



Witness Statement of Faegh Rourast

Name: Faegh Rourast
Place of Birth: Mahabad, Iran
Date of Birth: February 4, 1990
Occupation: Swimming instructor, student

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: January 5, 2012

Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Faegh Rourast. It was approved by Faegh Rourast on May 12, 2012. There are 53 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.

Statement

Background

1. In the Kurdish regions most people have two names. One is an [official] birth certificate name, and one is a name that other people, including family, use to refer to an individual. In my birth certificate, my name is recorded as Faegh Rourast, but friends call me Azad [freedom]. My father's name is Ali. On my birth certificate, my birth date is listed as February 4, 1990, but I am 23 years old. I was [previously] a first-year law student.

Commencement of Activism

2. Around 2005-06, I became acquainted with organizations that were connected to human rights because their work was relevant to my field. I am the brother-in-law of Ms. Zaynab Bayazidi [a women's rights activist and current political prisoner]. From 2006-07, I worked with a human rights organization in Kurdistan and Europe known by the acronym RMMK, as well as the One Million Signatures campaign [for gender equality in Iran]. Via Mr. [Rahmani], I would indirectly pass news and documentary films about self-immolation among women, problems related to landmines in Iranian Kurdistan left over from the Iran-Iraq war and the armed struggles between the Kurdish parties and the Iranian government, and the condition of small-scale cross-border smugglers to Kayvan Rafii, [the co-founder of a group called] the Association of Human Rights Activists of Iran. At that time I was in Mahabad, and later I moved to Orumiyeh.
3. I was in contact with the Kurdish political parties for one reason. That is, in the Kurdish cities of Iran it's inconceivable that someone can be arrested and not be stuck with the label of involvement in [opposition] politics. [The government] is not willing to make a mockery of itself by [openly] arresting me because of my human rights activism. More than anything, they label [arrestees] as spies, counterrevolutionaries, and activists for counterrevolutionary parties, but I truly had no connection with political parties and did not collaborate with them beyond scheduling and conducting interviews. I also conducted interviews with several Kurdish satellite channels.

Father's arrest

4. After the announcement of Farzad Kamangar's death sentence, a demonstration was organized in Sanandaj. One week later, in the city square of Mahabad another demonstration was organized. In the Mahabad demonstration, several other organizers and I took photographs and conducted interviews. This is the summer 2008 issue [in my case file]. We assembled as a gathering of civic activists in the city of Mahabad. This was how we publicized the event in bulletins on websites, because we wanted the people of Mahabad and the surrounding cities to refrain from using anti-regime slogans and to only focus on the matter of the injustice of Farzad Kamangar's sentence and [call for] the speedy reconsideration and reversal of his death sentence. When the demonstration started, because I was a participant myself, and because I had taken pictures there, they [the authorities] became suspicious of me and a few other organizers. My father has a shop in Mangur Square. They mentioned to him that they knew that I had participated in and photographed the gathering and they thought it was likely that I had forwarded these photographs to human rights organizations. This was the way that they admonished my father, but since they did not have sufficient evidence and Zaynab Bayazidi had just been arrested—and since the city

of Mahabad is small and they did not want for [another] gathering to be promulgated regarding the gradual arrests of activists in the city—they chose not to arrest me just then.

5. After awhile, on August 22, 2008, [the RMMK] released a joint statement with a group of students from Tehran University about the general strike of a group of civic and political prisoners in Orumiyyeh, Mahabad, Karaj and even Tehran. They made their requests known in [a list of] six points. After this strike I gave several interviews and they began to suspect me because [they identified] my voice. I gave interviews on the issue to France Radio and three Kurdish television channels: Tishk TV, Komala and Norouz TV, which are affiliated with Iranian Kurdish political parties. I gave 12 interviews on the issue of the 47-day general strike. I was [accompanied by] a woman [in these interviews]. They became suspicious and I became aware that they [the authorities] were following me. I was a swimming instructor at the time and also worked in a family-owned shop. I received suspicious phone calls from unknown numbers. They called my house numerous times, saying, for instance, that someone had immolated themselves near Mahabad and we want to talk to your son [Faegh Rourast]. Their aim was to see if and how the news of these fabricated stories would spread. They wanted to see how my family and I reacted.
6. On July 8, 2008, the day after the first time I was summoned by the Intelligence Office on July 7, 2008, Zaynab [Bayazidi] was arrested and charged with membership in the One Million Signatures campaign, actions against national security, and propaganda against the regime. On January 25, 2009 my father was arrested in his store under the same charges. On the same day, my paternal aunt and I were summoned. My aunt, who is a retired schoolteacher in Mahabad and was on the board of trustees of the Social Welfare Organization¹, was detained for several hours. Thus around half of our family has been either detained or summoned. My aunt was living with us [at the time]. Her name is Hajer Rourast. After detaining her at the Intelligence Office for several hours and repeatedly interrogating her, they did not keep her further, but everyday they would summon her and interrogate her and then let her go. The reason that she didn't remain in detention was that people in the city knew her and [knew that] she was an exemplary teacher and that she was working in the Social Welfare Organization. This is why she was never officially arrested.
7. On September 1, 2008 my older brother called me from my father's shop and told me with distress that "they" had taken my father. My father is sick and has high blood pressure. I thought my brother was telling me that they had taken him to the hospital. He said, "No! [Agents from] the Intelligence Office raided our shop." As he said this, not more than a few seconds later, eleven or twelve officers from the Intelligence Office entered our house violently. At that moment, my aunt and older and younger sisters were in the house with me. My aunt got in front of them and said "you have to have a search warrant, what you're doing is illegal." The officers pushed her and pepper-sprayed her while saying very indecent things. They asked me whether I was Faegh Rourast. I said yes. They said that after they were done searching the house they would arrest me. They expected me to flee, so that when they would [eventually] arrest me and I would say that I was innocent, they'd be able to point to my attempt to escape [as incriminating evidence]. I very calmly replied, "No problem. I will come with you." When they were leaving,

