



**Witness Statement of Danial Shahri**

**Name:** Danial Shahri  
**Date of Birth:** November 10, 1990  
**Place of Birth:** Isfahan, Iran  
**Occupation:** Student

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**Interviewing Organization:** Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)  
**Date of Interview:** October 18, 2011  
**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was approved by Danial Shahri on February 13, 2012. There are 37 paragraphs in the statement.

**Background**

1. I am Danial Shahri. I was born on November 10, 1990 in a Christian family in Isfahan. My parents are both blind and converted to Christianity from Islam. I was a student in Iran and was active in a home church in Isfahan. Our home church was attacked by the intelligence agents in March 2010 and the leaders of the home church were arrested. Subsequently, on April 11, 2010 I was arrested at our home and charged with “web management of the home church”, “blasphemy and publishing lies”, “evangelism” and “forming and participating in home church”. I was detained in Dastgerd prison of Isfahan for two weeks and finally released on bail until my first court hearing. Nearly six months later, on December 12, 2010, I left Iran.

**Early arrests of Christian in Isfahan**

2. The first arrests in Isfahan happened in 2003 in my mother’s church, the St. Luke’s Episcopal Church. Of course at that time I was too young for [the authorities] to cause me any problems. But a group was arrested in St. Luke’s Church at that time, including my mother and sister who were summoned to the intelligence office and interrogated. My father, who worked in the Social Security Organization, was also interrogated by the security office at his work place. [In interrogation] they asked them [questions like] why does this guy goes to church? Or, is that guy baptized or not? Or, why they went on that trip? And questions like that.

**Forming the home church**

3. Following the arrests, and since the official churches in Iran are under strict supervision and pressure from the government, I didn’t go to the official church any more despite the fact that our home was close to St. Luke’s church. . The government controls everything and doesn’t let the church engage in evangelism or conduct its service freely. From that time forward, a group of us Christians gathered in homes and had church service at home. The gathering of Christians at home is named the “Home Church”.
4. In 2010, the home church, held at a friend’s home, was also attacked by the intelligence agents of Isfahan. On February 28, 2010 they first went to the leaders of our home church. Coincidentally, since they were also our close friends, I was at their home that day fixing their computer, when about 15 plain clothes intelligence agents attacked their home. When I tried to defend them, they hit me and cursed at me too. They even handcuffed me so that I wouldn’t intrude. Finally they arrested the couple that was the leaders of our home church and carried them off.

**Detention**

5. After that, since their family had two sons, I went to their home every day so that their children wouldn’t feel lonely. On the afternoon of April 11, 2010 I was in their home and eating lunch

with their children when my sister, sounding frightened, called and told me: “Danial, come home. They have your arrest warrant!” I quickly returned home. When I rang the bell, one of the 15 plain clothes agents present at the arrest of the leaders of our home church opened the door for me and ridiculed me by saying: “Well, well, Mr. Danial! Welcome. Come in. We have come to meet you too.”

6. Later my father told me that they rang the bell that day and told my father they were mailmen with a letter for us. When my blind father opened the door they said “Ya Allah” and entered the home. They quickly showed the warrant for my arrest, on which my name and “web manager for the home church” were written, to my sister but had not let her read it. Even when my sister, who was wearing pajamas, went to her room to change, they followed her to see what she wanted to do.
7. When I entered the home, I saw four agents in plain clothes, from the group of 15 agents I previously mentioned, in my room. One of them was well-built and had a beard up to his eyes. One of them was short with a big stomach and slightly bald in the front of his scalp. One of them, who looked like their commander, sat in a corner and checked the things that the other took out of my room to take with them. No matter how many times my blind parents who couldn't see anything asked them what they were doing, they didn't respond in a clear manner. They mocked everything [they came across]. I was studying for Konkoor (Iran's university entrance exam) at that time. They even inspected my textbooks. They searched [my things] so carefully they even found things I thought I had lost. They seized the satellite TV receiver and cell phones. They even searched my sister's room, opened all the drawers, and searched everything.
8. They finally said: “Danial, you come with us, we want to talk to you”. My parents were very worried. I comforted them, left my wallet and other things at home and went with them. They realized my mother was very uncomfortable and told her: if Danial cooperates with us, we will bring him back home ourselves in 24 hours. Then they handcuffed me and put me in a dark blue Peugeot with a red government license plate. They sat me alongside one of them, who was fat and young and made a list of my stuff that they were taking with them. One of them sat in the driver's seat and took me to Dastgerd prison of Isfahan.

### **Dastgerd prison of Isfahan**

9. When the car arrived at the door of the prison, the guards opened the door – without questioning us – and we entered. Then the car passed by another large door near the clinic of the prison and we entered another building beside that door. There, they wrote my name and pinned it to my shirt and snapped photos of me from different angles. They took me to the upstairs of the building, and then blindfolded me in front of a thick iron sliding door that had “Alef-Ta” written on it. They then led me into the Alef-Ta wing.
10. They took me to a prison cell. Later, when my blindfold was taken off, I could see that the cell measured 2 by 5 meters. The cell had a toilet, bath and a dishwashing tap and blankets spread on

the floor. There were two other people in the cell. One of them was a fortune teller who introduced himself as a fortune teller; in prison he was called Haj Agha. The other person in the cell was a guy named Davood who had been arrested for participating in pyramid schemes.

