



Witness Statement of Amir Ahmadi

Name: Amir Ahmadi
Place of Birth: Sanandaj, Iran
Date of Birth: March 21, 1984
Occupation: Athlete

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

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Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

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

Statement

1. My name is Amir Ahmadi. I am 28 years old. I have two sisters and three brothers. Two of my brothers are currently in Iran and they are not involved in politics. I worked with the Komala, also known as the Komala Party of Labor of Kurdistan.¹
2. I was arrested during a period when the Ministry of Intelligence of the Islamic Republic of Iran was carrying out a vast operation. I was incarcerated for two years and four months—two months in the detention center of the Sanandaj Intelligence Office and two years and two months in prison. I fled Iran in 2007 and went to Iraqi Kurdistan. I arrived in Germany about a year ago.

Commencement of Political Activity

3. I began my political activities in 2001. Nobody knew that I was politically active. In Sanandaj, in Kurdistan and [throughout] Iran, one understands from an early age that the government violates people's rights. The government is repressive. The government doesn't value the people, especially national and religious minorities. They can't get anywhere [in life] because they are Kurds, because they aren't members of the Basij², and because they are not members of the Martyr's Foundation.³ [Differences in] religion are an additional obstacle for us, although I do not subscribe to any faith. People are forced enter politics, though, sometimes despite themselves. People can easily contact the Komala and the Democratic Party, and become politically active. That's why I started from a young age. I joined the Komala when I was around 19 years old.
4. After high school, I didn't enter college or [even] take college entrance exams. I was an athlete. I was wrestler, and I [also] studied physical training. I couldn't think about higher levels of education and sports. My brother is politically active and well known. Because of him, I knew that they wouldn't admit me [to universities] even if I'd had high marks. I knew I couldn't so I didn't even think about it or try for it. The Intelligence officers came to our door every week. I wrestled from childhood and ended up as one of the top three wrestlers in the country four times. Everybody's rights are violated in wrestling though. For example, the Mazandarani and Shirazis have very good wrestlers too, but they were never invited to the national team because wrestling in Iran is run by gangs.

¹ Komala, or *Sazman-i Inqilabiyeh Zahmatkishan-i Kurdistan-i Iran*, or the Organization of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan, is a leftist Kurdish political party formally established after the 1979 revolution.

² The Basij are a paramilitary organization associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). They claim a membership into the millions, and oftentimes joining the Basij can significantly improve an individual's educational and career prospects. See <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/basij-resistance-force>.

³ The Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans' Affairs (*Bonyad Shahid va Isargaran*) is an organization that receives direct funding from the government of the Islamic Republic, which may be used to make grants to the families of veterans of the Iran-Iraq War and others associated with the military and security apparatus of the Islamic Republic. Foundations like the Bonyad Shahid exercise a great deal of economic influence. See <http://www.payvand.com/news/09/feb/1327.html>.

5. My brother was a *peshmerga* for the Democratic Party. He went to Iraqi Kurdistan in the years 1993-94. The Iranian government learned of this through its Intelligence Ministry. My brother is still there. When he decided to flee, he knew that he could not return. [But] the rest of my family is not political at all. My father dislikes politics.

Arrest and Detention

6. Our group consisted of a core of four individuals. We were arrested in Sanandaj and I was imprisoned in 2006. I myself was arrested on January 31, 2006. I had never been arrested before.
7. It was six in the morning and I was sleeping. They [agents from the Ministry of Intelligence, although that was unknown at the time of arrest] came to my home and stood at the head of my bed. They woke me up and confiscated my computer and belongings. They did not tell me that they were [agents from] the Ministry of Intelligence. I only realized that when I arrived at the [local] office of the Ministry of Intelligence. They were plainclothes agents, and some of them were wearing black ski masks which only exposed their eyes.
8. They put me in the trunk of their car, a Peugeot 405. They drove me around the city for an hour to keep me from discerning where they were taking me. I was blindfolded the whole time. As is customary, the arrestee is blindfolded from the time they enter the Intelligence Office until the time of release. They filled out my forms the day I arrived there.