¹ An independent group supporting orphaned children and mentally- and physically-disabled individuals whose board is selected in annual elections. This association holds monthly events aimed at providing material and emotional assistance to orphans. Ms. Hajer Rourast has been elected as a member of the board for each successive year since 2008. She was charged with public criticism of the government for its lack of support for orphans.

they did not arrest me after all, because they wanted to see what I would do next. They didn't even give my sister the opportunity to wear appropriate clothes.

8. They got on their radio and four more officers from the Intelligence Ministry came and [all of the agents] searched the whole house. They scrutinized closets, drawers, textbooks and university entrance study books. They even pulled up our carpets that had been glued [to the floor]. They took a color printer with them afterwards. I asked them why they were taking the printer, which contained no memory. They thought that it was possible that it had RAM or a hard drive. They took the printer, a computer chassis and two cell phones belonging to myself and my aunt. When my aunt asked to see their permit, they said, "a permit for what?" They told me "what are you trying to debate? You have done some things and now the regime has taken an issue with you. We know what goes on in your house." This was their town when they spoke with me.
9. After that, a psychological war was waged against our family. They told my father that they were going to arrest all of the family. They told me that they might give my father a death sentence. The family and my father were uninformed of each others' situations, and they would give us incorrect information about each other. We were under a great deal of pressure [concern], because my father has high blood pressure.
10. From the autumn of 2008, I was under surveillance and they did something to make me perceive that they were unaware of me. In the winter, I began to have doubts. [I began thinking that] maybe some actions or decisions had been made in the Intelligence Office against imminently detaining me. Hence I did not flee because I assumed that ultimately their evidence [regarding me] might be such that they saw me in the gathering, but they couldn't say [for sure] that I had been interviewed [by subversive media outlets].
11. When I was detained in the Intelligence Office later on they [agents of the Intelligence Ministry] told me that they had chosen to arrest my father before the rest of us because they claimed that when my friends would come to the shop, we'd go up to the second floor and talk. They claimed that even if my father was not collaborating with us, it was inconceivable that he was not giving us assistance. The Intelligence Ministry agents continued that since some of my friends would [periodically] visit our house, my whole family was collaborating with us [the human rights activists]. They claimed that my mother and father and my whole family, including my aunt, all knew that I conducted interviews and that I participated in demonstrations and that I had worked for the benefit of [opposition] political parties. They further claimed that since my family had information about my actions and had not reported them, they were indirectly collaborating with me. They tried to psychologically pressure me this way.
12. The arrest of my father two days before I was arrested was part of a plot at which they themselves later indirectly hinted. During the course of those two days, one-by-one they placed members of my family and the families who came to our house under surveillance. They wanted to find out which Internet café I would go to and whom I was in contact with. They wanted to make me nervous somehow so that I would go to the Internet café and send word out about my father's arrest and give interviews so that they could arrest me in a reliable and well-documented manner [with transcripts from these interviews serving as evidence]. The first day [after my father's arrest] I didn't do anything. On that day, I was summoned to the Intelligence Office along with my brother, my older sister and my aunt. They asked us a series of simple questions and afterwards they let us all go. On the second day, my older sister, my aunt and I were taken. They told us that we all have connections with Zaynab Bayazidi. Afterwards they asked us to tell them where we collected signatures for the One Million Signatures campaign. [They said], "We have reports indicating that you have collected signatures from several shopkeepers at Azadi

intersection in Mahabad. Tell us the truth, how many times have you given interviews? Do you remember what you were doing in the city square?" They asked me these questions to try to get me to confess.

13. My father was in the detention center for 13 days. One of the ways they psychologically tortured my father was by telling him "we are going to rape your wife and daughter." My father told them, "Tell me what I have done, even if it is civic or non-political activity. Tell me and I'll accept it because I haven't done anything." Instead of 100 mg blood pressure pills they only gave him 50 mg pills. After 13 days in the detention center, as they were taking him to Mahabad Central Prison, he started to become ill and his lips bruised. After three days in prison, they feared that his heart would be damaged and they released him on bail, since, after all, they had no evidence against him. Later, a doctor told my father that if he had been in prison for one more week he certainly would have had a heart attack.