11. The next morning, on Monday, April 19, 2011, the authorities came to the cell, handcuffed me and drove me to the revolutionary court in Baharestan town in a Peugeot. Although the revolutionary court is normally located on Chahar Baghe Bala Street, the revolutionary court had temporarily relocated to Baharestan town while the main office building underwent repairs. The authorities took me to the court's 11<sup>th</sup> branch, but I was told that the judge didn't have time that day, so I was transported back to prison.
12. The next morning, on Tuesday, they came for me once again. They led me out of the cell, blindfolded me and after we climbed some stairs, they took me into a room for interrogation. On the first day of interrogation, they held me in that room alone for several hours. During these days of interrogation, I heard the interrogations that were conducted in the adjacent room. One person was interrogated for a drug-related arrest, another one was arrested for protests during Charshanbe Suri (Iranian "Festival of Fire"), and another one was arrested for attending a student party in a garden.

### **Interrogations**

13. After a few hours of waiting in the room on my first day of interrogation, an intelligence agent came in. I could not see his face then but on the last day, when I was going to be released, I saw his face. He was of medium height, with a wide face and stomach and East Asian eyes. His face had Central Asian like features. I suppose he was named Morteza.
14. Mr. Morteza came and stood behind me. He held my sister's computer in his hands. I realized it was my sister's computer because when he wanted to plug in the charger, he passed in front of me and I saw the charger from underneath my blindfold and realized it was my sister's. Then he showed me my sister's cell phone and asked if it was my sister's and I answered yes. There was a funny clip in my sister's cell phone that was in the cell phones of all young people. It belonged to a Mullah that said funny things. He said: "What does it mean? What are these things in your cell phone?"
15. Then Mr. Morteza left and another person whose name was Mohseni entered the room. I later recognized who he was because I had previously seen him in connection with the arrest of the leaders of our home church. He was a short man with a beard and wore glasses when he wanted to read things. His accent sounded like a mix between accents from Khomeinishahr and Najafabad. When he entered the room, he asked questions like: how well did I know computers? how well did I know English? and similar questions. He made me put all my answers in writing—he wrote down the question on a paper that he passed to me and then I answered in writing and passed the paper back to him. I had to sign and stamp my finger print under every answer. The paper was an interrogation paper that bore the official header of the ministry of intelligence.

16. In this first interrogation session, the interrogators informed me that I was charged with “Blasphemy and Publishing Lies”. This charge differed completely from the one written on the arrest order that they showed my sister when I was arrested. In respect to the charge of “Blasphemy”, they accused me of writing in a comedy website that insulted Khomeini. They accused me of writing curses on this website as well, while in fact I didn’t even know such a website existed. On the website printout my interrogator showed me, the website appeared to have a forum in which any one could become a member and write things.
17. Then Mr. Morteza asked me about other members of the home church. I said I can answer questions about myself but I won’t respond to questions about others. When I wrote my response and gave it to him behind me and he read it, he said: Do you know where this is? I replied: It is wing Alef-Ta (short for “Ettelaat” or “Intelligence” wing in Farsi) of Dastgerd prison of Isfahan. He said: Ok. I’ll show you! Then he went out and came back with Mr. Mohseni.
18. Mr. Mohseni said: I hear you are bullying and threatening us. Do you want to be famous? Do you want to become a hero? Then while I was blind folded they both started to hit me. Mr. Mohseni was in front of me and Mr. Morteza was behind me. They punched and kicked me. They said disrespectful things and cursed at me. I told them I would not say anything as long as they hit me.
19. Then they both went out and Mr. Mohseni came back again. He took me to a balcony like place. I was blindfolded but it was an open area without a roof. I later saw the area; it was the fresh air area of the Alef-Ta section on the second floor of the building. It was a tiled area, although it didn’t have a roof, it was covered by a net so that no one would climb it. I don’t know how big it was exactly. It was like a long corridor. Mr. Mohseni said: You have to cooperate with us. If you cooperate with us, I promise we will fix up your case. Then he said: We don’t let anybody become a hero here. He repeated this over and over. He said as long as you don’t speak, we will keep you here for as many years as it takes. They took me back to my cell that day.
20. On Wednesday they took me to the 11<sup>th</sup> branch of the revolutionary court, (I suppose) under Mr. Yousefian [the judge of the branch] in Baharestan town. The name of the branch was written at the door and my interrogator, Mr. Yousefian was a fat, bald man who wore glasses and spoke with a light accent from the south. During the interrogation, I was mostly given advice. The interrogator told me to cooperate with my interrogators so that I would be released quickly. He said: “You are young and you might make mistakes.”
21. There was no one else in the room except for the interrogator, me and the intelligence agent, who took me to court. He told the interrogator things every now and then and took notes. The interrogator said: “Try to cooperate and we will try to cover up your case. Why don’t you respond to them? They want to help you.” Then they took me back to prison that day.
22. During the next interrogation sessions they charged me with “illegal web actions”. Our goal was to make a website for our home church. This plan had not been carried out. We had only put it

down on paper. They [realized the plan] from the papers they collected from my room and charged me with that.

