



### Witness Statement of Foad Sojoodi Farimani

**Name:** Foad Sojoodi Farimani  
**Place of Birth:** Fariman, Iran  
**Date of Birth:** 1983  
**Occupation:** Researcher

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

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**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Foad Sojoodi Farimani. It was approved by Foad Sojoodi Farimani on July 29, 2013. There are 52 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 Foad Sojoodi Farimani. I was born in the year 1983 in Fariman, a city near Mashhad. In Iran, I was a PhD student in medical engineering at Amir Kabir University. I left Iran in November 2011. I could no longer live there since I was given an 8 year prison sentence.
2. In 2001, I got into Sharif University to get my bachelors in mechanics. I finished my degree in 2007. I am considered a "martyr's<sup>1</sup> child." This is the language that the Islamic Republic uses. Therefore, while I was attending Sharif University I was not encouraged to take part in political activities. I don't understand why they treated me like that. I could not join the Islamic Association of the university. But I tried to join other groups and book clubs. While attending Sharif University, I was not really involved in political activities.
3. In 2007, after I finished my bachelor's degree, I was accepted into Amir Kabir University's masters program for biomechanics, and I finished in 2010. In Iran I was able to register two of my inventions, both of which were related to robotic surgery. After that, I wanted to begin my PhD studies but I was arrested that same year in 2010.
4. I had a weblog during that time, but writing a blog was not my primary job. I was mostly active in Google Reader and also was writing in social media. I would create about 20 to 30 percent of the material myself and for the rest I would repost material written by my friends and people I knew. The blog was mostly focused on two issues. One was fighting against religious superstition. The second goal was introducing new tools to Internet users so they could better utilize the Web. This included introducing proxy sites, social tools or other similar things.
5. During these years, in addition to my online activities, I was mainly active in the university. We had a number of debate sessions with professors who taught Islamic studies. My aim was to do my part in fighting superstitious religious beliefs. I was also involved in political and human rights issues. I never did anything secretive or illegal. While in university I always asked for official permission before doing anything. I never did anything underground or under an assumed name.
6. In March 2010 I was in Mashhad. My stepfather was in the hospital and I was visiting him. They called and told me I should go to the Ministry of Intelligence's investigation office which was behind Bazaar Reza in Tehran. This was the only time I was summoned and it was done over the phone and not by written request, even though my address was known. After my stepfather died that same month I stopped my political activities almost completely to look after my family.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Islamic norms, people who are killed in the name of Islam or on behalf of an Islamic government are considered to be martyrs.

**Arrest**

7. I was a research assistant at Amir Kabir University and was involved in a lot of research. On the evening of September 4, 2010, I was going to the workshop to pick up a project. I was getting close to the university's entrance from Valiasr Ave., when a person approached me and asked, "Mr. Sojoodi?" I looked at the man and he looked like a low-ranking Basij member. I thought to myself that if he arrests me right now, who knows what they would do to me, where would they take me? I was about 20 meters from the university entrance. I just ran towards the door. I wanted to get myself into the university so at least they would arrest me legally. As I was running toward the door one of them tripped me and the other one threw himself on me and hit me on my head.
8. They were all plainclothes agents. They were almost certainly Revolutionary Guard members because later they took me to ward 2-Alef (2-A) of Evin Prison, which belongs to the Guards [IRGC]. They dragged me on the floor in such an aggressive manner that the injury to my right arm is visible to this day. They insulted me. Without showing me a warrant they put me in a dark green Peugeot, put my head between my legs and drove off. I didn't know where they were taking me. It was very scary. To this day, I still have nightmares about this incident.
9. I guessed that they are taking me to Evin from the turns the car was making. This gave me some peace of mind, because I thought at least I'm not in the hands of some strange group. I'm being officially arrested.
10. When we got there, they took me out of the car and sat me down. They took my wallet and counted the cash. My laptop and all of my projects were with me. They took an inventory of my belongings and sent me to be fingerprinted. Then they sent me to a room and disrobed me, which was a clear violation of my human rights. Throughout, every time I asked them where they were taking me they would just respond with offensive words.