Detention

14. On the second day after we were summoned, my sister was freed, but my aunt and I [remained in detention and] were separated. They took me from the Intelligence Office near the Vafai intersection of Mahabad to the Intelligence Office detention center near the 63rd Infantry Division barracks in Mahabad. After 50 days, when I was transferred to prison, I learned that during that period they summoned my aunt to the Intelligence Office on 5-6 separate days for interrogation.
15. [My detention that day was such that] after a few minutes they told me, "come to this room, we have some business to take care of." When I went to that room, they said "come to the yard, we have some business to take care of." When I went to the yard of the Intelligence Office, they blindfolded me. They led me into a car and two officers sat next to me. I wasn't between them, though, I was sitting on the side. As we neared the barracks in the main street near the entrance [of the Intelligence Ministry's detention center], they removed my blindfold and handcuffs so that the people would not see me in that state. They grabbed my hands and told me "walk slowly towards the detention center." The detention center is in an alley, but it isn't far from the street. In order to prevent people from seeing me and passing along the information of my whereabouts, they blindfolded me again when we got just in front of the door and kept it on until I got into my cell. As we got to the door of my cell, they asked me whether I had any disabilities. I said that one month before I had been in an accident and as a result I had a limp (because my knee had been fractured). They wrote this down. For 17 days, I was in the Intelligence Office in Mahabad, and from the thirteenth to seventeenth days, my fractured knee was bleeding. They kicked me, which caused my knee to begin bleeding internally again. So they took me to the doctor of the Intelligence Office. He gave me some pain medication, but I did not take any [of that] pain medication while I was in the detention center, because I suspected that perhaps it contained a narcotic agent. To be honest, I feared their pills.
16. Of these 17 days in [the Intelligence Office's detention center in] Mahabad, their behavior towards me during the first 13 days was substantially different. In those first days, they spoke to me politely, and said, "We are young, like you, and we make mistakes; let's start going to your house, and along the way you can tell us what you've done, so that [this situation] can come to an end." But from the thirteenth day on, they criminally and savagely beat me. They beat me a great deal at night. I endured immense pain, especially when they would strike my knee. I lost consciousness three or four times when they hanged me from my hands. On two occasions, because of a rise in blood pressure, my nose started to bleed.

17. They [the interrogators at the Intelligence Office] threatened my sister and aunt with rape. They [the interrogators at the Intelligence Office] told me that if I refused to speak they would bring my sister and my aunt and rape them. I learned later [as mentioned above] that they had made the same threats against my father as well. Until the thirteenth day, I was in a large room and I was not in a very difficult situation. From the thirteenth day on, I was in a room that could not have been a meter wide. I am 183 cm [6'0"]. The room was roughly 20 cm [7.8"]—too small for me to be able to lie down. My feet were tightly pressed against the entrance. As opposed to other cells, which tend not to have bathroom facilities and [thus] require that you call them [prison guards] to let you go to the bathroom, in this room they placed both a lavatory, which was raised about 20 cm [7.8"] off the ground, and a very rusted showerhead precisely behind me. When I wanted to wash my hands for the first time, I realized that they had intentionally rigged the plumbing so that the pipe leading from the toilet was closed, and when I turned on the water, the wastewater would come out instead. Of course, the room had no fan either.
18. One of the tactics they used was when I was asleep and the hallway was quiet they all of a sudden broke down the door and said, "Bastard! We found out more about you!" [This is how] they would wage a battle against our nerves.
19. [While I was in Mahabad], they threatened that when I went to Orumiyeh I would be executed. They told me that if I spoke, they would free my father and they would not rape my sister. After 17 days in these conditions, they transferred me to the detention center of the Intelligence Ministry's [provincial] headquarters in Orumiyeh, which is on a street called Shahrchai. I know Orumiyeh very well. Orumiyeh is very close to Mahabad. The detention center of Orumiyeh is much bigger than the one in Mahabad. It has perhaps 75 cells. Maybe even more; I'm certain that it is many times bigger than the detention center in Mahabad. I was there for 34 days. Whether you're healthy or not, they take you to the doctor two or three times a week there. They took me [out of my cells] blindfolded, but given the winding hallways and [the fact that] the basement torture center was four levels below, it was obvious that the detention center was large. As you look at the building from outside, you can tell that it is very large. From the first day that I went to Orumiyeh they harassed me unrelentingly with new accusations and told me, "We know you've given interviews. This is your voice." Then they would play several interviews for me, some of which did indeed feature my voice. In the Intelligence Office, saying no is better than saying yes. When I would say no, they knew that I was lying but the benefit of that is that when you say no, everything stops and they know you're lying to them. But if you say yes, then they take it as [an indication that] you are going to cooperate with them and they will press you on more questions, asking for instance, "who interviewed you?" But when you say no, even if they don't believe you they won't interrogate you further on the matter.
20. In the Intelligence Office of Orumiyeh from the first day to the sixth day I was with someone from Piranshahr who had been arrested due to [connections with] the Kurdistan Democratic Party, according to what he told me. They called him Ali Jula. After that, they sent me to a very dirty cell. They had placed two 50-watt light bulbs in that room, and the effect was that my eyes watered for a full month [after leaving the cell]. I could tell that my eyes were getting weaker. The light bulbs they put in that room were very weak. The walls were leaking; the intention was that [the humidity] would weaken our lungs. In this ward, there were many people. There were many memorials scrawled on the walls. They had used things like buttons and date seeds to leave marks on the walls. It was evident that many people had been held there.
21. In Orumiyeh they told me that if I refused to talk they would send me to Tehran, and that in Tehran they would assuredly execute me without even interrogating me first. They took me to a