23. I faced four accusations during my detention. The first charge was for “illegal web actions” which referred to website management of the home church. The second was “blasphemy and publishing lies”. Then “evangelism” and “forming and participating in home church” were added. They said according to the laws of the Islamic Republic, all these things that I did were crimes. I said it was impolite not to respond when someone asked me about Christianity. He said: “Tell them to go and ask the priest, you do not answer.” I once told them that the constitution gives Christians the right to conduct services. In response, Mr. Morteza, my interrogator at the time, told me: “In this room, I am your law, don’t give me laws!”
24. At the end of interrogations on Thursday, Mr. Mohseni allowed me to make a short phone call to my family to let them know where I was. Until then, for four days, my family didn’t know where I was. In the call, which was less than a minute, I told my dad that I was in the Alef-Ta section of Dastgerd prison. Then Mr. Mohseni took the phone and told my father: “Advise him to talk so that we can send him home.”
25. When I was released, I realized that during those four days, my family searched everywhere for me but had not gotten any response. Aside from the fact that my parents are blind, my father suffers from heart illness and he has had angiography surgery. Also my mother is diabetic and has to inject insulin every night. And now, in addition to all their medical ailments, they were worried about me.
26. My parents called “113”, which is the number of the information public bureau of the intelligence office. When you call it a recorded tape instructs that if you want to give a report, for example press one, and so forth. However, they had not managed to get information from anywhere. So they physically went to the information public bureau of the intelligence office on Hasht-Behesht Street of Isfahan. Later, my family even hired me an attorney but Mr. Mohseni threatened them and asked why they had done that. He insinuated that they must have a lot of money to be able to do that and he told them they had to fire the attorney.
27. During the interrogation, the agents threatened that if I didn’t speak, they would take my sister to prison too. After that, because of their threats and because they didn’t let me speak with my family, I went on a hunger strike. I mean I just drank a glass of water in the morning and at night.
28. Even if I hadn’t gone on a hunger strike, I would hardly be able to eat anything. The prison food was not good at all. The cell had a bowl in which the guards put food for three people in. We put our food in disposable plates and ate it. Then we washed the disposable dishes and used them again.
29. We only had a ten minute fresh air break on Fridays. My interrogations were long. They took me in the morning and took me back in the afternoon. But all my time in interrogations was not spent

on questioning. They sometimes left me in the room for hours and went away. The interrogation room was like an office. I could see from under my blindfold that there were books in the room.

30. The interrogators alleged that our home church is a Zionist one. Since our home church was related to the Baptist church, and since George Bush goes to the Baptist church, Mr. Mohseni's reasoning was that our church is a Zionist one. He said our goal was to overthrow the Islamic Republic. They made a case for me on Saturday and took my finger prints.
31. On Sunday Mr. Mohseni called me and said: we have brought your sister here. If you want your sister to go home by the afternoon you have to cooperate. I said I didn't believe him. I asked: how should I know you are telling the truth? Then he took my hand and led me to another room and from under my blindfold I could see my sister from behind. But when I wanted to say hello to her, Mr. Mohseni closed the door and took me away.
32. That day I went on a silence strike and said: I will not talk as long as my sister is here. That day in interrogation, I did not read the questions, and instead I wrote down on the paper that I would not speak until my sister is here.
33. In the afternoon they took me to my sister. We sat beside each other but they didn't let us talk to one another. Mr. Mohseni told my sister to advise me to talk, and she said: "Whatever he (meaning me) wants." That night they took me to the cell and one of the soldiers later told me that they had sent my sister home at eight o'clock. I later realized after I was released that for that whole day [that my sister was in prison] my parents sat behind the main door of the prison reception.
34. During my prison stay, I was interrogated six or seven times in total. On the Thursday of my incarceration they let my family visit me in the presence of one of the prison agents. Our visit took place at the end of a corridor that led to the Alef-Ta section. That day intelligence agents told me that 20 million Rials (approximately \$ 20,000) bail had been issued for me which could be exchanged with a bondsman.

## **Freedom**

35. On Saturday, April 24, 2010, I was released from prison with the bondsman surety. As I headed out of prison, intelligence agents told me my case remained open and that they would summon my presence at the court hearing.
36. In addition to my family members, other members of the home church were interrogated by agents of the intelligence. They interrogated one of the members along with his mother and father. They also warned the father of one of the members to 'take care' of his child.
37. After a while they called me from the intelligence to go and get my computer case. When I retrieved the case I saw that they had kept the hard drive. They told me that the judiciary seized

the hard drive. Except for my sister's laptop and cell phone, they didn't give anything else back. About six months after these incidents, on December 12, 2010, I left Iran.