**Ward 2-Alef of the Revolutionary Guards in Evin**

11. After that, they transferred me to the solitary cell number 152. My number was 9050. Later I found out that I was in ward 2-Alef, which is run by the intelligence division of the Revolutionary Guards. At the time I didn't know. I gathered this information later.
12. The cell was 1.5 meters by 2.5-3 meters. I could take about five steps in it. The ceiling was about four meters high. At the end of the cell, there was a bathroom that had an aluminum lid. The cell had a window. Once I used my clothes to get myself up and look outside the window. There was a wall in front of the cell. Therefore, in the cell I had no contact with the outside world. There were two ventilator tubes. The door was metal without any gaps. There was only a small ventilator at the bottom of the door. There was an old rug on the floor, the kind you would see in mosques, which had a lot of lint. The lint was quite problematic and made a lot of guys sick. I would dampen my clothes and

rub it on the rug to pick up the lint so it wouldn't make me sick. I think the cell was built recently because it didn't look old. The walls were covered with rocks for about two meters and the rest was plaster. The floor was cement with a rug on top.

13. There were some inscriptions on the wall. But it appeared that once in a while they would clean the walls. The word "freedom" was carved on one part. I was able to get a piece of metal from the air conditioner and carve the word deeper. I had stolen a pen [from my interrogators] and used it to write on the walls. I was able to open a screw and wrote the poem Yar-e Dabestani-e Man (My Grade-School Friend) on the rocks. Later, I was subjected to a lot of beating because of the things I had written on the walls. When I was in that cell I fed the ants a lot. After I left that cell, Farzad Eslami (a student activist) was held there. He told me the cell was covered with ants.

### **Interrogations**

14. The day after I was arrested, early in the morning, they took me for interrogations. I told them I had a right to have an attorney. They laughed at me, called me names and hit me in the back of my neck. They sat me down and handcuffed me to a chair with folding arms. They put me in a corner of the room. They had printed out a lot of the stuff I had shared on Google. They thought they had conducted an excellent investigation. They told me, "See how much evidence we have gathered against you! The minimum sentence you would get is execution."
15. During the interrogations [the interrogator] asked me every kind of question. "You are a terrorist. You were planning on bombing a place. You are connected with the Mojahedin (MEK). You have insulted Islam," and so forth. They tried to scare me in believing I would receive the worst punishment, so that I would agree to anything. I understood their strategy later on. But nevertheless, I was completely defeated.
16. Some of their questions were oral [and not written], so they could scare me or as they would put it, "break me." Sometimes they would give me written questions and would ask me to write down the answers. On the top of every page it read, "al-nejat fel-sedgh" (truth will set you free). If they didn't like my answers they would tear the paper, beat me, send me to solitary confinement, prevent me from having phone conversations with my family or they would take away my privilege to go outside (in the prison yard). For example once they told me, "Confess to working with the Mojahedin." I told them, "I'm a liberal. My father was killed during the [Iran-Iraq] war.<sup>2</sup> Plus, I have a problem with religion and communism. I can't be guilty of what you are accusing me." I wouldn't say it exactly like this but in a more respectful manner.
17. They tried really hard to make me confess that I'm connected with the Mojahedin [-e

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<sup>2</sup> From the witness: "My father was a physician in the Revolutionary Guard and was kidnapped from in front of the door to our home in Orumieh in 1984. His tortured, dead body was later found in a desert. In that time my father's suspicious death was imputed to the Mojadedin-e Khalq organization or the Komala party by the Iranian authorities.

Khalq]. My investigator told me if I don't confess they would hang my mother. I would ask them, "What exactly do you want me to say? I don't know any Mojahedin members. Give me a name so I could say I was in contact with that person."

18. I had four interrogators. The main one introduced himself as Saeid. His assistant was called Seyed. Another interrogator was called Haji. There was also a young interrogator who said his name was Pouriya Parseh. He couldn't have been older than 23-24 years old. He brought tea for the other interrogators. He played the good cop. He told me that if I cooperate with the interrogators he could help me.
19. During this period, I was taken to the court located in Evin prison<sup>3</sup> on three different occasions. The first time was around five or six days after my arrest. They took me to the prison's court to tell me the charges against me. The case investigator was Mr. Mohebi [the investigator at Shaheed Moghaddasi, Branch One court in Evin]. He was short, overweight and wore glasses. He looked like Judge Mortazavi<sup>4</sup>, but a bit older. His secretary was about 30 years old and unlike the rest of them, he was handsome. He would bring me tea and was nice to me. But the investigator treated me quite rudely. I told him numerous times, "let me have a lawyer." He would just look at me, from above his glasses. He wouldn't give a clear answer. In the first announcement of my charges the only charges the investigator accused me of were related to my political activities and not [anti] religious activities. However later they focused on what I had written or reposted on Google Reader. They were especially sensitive about the religious issues (I had commented about).
20. In the mornings, when I was in my cell, the first thing they did was to bring me tea, a piece of bread. Then they would allow us to go outside. Immediately after coming back to the cell, they would tell me to put on my blindfold and took me to interrogations. I was in interrogations until about noon, then I would go to my cell to have lunch which was usually rice or something with bread. We were served in plastic plates. After that, I would go to interrogations again. They would take me back to my cell after it was dark.
21. During early interrogations, I realized they took issue with my political activities and used confessions by others against me. Back then, they hadn't accused me of [anti]-religious activities. Until the fourth or fifth day that I was questioned, they didn't even mention any charges like insulting Islam or anything like that. Most of the charges against me were things like, "acting against national security," "spreading falsehood," and "creating public anxiety." I had saved an aerial picture of Tehran from Google Earth on my hard drive. They would ask me, "Tell us where you were planning to bomb?"
22. Unfortunately, I had acted naively and had not hid any of my actions. I had my computer on me when they arrested me and I had saved my email password on it. Still, they hit me for two days until I gave them my password.