Torture and Interrogation

9. Then they put me in a small cell. Typically, someone would come in and tell me to put on my blindfold. [After that,] two people would escort me into another room [where] I sat on a chair with a table behind me. They asked me questions and I had to respond. It was fine as long as they knew the answers were correct; when the answers were unclear, however, they used force. I was asked many questions, such as, "Who are your friends? What have you done? Where are your guns and grenades?" I was not armed, and they had probably only heard a little about my membership in the Komala. They wanted me to confess and to divulge information. That same day, they also arrested three of my friends. Over the course of one hour, they arrested all four of us at four different locations in Sanandaj. The interrogations lasted three to four hours a day.
10. [After they arrested me and registered my name] they took me to the cell. Then they came for me at 9 PM to take me to be tortured. While still blindfolded they took me down some stairs into a place from which I assumed I would never emerge. I was in my cell at 9 [when they usually came to take me downstairs]. The Intelligence Office [detention center] cells are very small with only a toilet and a tap inside. The cells were close to each other, followed by a corridor. I don't know exactly how close the torture room was to the cells because I was

blindfolded. [The way there] was very circuitous. The interrogators would fetch me at night so they could interrogate and torture me.

11. I remember well how I was blindfolded and forcibly taken downstairs. I felt like I was trapped, as if I could not get out of there. They hit me. The whips they used would leave no marks of torture behind, or if they did, only very faint ones. [On other occasions,] they would hogtie me or hang me from my hands until I spoke. They would eventually take me down when I said that I wanted to talk. They told me that I had to be interviewed, but I knew that these “interviews” were equivalent to executions. It meant that I would have to sign off on my own execution order. I was tortured a lot to that end. During the entire time that I was in that cell in the Intelligence Office, they did not take me to court. They tortured me without trial. They wanted my friends and I to confess, but we did not have anything to confess. The interrogator repeatedly said, “Why do you do this? Your own leader works for us.” I asked why he would tell me this, because perhaps I would ultimately get out of there, but he disagreed: “You aren’t getting out of here.”
12. The room had a table and chair, and I sat on the chair. My hands were tied and I was blindfolded. They hit me from behind with whatever they had. If I didn’t talk to them, they would come after me at night for a second round. There is more than one interrogator. They don’t risk coming alone. For example, I remember that one of them said, “He talks; he is a good boy,” and then suddenly he hit me in the mouth with a baton. I remember another time when one of them brought pliers and said that he would pull my teeth out. He shoved the pliers into my mouth, while asking, “Will you talk or should I break them [my teeth] in your mouth?” And my tooth got chipped. I couldn’t eat after that. It killed me when I drank anything. I still have not fixed my teeth yet. My eyes still hurt from the incident. They whipped me too. I never saw the whip, but it hurt. When I returned back to my cell, there were no traces of injury from the lashes.
13. When they are torturing someone they make sure that the [victims’] voices echo in all of the cells. In fact, even if they don’t torture anyone one night, they’ll play a tape of torture sounds. It was a form of psychological torture when they were played this tape. I could hear the tap leaking on the other side of the cell. Only on Thursdays and Fridays were there no interrogations. However, on these days the psychological torture was so bad that I wished that they would come and subject me to physical torture. No one was around on Thursdays and Fridays. I could only hear the sounds of someone walking around during a certain time of day. The door of the cell would open from the bottom and a tray would slip into the room with food. It was very low-quality rice. One couldn’t tell how many people had eaten from it. Then at night, they would throw a potato inside the cell. It was the same food every day. They gave me breakfast only every other day. There was a Koran in the cell. When the guy came to give us food, he told us to read the Koran. It was a terrible place and it caused many people to get depressed. I hope that they don’t take more people in there. I am still affected by it. I think about those times so often that I forget who I am. I forget everything. [At any given point], it was very likely that I wouldn’t get out of that torture room alive.

14. I had been in the Intelligence Office detention center's cell for 3 or 4 days when they killed Ebrahim Lotfollahi under torture. I always heard Ebrahim's voice. We were lucky that Ebrahim ended up there around the time we were there. Later I realized that I probably survived and was released from the Intelligence Office because of [the controversy surrounding the death of] Ebrahim. Ebrahim was a student in Tehran, and when he came back to Kurdistan they immediately arrested him. He became a martyr under torture in the Intelligence Office. After I left, I heard that someone by the name of Ebrahim had been martyred there. I knew it was Ebrahim [Lotfollahi]. Also, a story was leaked. Someone witnessed his burial. At the time, the observer did not know it was [agents from] the Intelligence Ministry that buried him, but nonetheless, the observer reported that Ebrahim was buried there. People [eventually] figured out that it was Ebrahim, and that the Intelligence Office had arrested him some time before.
15. I was there [in the detention center of the Sanandaj Intelligence Office] for sixty-two days. I really don't remember much about it; a lot happened! Just imagine, for 62 days my family did not know of my whereabouts. They [the authorities] didn't give any information to them. When my family went to the Intelligence Office, they told them that I wasn't there.

