at the environmental sciences in the medical field and people knew him in hospitals, he didn't want them to find out I did this because of him, so he stitched my hand up himself. My father had taken some courses and knew how to do these things. I have the pictures, and there are still scars [on my hand]. My father threatened to kill me saying no one would do anything to him. That's something my father always said.

University

31. The next year, my mother mediated [between my father and I] and asked my father to let me go to university. I took the university entrance exam and was admitted to the computer science program at the University of Applied Science and Technology at Mahmoudabad, which is in Mazandaran Province. Wanting to be away from Sanandaj, I had applied for the university in Mahmoudabad in order to live more freely.
32. My thinking was that if I went there my father would not come with me, but that is not what happened and my father accompanied me. When I received my acceptance, my father said I could only attend university if I agreed to marry one of my relatives that they had chosen for me. I accepted. That man had told my parents that he would set me straight if he married me. He was four years older than me.
33. In Mahmoudabad, my father took turns to stay with me. He would stay for a week or two and then leave and send my mother over to stay with me. It was easier when my mother was there. I would occasionally be alone for a day or two. I would change my clothes as soon as I left the university campus and go for a ride with several of my friends. The university police picked on me several times and asked why I did not wear the *hijab* when I left the campus. I told them, "I wear the *hijab* while I'm in school, but I do not think it is any of your business what I do outside of the campus."

Arrest and Detention

34. My friends were both male and female. I had told them [about my issue]. Although they did not understand my situation, they would say that I was a good person and regarded me as a friend. One of my classmates had a pool table. One night when my friends and I were on our way back

from the billiard hall, the *Basij*⁴ arrested me in an alley. The *Basij* and the university police are interconnected.

35. The *Basij* officers asked, “What is your relationship to the lady next to you?” I said, “We are brothers and sisters.” They said, “What are you doing here?” I said, “We were visiting a relative’s house and we are on our way back.” They said, “We will take you home to see who your parents are.” Since my parents were not home, I knew they were going to find out that I had lied. I said, “I am a student here.” They said, “Show me your student card.” I showed them my student card. They did not bother my friend and she left, but they arrested me for not wearing a proper *hijab*. I was wearing a jacket, with the hood covering my head. I said, “My jacket may be short, but I am wearing a hat. Why are you saying that my *hijab* is improper?” In Iran, men are not allowed to physically inspect women. They touched me all over. I was very bothered by this. A car came to pick me up and take me away.
36. In the car, a guy sat next to me in the back seat. The person who arrested me was sitting in the front and there was also a driver. The person sitting next to me laughed in a ridiculous way and said, “Is she really a girl?” He kept touching me. I told him you have no right to touch me. The person sitting in the front turned around and slapped my mouth and said, “Shut up, you piece of [expletive]. You cannot tell us about what we can or cannot do. We determine our rights ourselves.” I was very afraid. Nothing of this sort had ever happened to me in the many years I’d spent in my hometown. I was very afraid of what they were going to do to me.
37. They took me to the Mahmoudabad Central Detention Facility and detained me for one night. At that facility, you have to turn over your clothes, belt and everything that you have. The woman who physically inspected me bothered me a lot. She would say it is not clear whether I’m a boy or a girl. It is very hard for me to talk about it, but their physical inspection bothered me a lot. They did not even give me a single blanket the entire night in that cold detention [cell]. I was next to someone in handcuffs and leg irons. She was a murderer who had been arrested that same day. There were also two other girls there.
38. I was very afraid of that woman [the murderer] doing something to me, because she was psychotic. She was sitting in the corner, but I was still afraid. They also brought another girl who was there until the next morning. She bothered me a lot. I think she was one of [the prison officials.] She kept asking me if I was a boy or a girl. She kept touching me. I said, “Stop! You cannot touch me.” Physically, I was a girl, but I was bothered by her finding out that I was a girl.
39. When it got loud, the woman in charge came and beat me up with a baton and said, “Why are you yelling, you corrupt piece of [expletive]? Shut up and sit in the corner.” In the morning, they took me to the police station near my house. They took my pledge, saying someone had mediated on my behalf. One of my well-connected friends had intervened so they would not take me to court. At the police station they told me that if there were to see me like that again I would be in a far worse condition than I was the night before.

⁴ Basij is a volunteer-based militia force. Formed as a volunteer fighting force during the Iran-Iraq war, Basij is now controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). To enforce the morality code of the Islamic Republic, Basij forces often confront and arrest men and women for “inappropriate” attire, or that which is not in accordance with Islamic norms of dress.

Escape from Iran

40. Two or three weeks after this incident, during my second semester at the university, I realized the whole marriage business was becoming serious and my family was talking about the wedding ceremony. I told my mother I would burn myself before I married this person. "If I burned myself, no one would want a burnt person anymore."
41. One of my aunts was in Canada. She told my mother, "Bring your child here, so that she can live more comfortably." My aunt always understood me. I then ran away from my father and got out. I had a passport. At the time, I had finished two semesters at university. When my mother came to Mahmoudabad, I took everything I had and went to Tehran with my mother. From there we went to Tabriz and took a train to Turkey. My father did not know where we were.
42. I told Neda that I could have surgery and undergo a sex change. I showed her articles on this topic. I really liked her and she liked me. Although many years have passed, we are still in touch through Facebook and that sort of thing. But we are no longer in love as we used to be. We are just two ordinary friends. I am very happy that after all of these years, I got to talk to her brother who bothered her all the time. I had just one thing to tell him, "I was afraid of you ever since I was a child, but now I am happy that I am talking to you because I am going to tell you something that you could not understand at the time. It is now proven to you that I am a boy."
43. It is true that in Iran, transsexuals can get surgeries, but the surgeries in Iran are not really good. The rights of women and transsexuals are not respected. Nobody supports us, and no matter what happens to women, their cries fall on deaf ears. I would not be able to have surgery in Iran without my father's signature and consent. No matter how old I may be in Iran, my father still has to sign a sheet in order for me to have the surgery.
44. In Iran I went to a therapist, named Azad Maroufi, who is a psychologist. I really liked him. He approved me [for a sex change surgery] and gave me the sheet. I took this sheet to the medical examiner's office. Over there, they told me I should first bring an approval sheet from Tehran. They also told me that my father needed to sign it as well.
45. In Iran they refer to all gays and lesbians as transsexuals and make them get surgeries. Iran's former president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, once said that there are no *hamjensbaz* people in Iran. I wish he had used the phrase *hamjensgara* (homosexual).⁵ To prove this, they refer to all gays and lesbians as transsexuals and ask them to get surgeries. A lot of gay people got surgeries and are now regretful and have attempted suicide. I know a lesbian who had surgery and now regrets it. Iran is not a heaven for transsexuals. Iran is hell for all LGBT persons. The government has indoctrinated them to get surgeries, while the fact is that they become dismembered. Many of them end up attempting suicide.
46. I have been seeing a psychologist since I came to Canada. I really want to find out my true identity. I must be in therapy for a year, and I will undergo surgery only if they reach this conclusion and I become personally convinced of it. Having surgery [here] is not like in Iran, where it takes a month or two to get a permit and then you end up being dismembered. If someone has surgery and then ends up regretting it later, that person will regret it for the rest of her life. I do not want to kill myself with my own hands. Here I can live in any way that I want to live. I wish my peers in Iran could do the same.

⁵ The term *hamjensbaz*, as opposed to *hamjensgara*, does not imply that the person involved in a homosexual relation is innately gay.