



**Witness Statement of Fatemeh Goftari**

**Name:** Fatemeh Goftari

**Place of Birth:** Sanandaj, Iran

**Date of Birth:** 1964

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**Interviewing Organization:** Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

**Date of Interview:** December 20, 2011

**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Fatemeh Goftari. It was approved by Fatemeh Goftari on March 4, 2012. There are 37 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. My name is Fatemeh Goftari. I was born in 1964 in one of the villages outside of Sanandaj. I am an illiterate housewife.
2. My activity in political and women's rights advocacy dates back to the year 1990. I worked with some of the women's movement activists in the Azarmehr Women's Association in the early 2000s.<sup>1</sup> I was arrested in early 2003 because of my activism. The authorities accused me of acting against national security and detained me for 15 days in the detention center of the Intelligence Ministry office in Sanandaj. A few months later, I was sentenced to six months' suspended imprisonment on the same charge.
3. During these years, my family was constantly pressured by the security forces. Our house was raided many times and my husband was harassed.

### Yaser Goli's Arrest

4. In 2006, my son Yaser Goli, who was the secretary of the Democratic Union of Kurdish Students, was arrested by the security forces. Yaser was held incommunicado after his arrest. We were worried about him being tortured [and since we had no way to directly speak to him] I started to give interviews with various media outlets about his situation.
5. My son was later released from prison, but we continued to be pressured by the security forces under various pretexts. Eventually in early autumn 2008, my son was arrested along with other activists in a mass arrest in Kurdistan and spent three months in solitary confinement in the Intelligence Office. During those days, my other children and I were insulted and threatened many times for spreading the news about my son Yaser and other prisoners of conscience. My husband was arrested twice without any charges by the security forces, so as to further intimidate us and coerce Yaser to confess. My husband was sentenced to six months' imprisonment to prevent him from further speaking about Yaser's situation.
6. Three months after Yaser was arrested, we received a telephone call from the prison authorities that Yaser had been transferred to [Sanandaj] Central Prison. Then we realized that the security forces had a new plan for us. Three days after the authorities transferred Yaser to the prison, security agents called us and instructed us to go to their office to pick up his personal belongings. I told the agent who called me that my husband would come and pick them up. He insisted that I go and assured me that nothing would go wrong. He swore by Imam Hossein and Fatemeh Zahra [revered figures in Shi'a Islam] that it was no big deal.
7. I talked to my son Ammar and my husband and eventually we came to the conclusion that the authorities probably just wanted to question us. So I headed out to the Information Bureau [an agency under the Intelligence Ministry] with my son Ammar. As we approached the Information

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sanandaj.gov.ir/Default.aspx?TabId=135>

Bureau a Peugeot automobile turned in our direction and three people got out of the car. I was scared for Ammar. He was a student in Orumiyeh and I figured that now it was his turn to be arrested. But they had come to arrest me. They took away my son who was protecting me and pulled me into the car. Ammar was very upset about this.

8. In the car, the officers held on to my neck. This was especially painful because I am old; I am not like a 25-year old boy. I still tremble when I think about that moment and all of the pressure that I suffered. Why couldn't the government send a warrant to my home to summon me? Instead, I was taken to the Intelligence Office this way [through deception]. I was held there for 10 days.

### **Interrogation and Detention in the Intelligence Office of Sanandaj**

9. I did not see a single woman in the Intelligence Office. There were two interrogators, but I do not know their names. I could only see their legs from under my blindfold. My interrogations were very violent.
10. When I entered the Intelligence Office, they sat me down on a stool and forced me to drink a glass of water. Then they forced me to turn around in circles, which gave me a very bad stomach ache. I asked them why they were treating me this way. They wanted to make sure I got rid of anything in my mouth or body. This was my introduction to their hospitality.
11. The prison had three types of solitary cells. My cell was 2 meters by 1.5 meters and had no facilities. It did not even have a toilet. The first day that I was there, the officers took photos of me but I was not interrogated. On the second day, I was transferred to a second cell which had a bathroom inside. The interrogation began at 4 a.m. on the second day. They pointed out some prisoners and asked me if I recognized them.
12. Prison is not comfortable. Even if your children are by your side, you cannot be happy. The interrogators were very violent. They brought Habibollah Latifi<sup>2</sup> and asked me if, and how, I knew him. They proceeded to hit Habib. They hit him against the wall, causing his head to bleed. I will never forget that moment. It's like he is my own son. He was a student and attended university. The interrogators used very bad words and were very arrogant. I am a mother and they treated me this way. Imagine what they do to those poor kids.
13. I did not have an attorney. Individuals in the custody of the Intelligence Ministry are [often] not allowed to have an attorney and are only provided an attorney upon arriving in prison. I was treated unjustly in prison. The women's prison did not have enough light and there was only a small opening that let air in. It was also damp and cold and I contracted rheumatism. I also have varicose veins and when I walk, my legs bruise and I have to sit down.
14. I was not alone in the prison cell. There were fifty other women there, and sometimes there were as many as sixty. All sixty of us were in one room with no space. In fact, we had to lean against each other when we wanted to sleep. The women in that prison were treated very badly. None of my

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<sup>2</sup> Habibollah Latifi, a law student and Kurdish activist, was convicted of *Muharibih* (literally translating to "waging war against God") and imprisoned in Sanandaj Central Prison.

cellmates were political prisoners. The only political prisoners in this prison were Ronak Saffarzadeh, Hana Abdi, a girl named Amasheh Abadollah from Syria, and myself.