torture chamber four levels down. The room there is very long and it feels like a hallway. I didn't see it, though, because they had blindfolded me. But near me there were some individuals who were being tortured and I continually heard their shouts and cries. They used a taser on my [injured] knee and openly told me they would amputate my leg if my knee turned black [from gangrene], or hold me there until the gangrene spread throughout my whole body. "[Here in Orumiyeh] we will amputate your leg and it will be over, but there [in Tehran] they will hang you from your hands, and subject you to electrical shocks, disrespect, threats of rape against your family, and severe beatings."

22. I still have problems with two parts of my body. One is my knee. Whenever I pick up something heavy, I start feeling ill. When someone has endured beatings, he tenses his muscles and holds his body in a defensive posture. In addition to my knees, my spine has suffered some damage. When I sat for interrogations, they wouldn't torture me. [Then,] suddenly, someone would kick my spine from behind so hard that I lost consciousness for two or three hours. Since then, whenever I walk uphill I suffer from back pain.
23. After 20-25 days in the detention center of the Orumiyeh Intelligence Office, which is to say after a total of roughly 40 days of detention [in Mahabad and then in Orumiyeh], they started telling me that I had gathered signatures for the international petition campaign.²
24. [At this point I should add that] I forgot to mention that when they raided our house and seized my printer, they had also seized a list of 255 signatures from the One Million Signatures campaign. The list was on 5-6 sheets of A4 paper. [I was accused of] participation in the One Million Signatures Campaign, interviews with counterrevolutionary and anti-Islamic Republic television stations, and organizing the demonstration for Farzad Kamangar. I had saved a series of internet chats with one of my school friends who studied in Tehran University. They had recovered and translated those [from Kurdish], and obtained some information from them, but not to the degree that they could charge me with organizing the gathering for Farzad Kamangar. They also claimed that I had contacts with and had conducted interviews with some of the jailed civic and political activists who staged a general strike.

Trial

25. After 34 days [in the Orumiyeh Intelligence Office Detention Center] I was sent [back] to Mahabad. This was on March 19, 2009, which was the anniversary of the nationalization of the oil industry. The five following days, the courts were closed for the Norouz [Iranian New Year] holidays. Legally, the courts must be closed by 2:30 [PM]. At 5:45 [PM], they sent me to Mahabad. On the way, they told me that they would take me to Mahabad Central Prison, but instead they took me straight to the courtyard of the courthouse. When the judge came, I was very surprised, because a judge would not typically be there outside of working hours. There they formally informed me of the charges against me. Under the new laws passed during the term of Mr. Shahroudi [as head of the Judiciary], the accused must be formally informed of the charges against him by a judge within 24 hours and a temporary detention order must also be issued [at that time]. In my case, I was only informed of the charges against me and issued a temporary detention order after those 51 days of initial detention. My charges were: collecting signatures for the One Million Signatures campaign, conducting interviews with foreign [television and radio]

² Faegh Rourast is saying that this new charge was only made after he had already been in detention at the Orumiyeh Intelligence Office for 25 days. He was detained in the Orumiyeh Intelligence Office for 33 or 34 days in total.

networks, and collaboration and membership in the ‘self-avowed’ Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan. The most common charge that they [the authorities] make against NGOs in Iranian Kurdistan is that they have close connections with Kurdish political parties.

26. The evidence that they had [to substantiate these charges] was several recorded interviews. They had 12-13 tracks of interviews, several of which did contain my voice, but I did not confess to my voice being featured on those tracks. The second piece of evidence was the printout of that chat that they had translated and presented to the judge. They alleged that not only did I have a role in the strike by the imprisoned civic and political activists, but that I had played a role in its organization. I was also charged with [distributing] propaganda against the regime.
27. I was tried in Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Mahabad. My judge was Mr. Khodadadi, who had been in Mahabad for around 4-5 months. Before him, a cleric named Chabak had been the judge. Chabak had tried and sentenced Zaynab [Bayazidi].
28. From the day that I was arrested, my family sent a number of attorneys—Mr. Panjazar and Mr. Charesaz in Orumiyeh and Mr. Azimi in Mahabad and several others—to request that if my father could not be released, then at least they could release me. The Intelligence Office’s response was that they would not allow my family to officially employ an attorney in my case until the completion of my interrogation. After those 51 days, when I arrived at Mahabad Central Prison I finally contacted my family. They assumed that they could now obtain an attorney for me, but [now] the Intelligence Office declared that I could not be represented by an attorney until I was sentenced.
29. Two or three days before Sizdeh Bedar [the holiday commemorating the 13th day of the New Year, typically around April 2-3] they took me before a judge. The judge asked whether I had conducted interviews. I said no. He said that I was lying and that I had. Essentially, the court has nothing to do with the issuance of a judgment. From the moment that you are arrested and interrogated you have been sentenced and the primary actor is the Intelligence [Ministry]. It is just a façade when they take you before a judge. Because legally, when you tell a judge that you have not done something [with which you are charged], there must be another hearing. But judgments are based on whatever has been dictated to the judge. After speaking with the judge for 4-5 minutes, the judge called for a soldier to take me away. They took me to Mahabad [Central] Prison and two days later they issued my sentence. My trial had only one hearing, and that was more of a discussion.
30. I was sentenced to one year in prison and a two-year suspended prison sentence. I said that I rejected the sentence. They responded that if I had a criminal record I would have received a 4-5 year sentence instead. I said, “What evidence do you have against me? The worst of it is that you have seized some signatures for a campaign which you admit is not a political party seeking to overthrow the government, it [the One Million Signatures campaign] only seeks equality under the law for men and women.” During this period [of the initial trial], they did not let me employ an attorney. Once I was sentenced I said that I would get an attorney [as they had previously said would be allowed]. They [the authorities] said that if I employed an attorney and filed an appeal they would seek [an increase of my sentence to] five years, the maximum penalty for my crime with the help of Mr. Hazrati, the prosecutor of Mahabad. Two people with whom I developed friendships in prison who had also been arrested due to connections with the One Million Signatures Campaign and the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan said that if the Intelligence [Ministry] made this threat I could be sure that they intended to follow through with it. Another [friend] said that it was an empty threat. [Nonetheless] I did not file a complaint or obtain legal representation.

