



**Witness Statement of Farhad Sarhangi**

**Name:** Farhad Sarhangi  
**Place of Birth:** Mahabad, Iran  
**Date of Birth:** 1958  
**Occupation:** Attorney

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**Interviewing Organization:** Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)  
**Date of Interview:** February 13, 2011  
**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an in-person interview with Farhad Sarhangi. The statement was approved by Farhad Sarhangi on February 13, 2011. There are 15 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

1. My name is Farhad Sarhangi. I am 52 years old and from the city of Mahabad. Prior to leaving Iran I was a teacher. I left Iran in 1987 due to my political activities against the regime as I could no longer remain there. My activities were armed and against the regime. I was a *peshmerga*.<sup>1</sup>
2. At the time of the 1979 referendum, there were barely any ballot boxes in Kurdistan so that people could cast ballots in them. Voting polls throughout Kurdistan were few and far between. There wasn't any voting poll in Mahabad. Voting stations were in larger cities such as Sanandaj and Kermanshah. I think that the number of people, who voted in Kurdistan, whether it was yes or no, was at best 1%. I didn't participate in the referendum and if I had I would have voted no.
3. In Mahabad, two wars took place. What happened was more than a simple conflict; it was all out war. During the first war, I was in the city but took advantage of an opportunity and got out. I returned in 2-3 days and took my children, mother, sister and brother out of the city. I took them to Bukan, which was secure since the war had not reached it.
4. I was in Mahabad during the first war of the IRI on Kurdistan, also known as the bloody Nowruz of Sanandaj. It was an unequal war. The regime hit the residential parts of the city and the citizens with rockets and bombs and other war missiles. Many innocent people died. The government gave no forewarning to have civilians evacuate the cities. We went to Bukan and waited for the situation to calm down in Mahabad and for the war to cease. The *peshmergas* (I wasn't one at the time) left the city and the city completely fell in the hands of the government forces. Conflict didn't end, however, and the *peshmerga* and the partisan groups returned. Conflicts inside the city continued until Khomeini issued the order of temporary cease fire. At that time, the assumption was that Khomeini had done so to have time to strengthen and rejuvenate his forces. The government was newly formed and not prepared to fight a war. In Kurdistan, they sustained a massive blow militarily, casualty-wise and financially. This was largely due to their unfamiliarity with the terrain. It was difficult for them to continue the war and they needed to renew their forces. Cease fire lasted for a few months and finally Khomeini issued a verdict of Jihad, meaning that they should do whatever they could to combat the infidels. I can say that this jihad order is still in force.

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<sup>1</sup> *Peshmerga*, sometimes spelled *peshmerge*, is a term used by Kurds since the start of the Kurdish independence movement in the 1920s that literally means "those who face death". The term is used quite broadly—the definition ranges in definition from Kurdish fighters to simply any civilian that is a supporter and defender of Kurdish civil and political rights.

5. In my city, Mahabad, there were only a few families who did not suffer casualties during the war, either by way of martyrs (death during combat) or executions. There was minimal to no contact between prisoners and their families. Defense attorney meant nothing in those days. The conditions might have improved now. During those times, whoever was arrested was given a sentence after a short trial lasting only a few minutes. There was no such thing as defense attorney.
6. I became a *peshmerga* in 1983-84. As a *peshmerga* I worked with guns. I was active in an armed organization (Komala) against the IRI. I didn't directly participate in armed activities and mostly did cultural work and worked as a teacher even when I was a *peshmerga*.
7. It is almost natural to become a *peshmerga* in Kurdistan. When one sees that all of one's rights, cultural, social, economic and other, are being violated, naturally one desires to defend them and when he gets nowhere through normal channels, he turns to armed combat. At the time when I was doing cultural work I was working along with Komala. We knew one another well, especially in Mahabad where I was well known. When I could no longer remain in the city while continuing my activities, I informed the organization that I wanted to join them and they said that they have long been waiting for that moment.
8. First time I was arrested I think was in 1980. The government offices in Mahabad had just formed. On total I was imprisoned for a year. Less than six months of this period was spent in solitary cells. I was arrested by the intelligence office. When I was released instead of being happy I was always upset for having wasted a year of my time in those frightening prisons under violent torture. To this day I don't know why I was arrested. Before spending six months in a solitary cell, I was arrested so many times that I don't even have a correct count of it anymore.
9. I had a notebook where I took note of a lot of matters regarding the prison times and arrests but I lost it when I migrated to Sweden. For example, each time they kept me for a few weeks and then released me. Then they would arrest me again in a few weeks and keep me for a few more weeks. They never told me the reason for my arrests or showed me an arrest warrant. After a few months in a solitary cell they took me to a makeshift court. At first I thought they were taking me to execute me because it was at 12 midnight when they came to take me out of my solitary cell to visit a Haj Agha. He asked me very short and unspecific questions. I was there for about ten minutes and around eight minutes of it went by in complete silence. Around 1.5 to 2 minutes were the Q and A between the Haj Agha and I. Then he said, "go!" I was released two to three days later. He asked irrelevant questions. For example, he asked me about what people do in the Canary Islands or would comment, "I don't know why people turn their backs to the IRI."