### **Problems with the Legal System, Trial, and Transfer to Sanandaj Central Prison**

15. Prior to my arrest, officers from the Intelligence Ministry threatened my husband a number of times on account of his previous arrests. They also threatened my son Yasser. After they arrested my husband, I got into a physical fight with Amjadi<sup>3</sup>, the head of the judiciary of Sanandaj [sic], and I tore his collar. [I did this] because I had spoken with him on a few occasions, during which he had promised to help my family.
16. When my husband was detained, I went to Amjadi's room and explained that my husband had been arrested and I reminded him that he had promised to help us but that he had not yet done anything. He asked me to sit down and then, in Kurdish, told me to be with him for a night. At that point, I understood what he meant. I grabbed his collar and pulled, tearing his button. I should have slapped him in the face a few times to teach him a lesson, but I did not have the chance. A guard subsequently appeared and hit me in the back of the head with the butt of his rifle. My hands went numb and I fell down. When I tried to stand up, he lifted me up and cuffed my hands behind me [with such a force that] it felt like my chest was being torn apart. I said: "Why are you doing this? You insulted me! You deserve to be insulted not me." He threatened me, claiming that he would do things to me that would make everyone around me cry. I feared his threats. The guard told Amjadi to let him imprison me. Amjadi said: "Let her go, I know what I am going to do to her!"
17. When I was released, I did not tell anyone, except an attorney, about the disrespectful treatment that I received at the hands of Amjadi. The attorney told me that if I disclosed this information now, it would cost me greatly. He said they [the authorities] would kill my husband and son and would inflict further harm on me.
18. My crime was as follows: I visited families of the martyrs killed on the borders—some of them were from Komala<sup>4</sup>, PDKI<sup>5</sup>, PJAK<sup>6</sup> and some of the soldiers and agents of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) who were killed. As an active member of the "Mothers of Peace" I visited these families to offer condolences. [The interrogators in prison] asked me why I came and why I had joined the Azarmehr Association. They told me that what I was doing was blasphemous.
19. During my [previous] imprisonment in 2003 I had written a letter about my suffering in the prison. Since I am illiterate, I had someone write it for me. They took this letter and considered its authorship a crime as well.
20. I was transferred to Sanandaj Central Prison and sentenced to 6 months of imprisonment. This was a suspended sentence that I had received in 2003 which had been modified to 5 years' probation. My attorney, Dr. Ne'matollah Ahmadi, was able to reduce the sentence to 3 months and a day. I was subsequently released after 40 days and after paying 50 million Toumans' bail [note: nearly 50,000 USD at the time]. Dr. Ne'matollah Ahmadi also represented my son Yaser.

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<sup>3</sup> Mohammad Reza Amjadi, prosecutor of the Public and Revolutionary Court of Sanandaj

<sup>4</sup> Komala is a Kurdish political party in Iran.

<sup>5</sup> The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan ("PDKI") is a Kurdish political party in Iran.

<sup>6</sup> PJAK is an armed Kurdish political group that carries out attacks on the IRI.

**Subsequent Arrest and Detention**

21. Next, the judiciary reinstated a case against me related to incidents in 2008. I was sentenced to 6 months plus an additional 18 months, making it a two-year term in total. Dr. Ahmadi told me that I would be pardoned.
22. Normally, officials from the Intelligence Ministry would have had to obtain an arrest warrant and show it before entering the house in order to arrest me. Instead, they summoned me to court and claimed they merely needed me to sign something. When I entered the courthouse in Sanandaj and showed my ID, some officers immediately cuffed my hands and took me away. The procurator and judge in my case was named Tayyari. I do not know the identity of my interrogator at the Intelligence Office.
23. I was [detained] in the same prison as Ronak Safarzadeh and Hana Abdi [the Sanandaj Intelligence Office]. Both of them were subjected to grave mistreatment. Ronak, a cheerful girl from a traditional family, was very strong; she did not visibly show that she was bothered. She was in solitary confinement for two months. We were not allowed to sit down and talk. The only time we could talk was during meal times because we sat down to eat at the same place. During this time, she didn't describe her experiences that much.
24. On other occasions we could not talk to each other because there were two cameras on both sides of the room. If we started talking, guards would suddenly approach us and remind us that we were not allowed to talk. They [the prison guards] also hit Ronak many times and threatened her by saying they would arrest her parents and younger sister and mistreat them, too. They put her under a lot of pressure.
25. Ronak was a peaceful person. She had been a vegetarian before her imprisonment and when an animal was killed it saddened Ronak. She did not eat meat because she did not want animals to be killed.