Prison

31. They took me to Mahabad Central Prison, where it was difficult to get furlough and the prison guards were bad [abusive]. We just knew of just a couple exceptions [regarding the impossibility of receiving furlough], which occurred because the prisoners were quite old and there was no evidence against them. Otherwise even if there is only one week left in your sentence they will not give you furlough. But Bukan Prison is not like that. Fifty to sixty percent of the political prisoners in Bukan are given leave to go on furlough; they are only denied furlough if they have [been convicted of] very severe crimes. [This distinction emerged from the fact that] the population of political prisoners in Mahabad Central Prison at the time was 37 people. In a 350-person prison, 37 political prisoners is a relatively high percentage. It appears that the government does not investigate this, because they usually don't want the population of political prisoners to be so high since they fear that they [the political prisoners] will spread their ideas to the other prisoners, so that when they are freed they will begin opposing the government as well.
32. Eight and a half months into my detention I learned that the Intelligence Office decided to send the prisoners from Sardasht and Bukan to their hometowns. In prison, I grew close to Mr. Amir Mesbah Ghazi, the director of the Mahabad branch of the Literary Association, who is a master's student in literature at Mahabad University who had been arrested and sentenced before me to two years in prison. During my eight and a half month span [of imprisonment in Mahabad Central Prison] we were admonished at least 10-12 times to not spend time together or communicate. I spent eight months and 29 days in Mahabad [Central Prison] and the following three months and two days I was in Naghadeh [Prison]. The population of Naghadeh Prison is smaller, and the number of political prisoners there is also smaller. Since it is in a city where Azeri and Kurdish populations are mixed, the security is lower and the conditions are a bit easier [to deal with], but access to telephones is a bit more restricted.

Freedom

33. After three months and two days [in Naghadeh], I had served my full term and I was freed. Around 15-20 days after my release I got in touch with my political prisoner friends from Naghadeh and Mahabad. I had given them my phone number. If someone [a prisoner] was sick and needed medical treatment but they [the prison authorities] did not take him to the hospital, or if another prisoner was not given furlough, or if someone committed suicide, or if any other violations of prisoners' rights took place, I sent the news of such violations to Mr. Rafii [of the aforementioned Association of Human Rights Activists in Iran] and I sent the news to the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan in Europe.
34. I don't know whether one of the prisoners' phone lines was tapped or not, but later the Intelligence Office asked my father about my whereabouts: "Where is Faegh? He is not in the shop or in [your] house! Tell him to come and retrieve the computer we had seized from him tomorrow." I became a bit suspicious and went to stay with my friends in Orumiyeh for two or three days. One of my friends paid a visit to my family. They told him that in a span of two or three days the Intelligence Office had called at least 15 times and said that to retrieve my computer I had to go there myself, not my brother. One of the Intelligence agents told my father that this [Faegh] "will never learn his lesson." I became suspicious of [the authorities]. They also become suspicious that I had fled the country. One day, Mr. Hedayati, who is the Deputy Director

of the Intelligence Office and the head of the Intelligence Office detention center, and who therefore ordered all of the violent actions [that took place there], and who has a history in Mahabad and Sardasht, told my father that if they were to arrest me, they would bring a disaster down upon me. “He can either come to us and write a letter of repentance or we will bring that individual from prison to divulge everything himself.” In Naghadeh prison, where surveillance is widespread, someone [with whom I was in contact] had probably confessed. I became suspicious and did not go home.