Transfer to Sanandaj Central Prison

16. [When they transported me out of the detention center] they took off my blindfold near [Sanandaj] Central Prison. I had no hope that I would survive until that moment. They asked me, "Why are you being so stubborn? Tell us." My current memory problems go back to that period. I was under a great deal of pressure because the Intelligence Office was very vigilant about us. When I was arrested, they fabricated a story about us: "A cell of Komala organization has been broken up in Sanandaj and 110 kilograms of drugs, four AK-47s, two handguns and a number of grenades have been discovered in connection to this group." None of these allegations were true, but nonetheless newspapers like *Hemayat*, *Ettelaat*, *Kayhan*, and other Iranian newspapers reported them. Three days after my arrest, on January 31, 2006, the news about the arrest of the "Komala cell" was published. They [the articles] are still available; I have them. This is why the Intelligence Ministry agents were so sensitive about us.
17. The Intelligence officers harassed us. That's what it is like in the Intelligence Office. [But] they didn't harass me initially. They would say "It is ok if you talk, if you do not, we will beat you up."
18. [Next] they transferred me to [Sanandaj] Central Prison. Before doing so, they blindfolded me, removed me from my cell, shaved my face, cut my hair, and let me take a bath. Then they blindfolded me, tied my hands, and took me inside a car. Four of them were sitting all around me. They drove me around for [somewhere between] an hour and an hour and a half again, even though it is only a ten minute drive from the [Sanandaj] Intelligence Office to [Sanandaj] Central Prison. [They did this] so that I could not understand where I was. This was for their security. I was put into quarantine when I arrived at the prison. They wanted to make sure that I didn't have drugs. "What's the matter?" they asked, "Didn't you have 110 kilograms of

drugs?” I said that it was not true: that they fabricated that story. It was all a show. The agents themselves bring drugs into the prison. After three days, they escorted me [out of quarantine and] into a ward of the prison. There were a lot of political prisoners in the prison. They came to me because they had read the news in newspapers. After some time passed, I was taken to the Branch One of the Revolutionary Court [of Sanandaj].

19. I was allowed a visit with my family a week after my transfer to the prison. I was able to call my home and let them know that Thursday was a visiting day. All wards have their own telephone lines. My family had previously come to the prison to visit me, but because they didn't have an appointment they were told to come back on Thursday.

Trial and Sentencing

20. My trial wasn't held until some time later. I know that Nowruz [Iranian New Year, on the first day of Spring] had passed, but I don't remember the exact date. It was perhaps two or three months after Nowruz [meaning May or June]. It was my first hearing. I went to the interrogator first and then I went to the judge. I went to the judge two times. My interrogator was Mobaraki; he was a nasty person. He cursed a lot. He did not understand anything. There was no talking to him. He told me: “Do you want me to get up and hit you in the mouth?”
21. I had two attorneys. I had one at the beginning, but then switched to another attorney. My first attorney was Omid Rashidi. He was my relative. He was not very effective in the sense that he got scared a lot. He was conservative and timid. Therefore, I replaced him with Shahram Gorouhi. He was very effective and defended me well. Later, some other [attorneys] came forward [and offered to help], but I already had an attorney.
22. During the court hearing, I was asked the same questions that they asked me at the Intelligence Office. They questioned me about the 110 kilograms of drugs. I told them that it wasn't true. They said, “There were drugs [associated with your arrest], otherwise why would the Intelligence [agents] say so?” I responded that they should bring them [my accusers] and show them to me. To that, they said: “The Intelligence [Ministry] doesn't lie.” I responded that I don't lie either. Then they asked me about guns and the Komala, and I made it clear that I had no contact with the Komala. They also harped for a long time about my brother being a *peshmerga* for the KDPI.⁴ There was a great deal of pressure on me because of this. I concluded based on the discussion with the judge and the attorney that all of this was happening because of my brother. I made no confessions, and neither did my friends. They [the authorities at the court] couldn't do anything. After 3 sessions of interrogation, they sent me to the court presided over by Judge Babaei [Branch One of the Revolutionary Court of Sanandaj].

⁴ The KDPI stands for the Democratic Party of Kurdistan in Iran (sometimes referred to as PDKI), a political grouping dedicated to advancing Kurdish rights and promoting autonomy for the Kurdish regions of Iran. The KDPI was founded by Qazi Mohammad, a Kurdish political and religious leader.