**Bijar Prison**

26. First Yaser was arrested. After a month my husband was detained. Then after, I think, three and a half months, I was arrested. In the course of my detention, on the one-year anniversary of Yaser's arrest on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> [approximately eight and a half months after my arrest this time], I was transferred to prison. I went on a dry hunger strike for seven days.
27. They told me that they were going to release me. When I entered the guards' room, they shackled my feet, cuffed my hands and put me in the car and transferred me to Bijar Prison [in the city of Bijar in Kurdistan province] without even telling me where we were headed. The same night, they attacked my family's home in an attempt to capture Ammar. Our home was in a four story building and Ammar managed to use the roof to escape. I was shocked by the news.
28. My husband discovered that officials banished me to Bijar.<sup>7</sup> At the time, he was going to the courthouse, the Intelligence Office, and prison every day. We would not be alive now if it was not

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<sup>7</sup> Bijar is located at an elevation of 1920 meters above sea level, making it the most elevated city in Iran. See <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bijar-a-town-and-a-sahrestan-county-in-the-kurdistan-province-of-iran>.

for him. Bijar Prison was full of lice, and we had only been given a rug and two blankets, so it was impossible to sleep there. I was going crazy.

29. I called my husband and he said he would come to visit me the next day and would also bring the children. When he arrived, I realized that he had not brought my second son, Ammar, and only Amer was with him. When I asked where Ammar was, my husband said Ammar was safe. He swore to God that the Intelligence Ministry had not arrested him.
30. Ammar escaped on the very night that they tried to arrest him, and I did not see him for two and a half to three years. The authorities confiscated Ammar's passports and documents so he travelled from city to city in Iran; to Shiraz, Isfahan, Tehran, and elsewhere. He was there for a while and finally travelled to Iraq.
31. Yaser was imprisoned in Bafq [in central Iran, over 1000 km, or 620 miles away from Sanandaj] and I was imprisoned in Bijar while the location of my other son, Ammar, was unknown. My other son Amer had heart problems and my husband was home alone with him. What mother can tolerate so much pressure? We were a family of five and each of us was imprisoned somewhere.
32. When Ehsan Fattahian<sup>8</sup> was executed, Amer, along with his friends, initiated a strike to protest this atrocity in Sanandaj. Amer filmed the event and was subsequently arrested. While I was in prison, I was informed that the counterintelligence unit of the police had arrested Amer. The counterintelligence unit is notoriously violent. They punished the poor boy for what we had done. They hit him in a way that caused him to be unable to even walk for months. I think Amer withheld some details of his detention from me because I am his mother and he did not want to upset me.
33. Amer was released 20 days later, after his father posted bail. When I saw him, I noticed he lost a lot of weight. He told me: "Mother, I do not know how you could tolerate such a long time in prison." Amer was subsequently summoned for a court hearing and sentenced to 6 months of imprisonment on a charge of acting against national security.

#### **Mistreatment by Intelligence Agents**

34. One day, while I was on the way to my mother's home because she had summoned me, I passed through some alleys and two intelligence agents approached me. They told me that I had to go with them. I explained that my mother's home was close and they would be able to ask me anything they wanted there. One of them took his gun out and put it behind my head and told me that I had to quietly go with them wherever they asked me to go. I was very frightened. I put my cell phone in my purse and we walked through alleys.
35. We passed by a demolished home where there was some soft dirt on the ground. I picked up two handfuls of dirt, threw it in the eyes of both of the agents, and managed to escape. One of the agents hit me on the head from behind, and though I was a bit dizzy I continued running away. It was 11

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<sup>8</sup> Ehsan Fattahian was executed in Sanandaj prison on November 11, 2009 at the age of 28, for his political activities on behalf of the Kurdish minority in Iran.

AM and I ran in the middle of the street and shouted, then I escaped into a store. In that neighborhood my father was well-known, so when people gathered, the agents did not follow.

### **Leaving Iran**

36. I had done a great deal to secure Yaser's freedom, and eventually posted his bail, [I suspected that] if the authorities arrested me this time, they would make me take Yaser to them. So, I fled Iran. My husband, Amer, and I stayed in my brother's home for a week and then left the country. Amer and I left Iran illegally but my husband left the country legally. Amer could not attend his own trial, because he was already here. His attorney, however, managed to get his sentence lowered from six months of imprisonment to a fine of one million Toumans (about \$1,000 at the time). We paid the money and took back the deed of the man who bailed him out. The five of us—Amer, Ammar, Yaser, my husband, and I— are now together.
37. When I was in prison, I was always upset and wondered if we could once again live together under one roof. I am lucky now and feel the joy of this luck. This is all because of my family. Each of us was imprisoned in a different place, but thank God we are under one roof now. We do not have much material wealth but we are together.