Fleeing Iran

35. Ten days into the Islamic month of Ramadan (July-August 2009), I went to Mahabad and hid at the home of a relative. At 6:15 that morning, they [agents from the Intelligence Office] kicked in the door of my family’s home, waking up my family. They assumed that I was there. Via my family, I received the news that the Intelligence [Office] was out to arrest me again. I stayed in Mahabad until the afternoon of the next day and then I crossed the border illegally (because I did not have a passport, and even if I did and tried to leave legally they would have arrested me) and come here. Three days later, when news websites spread the news of my departure, Mr. Hedayati called my mother and aunt and told them to tell my father and my older brother to go to Iraq and return me to Iran, otherwise my file, which had been compiled due to my connections with prisoners and my alleged participation in a university gathering in Orumiyeh, would be made to look five times worse. The charge regarding the university gathering in Orumiyeh was new to me. This went back to my first term in college, and I was a participant in a gathering regarding Kurdish language [rights] in the University of Nazlou [near Orumiyeh]. One of my fellow participants had been apprehended or confessed, and that was why I was charged with these two offenses.
36. My aunt asked what she could come and tell me at her [advanced] age, adding that it was certain I would not return after they had arrested and threatened me so many times. They told my father five or six times that they would visit the same punishment on him as the previous year [imprisonment]. My father told them to come and tap his phone and he would tell me to return, and that if I didn’t return, what more could he do? My father did indeed call me many times, and I told him that I did not have any intention of returning because I knew that as soon as I did I would be arrested.

Zaynab Bayazidi

37. Initially, Zaynab Bayazidi was our neighbor. I became the husband of her sister. From 2001 or 2002 she was involved with NGOs in Mahabad and Orumiyeh. She was a computer science student [at the time]. She graduated from the University of Applied Sciences of Orumiyeh. In 2004-05 she joined NGOs like the Literary Association. But it was really from 2005-06 that she became well-known as an activist in connection with the One Million Signatures campaign. Then in 2006-2007, due to our connections in the campaign, we grew close and coordinated our activities. Sometimes we even visited some cities together. I accompanied her and several other people on visits to the villages surrounding border towns, for instance to places where a small-scale cross-border smuggler had stepped on a mine and been killed due to the policies of the government regarding mine-laying and his family had been left without a guardian, or somewhere that a violation had been reported or if a woman had committed self-immolation. [Wherever]

anything occurred that was connected to human rights violations, we sent people [to report on it] if we could.

38. In 2003-04, in the course of these activities, Zaynab went to a village near Sardasht where a woman had committed self-immolation (at the time I did not know Zaynab well). On her return trip, the Intelligence Office in Sardasht arrested her on charges of illegally crossing Iran's border to Iraq and connections with opposition groups. She told them: you can accompany me to the house in the village of Alvatan where I had gone because the daughter of the family [there] had committed self-immolation and see. The brother of this girl has stepped on a mine and has lost both of his legs. Nonetheless, Zaynab was transferred to the Intelligence Office of Orumiyeh from Sardasht, where she was unnamed and unrecognized for 40-41 days. No matter what her family did, they could not [obtain any information about her]. After 40 days [in detention] without formally being charged, she was freed.
39. The connections between Zaynab and I increased after 2006-07. In this field we were like colleagues. Zaynab was a former member of the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan. She was active in the Association of Human Rights Activists of Iran. In addition she was in many other associations and she took part in many poetry readings.
40. On Sunday, July 9, 2008, due to these continuing activities, they [Intelligence Ministry officials] called her home and her shop and told her to come [to the Intelligence Office] because they had a few questions to ask, after which they would let her go of her own volition. At the time, she had a shop for feminine items and clothing in Mahabad because she had not been able to get a job anywhere after graduation owing to her previous arrest. On Monday [July 10, 2008], she went to the Intelligence Office. They interrogated her approximately 2-3 hours. They told her to leave and report to the courthouse on Wednesday at 9 AM, since it looked bad for a girl to be forced to report to the Intelligence Office multiple times. She reported to the courthouse at the specified time and was interrogated from 9:00 AM to 1:45 PM in the afternoon. They told her: you don't need to lie anymore. We know that you work for political parties. You use your membership in human rights organizations as a cover, but we know what your evil intentions are, and that you want to organize mass civic protests. Gender equality is forbidden in Islam, what's the point of working in the One Million Signatures campaign?
41. One of the other accusations against her was in regards to the fact that she had named her store *Zailan* (Zailan is both the name of one of the heads of a Kurdish political party and the name of a plant in Kurdish and it has been given a permit and registered as a civic organization by the Islamic Republic). One of the other accusations was that she had indirectly spread propaganda for the political parties. In response, she said: if you don't like it, then why have you allowed an organization to register under this name? Secondly, why do you assume that the name of my store is connected to the individual and not the flower?
42. Her interrogators in the courthouse were Mr. Hedayati and one of the main torturers of the Intelligence Office, a man by the name of Mr. Barzegar who tortures all of the political and civic activists taken into custody regardless of affiliation (he beat me several times as well). At 1:45 PM, they sent her to Mahabad [Central] Prison. After 37 days without any form of interrogation (since it was the second time that she had been arrested and they had a certain animus towards her), they sentenced her to four years of discretionary imprisonment and exile to Zanjan [in addition to] the automatic addition of her previous suspended sentence.