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<sup>3</sup> The Shaheed Moghaddasi court located in Evin prison was established in winter 2009 following a mass arrest of those individuals connected to the post-June 2009 presidential election protests. See: <http://www.kaleme.com/1388/12/04/klm-12165/>

<sup>4</sup> See: "A Year Later: Suppression Continues in Iran", IHRDC, available at: <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/3162-a-year-later-suppression-continues-in-iran.html?p=19#.Ud7XWG2W790>

23. Over time the accusations against me changed from political charges to religious ones such as "insulting divine principles." After they were able to access my Google Reader posts they told me that I have insulted Islam. I told them that I had only reposted the material, but they wanted me to confess to writing them myself. I remember one specific post that I had only reposted, the article was even incorrect and I had asked others to not write such texts but my interrogators still forced me to confess to writing it.
24. For example, I had written emails to my friends and had answered some of their questions. For example, in one of the emails I had said that those who have schizophrenia claim they are prophets. I was subjected to a lot of beating for that one sentence. I don't understand how I had "insulted Islam" in a personal email to a friend.
25. They would read my personal emails to find evidence against me. They would say the emails are insulting to Islam. The interrogators really didn't have any evidence against me and I would say about 80 percent of what [they forced me to] confess to was related to what I had posted on Google Reader. The other 20 percent was for taking part in protests.
26. The events of Ashura [Shi'a religious day] on December 16, 2010 were especially important to them. It seemed like they had arrested a university student and he had said that I had set a bank on fire that night. They put a lot of pressure on me to make me confess. However, I wasn't even in Tehran on that day, I had ran away to Mashhad. [Because I would not confess to setting the fire] they didn't allow me to get fresh air for two days. Psychologically it was really bad, I felt like all the walls were closing on me and I would get anxiety attacks. I would beg them to take me outside and told them I would confess to whatever they wanted. I said, "Fine, I set a bank on fire but I don't know which bank. Just give me a bank and I will say I had set it on fire." Later, after I was out, I showed my plane tickets to the judge and told him that on that day, I was not in Tehran I was either in the airport or on the plane flying to Mashhad. I wanted to show the judge that my entire confession was made under pressure but he was not care.
27. During the 105 days [that I was imprisoned] I think I was questioned for about 60 days. On some days I was interrogated two or three times a day. They even questioned me on holidays and during the night. Later, I found out that they would work overtime so as to collect more salary.

## **Torture**

28. There are many forms of torture. Some torture is psychological and some is physical. I think compared to the psychological torture, the physical torture did not harm me at all. I even liked the beatings, because it made me tired and made me fall asleep faster in my cell. I would try to agitate the interrogator so he would beat me up. The physical act of not interrogating was a psychological release for my interrogator.