23. During my first court hearing with Judge Babaei, they didn't even let my attorney into the courtroom. He asked me if I had cooperated with the Komala and I told him that I had not. Then he asked other questions and ultimately handed down a sentence of 8 years' imprisonment, a \$7,000 fine, and 100 lashes. It took them a year to hand down a sentence. My trial took a whole year after I entered Sanandaj [Central] Prison.
24. My charges were based on the first session I'd had with Interrogator Mobaraki. My charges were [taking] actions against national security through cooperation with the Komala, the possession of 110 kilograms of drugs, the transfer of drug profits to the Komala, assassination, theft and the possession of four AK-47s." Then they brought two people to identify whether I was the one who robbed them. The interrogator asked, "Is he the man who came to your home and took your money?" Thank God they said no. The only evidence they had against me was a photo from a Nowruz celebration that I had taken in Iraqi Kurdistan [and saved] on my computer. That picture belonged to the Komala. The rest of the evidence was [recordings of] telephone calls. They asked me if [a given recording] was me talking to various people, and I responded that it was not me. They hit me and said, "It is you. We won't do anything to you. Just tell us that it is you." They wanted to manipulate me so that I confirmed their allegations or tire me out so that I would finally be forced to say yes.
25. After I received my sentence, the prosecutor appealed it because he believed that it was too light. My sentence was sent to the Appeals Court [of Kurdistan province]. So I waited to see what the final sentence would be. Would it be execution? It was during the time that Ehsan Fattahian was there [in Sanandaj Central Prison]. Ehsan was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment. He was exactly like me. The prosecutor appealed his sentence, and it turned into execution, while my sentence remained the same [on appeal]. The appeals process took a few months.
26. During the appeals, my father died. After he died, I requested a provisional release. I was given bail. They gave me a five-day break to see my father, but the funeral had passed by the time I was out. I had the right to receive provisional release. I served one-third of my term, after which one has a right to furlough. However, they often delay giving furlough to political prisoners, if they give it at all. But since my father had passed away and I had followed up with my attorney, they granted me the provisional release. When I left the prison for my temporary release, I escaped. I was imprisoned for about two years and four months. I don't exactly remember. It was from 2005 to 2007. I remember that I was in prison for three Nowruz [Iranian New Year] holidays.

Prison Conditions

27. I was tortured in prison. I had cellmates who were on death row: Adnan Hassanpour, Farzad Mohammadi, his brother and others. Adnan had a death sentence too, but it was reduced

recently. Adnan told me about his treatment in prison, but people don't talk much. We can't trust everybody. For example, there was a ward in prison called Ward 2. Political prisoners were usually held there. There were also murderers and a lot of other people in Ward 2. People have to be careful about what they say in there. I had a friend who was pulled out of Ward 2 because some news had been leaked out. They took him and no one saw him again. The [prison] telephones were also tapped.

28. Those on death row were under camera surveillance. If they didn't see people like Adnan, Anvar, and Sohrab Jalali for five minutes, they would immediately come for them. They would ask where they were for those five minutes. They did this to Adnan. The camera went wherever he went. There were also cameras in the yard. When prisoners wanted to make phone calls, they would have to do so in front of the camera. If they didn't make their phone calls in front of the camera, then they would be put in solitary confinement. Both hands and feet are tied in solitary confinement. We would be kept there for three days without a toilet. They do this to break the prisoner's pride. I was sent to solitary confinement once.
29. There was a man there who was a member of the IRGC. He had come from the Nezam Ward. The Nezam Ward is for soldiers, for instance those with alcohol problems. I was in Ward 2 when this soldier was sent to Ward 2. Because my fellow inmates were comfortable with me, they had elected me to be responsible for Ward 2. I didn't let the soldier in our ward. We got into a fight and I threw him out. The prison authorities came and reported me to the manager of the prison, Khosravi. He sent me to solitary confinement for three days. For those three days I didn't eat anything for fear of my pride.
30. Parvin was the manager of the prison before Khosravi, and in some ways Parvin was better. But when Khosravi became the manager, he made the prison different. He increased the flow of drugs. There are more drugs inside Iranian prisons than outside of them. Prison agents and guards approach people like me and bring drugs. They say, "I will bring the drugs and you sell it to the prisoners, and you can keep 100000 Tomans [at the time roughly \$100] and give me 50000 Tomans [at the time roughly \$50]." They know to whom they can sell it. I saw this myself. Sanandaj Prison is a small prison. It isn't like Ghasr or Evin, which are large prisons. There are only 1300 to 1400 prisoners in Sanandaj Prison. People can see everything [that happens in the prison]. It is very normal for a guy to bring in half a kilogram of drugs. There are a lot of drug addicts too. Prisoners self-harmed to get drugs like Methadone. The prison doesn't have the equipment to stitch the cut, so the prisoner is sent to the hospital. They acquire drugs like this, and give half of the money to the guards. Drugs are very expensive in prison. When Khosravi came, he increased the supply of drugs and lowered the price.