43. This all occurred from 2008-09. In 2005 when she was arrested by the Intelligence Office of Mahabad, she was sentenced to four years of probation in lieu of a sixth-month discretionary sentence and exile to Maragheh.
44. The charges against her [Zaynab] were spreading propaganda against the regime, conducting interviews with counter-revolutionary [radio and television] stations and active membership in the One Million Signatures campaign. After she left a document [for bail] she received the four-year probation sentence in the place of six months of discretionary imprisonment and exile to Maragheh. This means that from 2005, when she received the sentence, she had to avoid getting arrested until 2009 [or else face imprisonment]. Thus her probation had not ended by the time she was arrested in July 2008. After 37 days in limbo, she was sentenced to four years of discretionary imprisonment and exile to Zanjan Central Prison as well as the activation of her previous six-month prison sentence to be served in Maragheh due to the fact that her term of probation had not ended. [And she had been detained in Orumiyeh and had been put on probation another time and therefore this was her third arrest, after she had been taken to court once and had been detained in the Intelligence Office once]. Hence she had to serve four years of imprisonment in exile in Zanjan and after that she had to serve six months in Maragheh.
45. Afterwards Zaynab was completely surprised. We did not expect that she [would get such a sentence] since no details about her [case] had emerged. Zaynab's home was not searched, they had not seized her computer, and no text written by her had yet been found. They had not even tapped a telephone line [of hers]. Anyone we spoke to [about her case] would say that that even if all of the political and civic activists got guilty verdicts, Zaynab [at least] would be acquitted. And she herself was shocked. Not one year, not two years, but a four-year sentence! She went on a hunger strike for 17 days. By the eleventh or twelfth day, her physical state deteriorated significantly. She had a friend in the prison who was not a political prisoner, but with whom she had become close. They did not let her call anyone, but she called me (Zaynab had given her my phone number) and told me that [Zaynab] has pain in her eyes and her head. They told her that they would inject her with nutritional serum, but she refused it until the seventeenth day. The media reported the situation and people became well-informed such that out of the Intelligence Office's fear of gatherings in support of Zaynab, on the seventeenth day [of her hunger strike] the cleric Mr. Chabak, the judge who sentenced her, paid her a visit and said: dear Zaynab, there has been a misunderstanding. You won't receive this sentence, you can be sure. Appeal the case and you will be exonerated.
46. At that point, Zaynab was able to employ an attorney. Her attorney was Mr. Hojjati from Tehran, who was a member of the Association of Defenders of Human Rights. The attorney came from Tehran to Mahabad. He was fooled by the judge's deception as well. He said that the judge promised to acquit her if she broke her hunger strike. So she broke her hunger strike. As a rule, defendants have a right to appeal the judgment within 20 days of sentencing. Seventeen days passed [when] Zaynab wrote her protest and the attorney said that he would write the bill [the official appeal] the next day. Legally 20 days must pass [wherein the trial court judgment may be appealed]. At the beginning of the eighteenth day, Zaynab broke her hunger strike, which was reported on the news channels. One day later, when the attorney wanted to file the appeals petition, he went to the Mahabad courthouse. They [the judiciary representatives at the courthouse] told him that the file had been referred to Orumiyeh. The Branch 10 appeals court under Mr. Jalilzadeh is in Orumiyeh. He reacted with surprise and said that 20 days must pass in order for a case to be referred here [to the Branch 10 appeals court]. They said that it had been [referred]. We immediately got ourselves to Orumiyeh, but administrative [work] hours had ended. We returned to Mahabad and immediately went back to Orumiyeh the next morning. I was with Mr. Hojjati [Zaynab's attorney]. For appeal, the law requires that a five-person panel be

convened, with two judges in favor and two judges against. They vote and the fifth judge votes. This takes a minimum of one or two weeks.

47. Hence on the eighteenth day they referred the case to Orumiyeh. On the nineteenth day in the early morning they approved it so that the attorney would not be able to write the appeals petition for her. Mr. Hojjati immediately conducted interviews with the Defenders of Human Rights. He wrote that from the moment of the issuance of the judgment from the trial court to referral and appeal, [everything was conducted in] a hasty and illegal [manner]. He made an Article 18 inquiry³, but he received no response. Another lawyer we employed after the confirmation of the appellate decision was Mr. Charesaz from Orumiyeh. When [Mr. Charesaz] came to Mahabad the judge overseeing Mahabad Central Prison, Mr. Sheikhlou—who is now the prosecutor of Piranshahr—told him before my very eyes that “these people [the family of the witness] are all subversives. They are not good people.” In the following few days, he pulled back from the case. Thus Article 18 did not do anything for Zaynab’s case until it was sent to the Supreme Court. Zaynab was arrested on July 9, 2008. On November 15, 2008 they transferred her to Zanjan Central Prison. She spent four months and six days in prison since her arrest [at that point]. They didn’t immediately exile her.
48. After four months and six days, they transferred her to Zanjan Central Prison. At that point, roughly fourteen or fifteen months of her sentence had already been served. The conditions at Zanjan Central Prison are quite different from those in Mahabad [Central] Prison. For example, there were no Kurds there with whom she could speak Kurdish. Being able to speak in one’s mother tongue is important from a psychological perspective. The second example is that Zanjan is a six hour drive away from Mahabad. Even if her family drives to see her with their own car, they have to leave at 4-5 AM in order to arrive [in Zanjan] during working hours. If they go with a bus, the trip takes longer than a day. Six hours there, six hours on the return trip. They must travel 12 hours for 20 minutes of visitation. That’s two [problems]. The third problem is that Zanjan [Central] Prison has a systematic policy of separating the prisoners from the outside world. In furtherance of this policy, they [the prison authorities] give them telephone access three times a week. It’s not like Mahabad, where you can use the telephone whenever you want. Each time they are given telephone access, they have five minutes maximum on the phone. Her mother has protested [this] several times to the Zanjan prison. After 4 minutes and 50 seconds, they tell her to finish her conversation. Until recently, about a year ago, they only gave Zaynab telephone access twice a week.
49. These problems and more led to a visit by the head of Zanjan [Central] Prison to the women’s ward of the prison about 15 to 16 months into Zaynab’s detention. A conflict took place in the prison. An Azeri woman in the prison had complained about some of the behavior in the prison. The warden, in order to be seen as positive and approving [of the state of the prison] in front of the prisoners, punished her by depriving her of telephone access for two days or prohibiting visitation for a week. With his own hands he acted very inappropriately with her [the complaining prisoner] in front of Zaynab and other prisoners. More specifically, he pulled her hair and slapped her. Later and more dangerously, when this woman was too tired to defend herself, they electrocuted her with a military-grade taser. Zaynab protested this, and the prison warden was so nervous that he exploded with rage against her.