29. But one of the worst psychological tortures was the intrusion in my personal space. Searching my personal writings, pictures of my family that were on my computer and my personal email. They had separated all the text messages that I had sent to female recipients from other text messages.
30. My father was killed in the [Iran-Iraq] war when I was 10 months old. My stepfather's mother is like my grandmother. Her name is Masoumeh. They would tell me this is my girlfriend's name. They wanted me to confess to having had a sexual relationship with her.
31. I had around 15-16 female students. The interrogators wanted me to confess to being involved with them. They would look at my pictures from a wedding or pictures of my mother or my sisters that were taken at home. I would ask them, "Why are you looking at these pictures?" They would tell me that they have a religious permission to check the pictures.
32. They subjected me to sexual humiliation and torture. They would project their own sexual fantasies on me. For example, they would ask me if I had done some act and would ask me, "How was it?" They would say disgusting things. I think this sexual humiliation is one of the worst things they do.
33. During the interrogations my right eardrum was injured. The injury was both as the result of the beating and also due to the fact that I had put some chewed paper in my ears to [protect] my ears from their screams. The combination of the two resulted in an ear infection and I was taken to the doctors. During my incarceration, I would often attempt suicide because I had lost hope.
34. I attempted suicide in various ways. One time I collected some freezer bags for a couple weeks. Then I twisted three of them and tied them all together to make a long rope. I hooked up the rope on the air duct and while I stood on the blankets tried to hang myself. It didn't work so I had to come down. In another case I snapped off a piece of zinc from the air duct and sharpened it. Then I tried to cut the veins in my left wrist several times, but since the zinc was too soft it didn't slice through. One time I lost a lot of blood, to the point that I almost fainted but somehow I was still alive and got up in the morning.
35. One of my worst experiences in prison was mock execution. I had heard of mock executions in prison. For example Mr. Mohammad Abtahi<sup>5</sup> had said that they had taken him up to the gallows. My experience wasn't like that, however after the interrogations they tried to give me advice. They were very uneducated. Once Haji asked me, "What is the last book you read?" I asked, "What is the last book you read?" He said, "No! I don't need to read any books I follow religious teachings." I talked to him about physics and he said, "So you don't believe in God." I said, "No." Then, he gave me a piece of paper and said, "Write your last will." So I did. Then he handcuffed me, put something around my neck and began pulling it from behind. Before this incident, I had attempted to kill myself

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<sup>5</sup> "Former vice president of Iran sentenced over election protests", Guardian, November 29, 2009, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/22/mohammad-ali-abtahi-iran-protests-jailed>

in prison. So I really hoped that he would kill me, so it would finally be over. But after he saw that I'm not making any noise and I'm not resisting, he changed his mind. This was one of my experiences.

36. Another horrific thing was that my family was informed of my arrest very late. It was about five or six days after my arrest. My stepfather had died three months prior, therefore my mother was in a very bad psychological state when she heard about my arrest.<sup>6</sup> My mom had taken a real hit during that time. My interrogators were real jerks. They sent my mother a will that I had written. My mother thought they were really going to execute me.
37. During the 105 days that I was incarcerated my mother visited me twice. The first time was about 60 days following my arrest and the second time about 20 days after that. The first time, I saw my mother for about half an hour in a room close to ward 2-Alef. The second time, I saw my grandfather, my uncle and my mother in a big room, which I think was the prison's main visitor room, but it was after hours. Both visits were in person.
38. Every week I could make a phone call for about three minutes. Every time I made a phone call, someone would stand next to me so he could hang up the phone if I began saying [anything they didn't like]. I was only allowed to say hello, and say that I'm doing well. If I said that I'm not well, they would hang up the phone. And I had to emphasize to them that they could not give any interviews to the media.
39. After I was moved from my solitary confinement, I was put in another cell with a guy who was in media. His name was Mr. Nazari. Mr. Nazari worked in radio. They had accused him of strange charges like spying, "connections with foreigners" and things like that. I shared a cell with him for less than a week.
40. Then they moved me. They put me in a smaller cell with Habib Farahzadi [a student activist from Tehran University].<sup>7</sup> I shared a cell with just him for about two weeks or less. After that they moved Habib and I to another cell with a drug dealer whose name was Mahmoud Mohammadi. He said they had arrested him with 7-8 kilos of crack but had accused him of spying for Afghanistan and carrying weapons and things like that. They had tortured him really bad. After they moved Habib Farahzadi, they transferred Naeim Aghayi to this cell. He was a student at Tehran University and had studied agriculture. He had the same charges as Habib Farahzadi. Then they transferred Naeim Aghaei also and I was left with Mahmoud Mohammadi.