Political prisoners

31. When I was in prison, there were a lot of [other] political prisoners there as well because the Intelligence Office had initiated a series of [arrests] and broadcasted propaganda on TV. Their goal was to wipe out all secret organizations. They had cartoons run on TV. For example, they

showed [someone named] Nourizadeh calling a person in Tehran and telling him that “we have put some money, guns and drugs somewhere. Distribute the drugs, get the gun and kill so-and-so person, and you can keep the money.” Then [in the cartoon] the sister of the other person calls the Ministry of Intelligence and informs them about her brother and says that he has been deceived. They arrested many during this time. [I know of] about 130 political prisoners at that time. Ehsan Fattahian was executed at that time. I was in the same ward as Ehsan and we were affiliated with the same political party. He was convicted of collaboration with the Komala and actions against national security. His sentence was increased when the prosecutor appealed it. The case was sent to the Supreme Court. Ehsan was beaten, and at times I could see this, but I really can’t speak for Ehsan. Everybody knows what happens in the Intelligence Office.

32. Ehsan was executed and Khedr was executed. Khedr was not a Kurd; he was convicted of collaboration with the MEK.⁵ He never confessed to having any political [allegiances]. He said he had gone to Karbala and had been arrested on his way back. Other people who were sentenced to death were: Anvar Hossein-Panahi, Arsalan Hossein-Panahi⁶, Adnan Hassanpour, Sohrab Jalali, Jahandar Mohammadi, Farzad Mohammadi, Yaser Goli, and the sister of someone named Farid who was in our ward (she was in another ward). They [the siblings] worked with PJAK. Habibollah Lotfi and Aku [Kurdnasb] were also detained there. These were all prisoners on death row. Many of their sentences have been reduced. Back then they wanted to execute Habibollah, but people became active and the government couldn’t go through with it. I wasn’t in the same political party as all of them. [But] Habibollah was my friend and we shared our expenses. I think Adnan’s sentence has been reduced too. They had charged him with carrying out espionage for the United States. They had confiscated a GPS unit from him. He said that he was a cartographer and that he was carrying the GPS for his job, but they [the Intelligence services] insisted that he was working for the Americans. They arrested him with Hiva Boutimar, but Hiva was in Mariwan Central Prison. While some people in my cell like Anvar, Arsalan and Ehsan Fattahian were waiting to be executed, there were also some who just had prison sentences like Yaser Parvizi. They change prisoners’ sentences. Perhaps if I had stayed in prison for another year, and if they had arrested one of my friends and he had confessed something about me, my file would have been reviewed again and I would have been sentenced to death.

Escape

33. When I left the prison, I stayed in Sanandaj for two days, and then I went to Marivan at night. One of my oldest friends with whom I hadn’t even made any contact during those two days [in Sanandaj] arranged everything for me. He gave me an IranCell mobile phone line and simply

⁵ The Mojahedin-e Khalq, an organization designated as a terrorist group by many experts including the US State Department at the time of publication. The MEK espouses a Marxist-Islamist ideology. It fought with Saddam Hussein’s military during the Iran-Iraq War. See <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/mek.htm>.

⁶ Arsalan Ouliyee, a cousin of Anvar Hossein-Panahi.

he told me, "Go there [to Marivan, a border city]. They are waiting for you." Some Komala people came for me [when I got to] in Mariwan and took me to Iraqi Kurdistan. I left Iran on August 10, 2007. I had gotten out of prison just five days before leaving Iran. When I got to Iraqi Kurdistan, I became a *peshmerga*.

34. As a *peshmerga*, I openly engaged in political and military activities. When I went there, since I still had [connections] with a group in Sanandaj, I started to contact them and organize them in there. There are things that can be done inside a city. There are secret organizations, with secret cores, such as my own organization, and they are involved in activities like spreading information. I organized these activities.
35. Right now, the *peshmerga* cannot be out in the open. They cannot pass the mountains and go into the cities. It is dangerous. Security and Intelligence [forces] have made gains. The activities that the *peshmerga* carry out in the cities are performed by secret organizations.