³ Article 18 of the Law of Organization of Public and Revolutionary Courts governs the appeals procedure. Text and commentary (in Persian) at: <http://www.akharinnews.com/news-border/item/4824-javanfekr.html>

50. After this unprovoked outburst, the prison warden's treatment of Zaynab became worse: he lessened her telephone access from three times a week for five minutes each time to twice a week for five minutes each time. In response, Zaynab staged another hunger strike for nine days. Back then the Zanjan prison had been named the cleanest and best prison in Iran for two years running. They told the family face to face to refrain from doing anything that would create news regarding the prison: you are Kurds and have been brought from the other side of the world and we do not want all of our efforts in Zanjan prison to be besmirched [because of you]. Because of this, the warden promised [Zaynab] that he would correct his behavior. He said: your telephone privileges are determined by the Intelligence Office, so I can't [change that], but I will correct my own behavior. End your hunger strike. So she broke her hunger strike. During this time in prison she has gone on hunger strike twice. Currently, Zaynab has been in Zanjan [Central] Prison for three years and two months. She had also been detained in Mahabad [Central] Prison for four months. That makes three and a half years. That means that six months remain in her sentence in Zanjan.⁴ Then she must serve her six-month suspended sentence in Maragheh as well. Maragheh is roughly 90 minutes' travel from Mahabad—roughly half as far as Zanjan.
51. Zaynab sustained some damage to her head and her eye as a result of her first hunger strike but after she broke the hunger strike her physical and psychological state has returned to normal, as far as I know. But oftentimes even taking [her] a simple popular book on the marketplace that is stamped with the approval of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance [is a cumbersome task]. They [the prison authorities] intentionally confiscate the book and say they need to investigate it [first]. Even after investigating the book in front of them [the family bringing the book], [the presence of] the stamp of approval of the Islamic Guidance Ministry and permission is in order after some two months, they still don't give it to her. When Zaynab protests, they tell her that they cannot give it to her and that when her family comes she should have them take it back. At the same time, they tell us to bring books, and that there is no problem [with passing them to a prisoner]. My point is that they have waged a psychological war with her and her family during the course of her imprisonment. It still continues.
52. During her prison term, two more attorneys in addition to the original two have been employed for her case. One is Mr. Yadollah Hesari in Orumiyeh. The other has been enlisted more recently. His name is Mr. Mazin and he is from Tehran. When he started working on the case, and after Zaynab had spent [the aforementioned] four months and six days in prison in Mahabad and two or three months in prison in Zanjan, unfortunately the Supreme Court of Iran upheld her sentence. This attorney [Mr. Mazin] said that we can write a request for a pardon.
53. At the same time, the Intelligence Office of Zanjan has told her personally that she must write a request for a pardon. She has responded that: not even one line of anti-regime text has been connected to me. I confess to being a member in the One Million Signatures Campaign, but I was not a member of the Human Rights Organization at the time of my arrest. And membership in the One Million Signatures Campaign is not a crime. Since I have committed no crime, I will seek no pardon. But in reality, the Intelligence Office has told her family that they will approve neither furlough nor pardon in Zaynab's case. Since the Supreme Court ruling, Zaynab's lawyers have gradually abandoned her case.

⁴ This interview was conducted on January 5, 2012. Based on the timeline provided by the witness above, Ms. Bayazidi should have completed her full four-year sentence in Zanjan in June 2012, but based on the latest reports at the time of publication, Zaynab Bayazidi was transferred to Maragheh Central Prison, presumably to serve her four-month suspended sentence, on June 22, 2012. See http://www.fppk.net/persian/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=547:2012-06-22-21-45-19&catid=57:frontpage&Itemid=260 [in Persian].