10. Every time I was released, I would be re-arrested a few days later by the Intelligence officers. I was tortured too. One of the torture sessions was really bad and involved electricity, or an electric shock machine. There was a hat that looked like a helmet that they placed on my head and then they'd attach wires to my hands. They said that it was a polygraph device. When they turned on the electricity all the cells in my body ached. Then they would say, "you must be lying, because otherwise this wouldn't happen." The interrogator himself professed to me, saying, "yes, we torture!" He continued, "you call them torture and we call them Shari'a sanctioned Ta'zir because Shari'a allows us to do such an act." There were other methods of torture too like flogging and not allowing us to use the bathroom. In 24 hours, they allowed us access to the bathroom twice a day for two minutes each time and only with the doors open. There was other psychological torture, for example they would barge into the cell at 3 am and wake up everyone in the ward. Another method of torture was sleep deprivation, which was done to many people, but not to me.
11. I was taken for interrogation too. The conversation was very basic and unimportant. After all these years I still don't know why they arrested me and what my crimes were. After the first time I was arrested, upon my release they told me to go to the Intelligence Office of Mahabad twice a week and sign something. One of those times they kept me. Sometimes I think it was easier to be imprisoned than to go and give signature twice a week.

### **Execution in my family**

12. My younger sister Masoumeh was arrested in 1982 and executed in 1983. The reason for her arrest was her political and underground activities, or so it seemed. She was 15 and very young. They sentenced her to six years' imprisonment because she was so young. At least that is what they said. But she only served 11 months of that and was suddenly and unexpectedly executed. One day my younger brother Masoud came to see me and said that I should go with him because they had killed Masoumeh. Her friend and cellmates say that she was a very strong person. She endured a lot of torture and had even lost a small toe as a result of the torture. But in the end they raped her and then executed her. We were informed of the torture and rape by one of her friends, who was also in her ward in that prison. She knew Masoumeh from before. Masoumeh was held in Mahabad prison at first but was later transferred to Orumiye prison and never returned.
13. Although Masoumeh was tortured in both prisons we are unclear as to where and when the rape occurred. In the IRI doctrine a virgin girl should not be executed and for this reason they have a Shari'a binding permit for raping girls awaiting execution. In my opinion, even if my sister had political activities, and indeed her activities could very well

have had political tendencies where she sympathized with political groups, how dangerous can a 15-year-old be for a regime? We never saw the body after the execution. My mother and another sister and a few relatives who were all female went to Bagh-e Rezvan cemetery in Orumiyeh and they showed them a grave site and said it is her grave, or maybe showed a corpse that was hers, I don't know. Even this simple information was not easy to acquire. My family and relatives insisted on wanting to know her burial site so eventually, away from the watchful eyes of the Basijis, they were shown a grave and were told that 4-5 girls who were executed were buried there. That grave was very likely hers. She was executed along with three other ladies. In total four ladies were executed together on that day.

14. Group executions were common in Kurdistan at that time. Once they executed 59 people together. Another time they executed 37 people in Mahabad. When my sister and the other ladies were executed, nine men were also executed. They were all Kurds. During those days, each family had suffered at least one death. One of the girls executed along with my sister was Narmin Pak Nia. I am positive that the information about this is available online. They were initially at Mahabad prison and later transferred to Orumiyeh.
15. All I know is that Masoumeh got 6 years' imprisonment. The sentence changed later. I don't know the reason why. We didn't know which authority to file a complaint with. There was so much pressure and tension that we thought if we were to complain we would be arrested too and killed. At that time I had to go to the Intelligence Office to provide my signature twice a week. One time I was there I insisted and pleaded a lot and one of the officers verbally told me that her sentence was six years. The sentence was never officially issued. For a portion of her imprisonment, I was also in prison. I don't know how the family came to know of her execution. After her execution I was arrested again. This game of cat and mouse continued until it was no longer bearable for me. In 1987, I walked on foot to Turkey, without a passport or any other amenities. I was en route for a long time, passed through the mountains and eventually came to Istanbul. I passed the asylum process and finally came to Sweden.