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<sup>6</sup> "45 days that Foad Sojoodi Farimani, imprisoned student in the Revolutionary Guard ward, is incommunicado" JARAS, December 2, 2010, available at: <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/26542/>

<sup>7</sup> "Witness Testimony of Habib Farahzadi: a student activist and law graduate", IHRDC, available at: <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/witness-testimony/1000000347-witness-testimony-of-habib-farahzadi-a-student-activist-and-law-graduate.html#.Ud66D22W790>



**Release**

41. The second time they took me to Mr. Mohebi, the investigator at Evin court, he told me he would not release me on bail because I was "spreading corruption on earth." Meaning, according to him my freedom was equal to "corruption on earth." I objected. The last time I saw him he said he wants 500 million tomans [approximately US \$500,000 in 2010] to release me on bail. My family gave the deed to my uncle's house for bail and I was released on December 19, 2010.
42. Sometime after my release my mental health deteriorated really badly. I was on the verge of committing suicide and had completely lost hope. To stop myself from killing myself I went to the doctors and committed myself to the Mehregan psychiatric hospital in Tehran for ten days. During this time, the Ministry of Intelligence sent one of their agents to talk to me. The guy pretended he was one of my friends and I told him what had happened to me in prison. They were upset about the fact that I was talking about prison. Therefore, Saeid, one of my interrogators called me and threatened that he would "take care of me." After that I changed my cell phone and went to Mashhad.

**Judge Pir-Abbasi**

43. My trial began on May 4, 2011 at Tehran's Revolutionary Court, branch 26, with Judge Pir-Abbasi. Pir-Abbasi wore a suit and he had a triangular beard. He was short and about 55 years old. I don't know if what occurred could be called a trial. It wasn't like they presented charges against me and then I was able to defend myself. Most of the exchanges were about unrelated things. What was said wasn't a legal argument.
44. Because we didn't have good Internet access in Iran, before my arrest I had saved various articles so I could read them later when I had time. One of the articles was about Mohammad cartoons. I had saved the cartoons, with the article on my hard drive. The investigators had printed all of them in color and presented them to Judge Pir-Abbasi. The judge could not comprehend that I wasn't the one who drew the cartoons and he wouldn't even allow me to talk. He just held the cartoons up and asked me, "What are these?" I told him, "I didn't draw them nor have I reposted them anywhere. Is it a crime to have them on my computer?" I asked him to find me not guilty and he said, "You should have thought about that before." My lawyer, Ms. Maryam Daraei, also asked the judge to consider my young age and find me not guilty.
45. My lawyer, Ms. Maryam Daraei, my mother, my uncle and two of my friends, including one who was a clergyman, were present in the courtroom. They came to testify that I had not insulted Islam. We thought because I was charged with insulting Islam, having a clergyman testify would be more effective. But the judge did not take notice and just did what he wanted. There was a man in the back also, who might have been an agent of the prosecutor. I was not allowed to see this man. I mean he deliberately sat behind me.
46. Satarifar, Judge Pir-Abbasi's clerk, sometimes entered the courtroom and then leave.

Satarifar had a round face and wore thick glasses. He wore his shirt over his pants and his hair was a bit of salt and pepper. He was around 45-50 years old. In the court, he threatened that he would "take care of me." He said, "Your father was a martyr and you are acting like this? We will make an example of you." Judge Pir-Abbasi had been transferred from family court. In a way, Satarifar would dictate the verdict to Judge Pir-Abbasi. Satarifar did something else also. Judge Pir-Abbasi had ordered for my belongings to be returned to me. I went to Satarifar asking for my things back. He told me, "Boy, just leave before I do something to you." I left the room. I was crying so hard that I couldn't see well and fell on the court steps. The tendon in my left leg was injured severely.

47. I received an eight-year sentence, five years for insulting Islam, two years for "acting against national security," and one year for insulting Khomeini and Khamenei. I also received 100 lashes for insulting Ahmadinejad and a 100,000 toman [approximately US \$100 in 2010] fine for insulting the Guardian Council. One of the charges in my indictment which was illustrated by the Yalasarat header and was set by the Revolutionary Guard was "insulting the Prophet [Mohammad]" and [the prosecutor] had asked the court to execute me. However, Pir-Abbasi sentenced me to prison. Apparently Yalasarat is the name of one of the Revolutionary Guard battalions.
48. Another horrible thing was that although they returned my laptop and hard drive they had destroyed all my research projects. Everything I had done for the past ten years, and all the articles that I had written, were destroyed. I was willing to go to prison for eight years but get back all the work that I, and others, had done in the past ten years. I was in charge of one specific group with 30 students in it. We had agreed that I would be the only person in possession of the material. Unfortunately all this information was destroyed.
49. I appealed the eight-year sentence. But I was never informed of the appellate court's verdict. I don't know how they ruled. In 2011, two weeks after I had gotten married, they told me that I had to go back to court in 20 days. They also sent an order to my uncle, the one who had given the deed to his house for my bail, asking him to turn me in.<sup>8</sup> Then I heard something that made me realize they are building another case against me. I began thinking: on one side was the 500 million tomans that I had given for bail. On the other side was the eight-year sentence against me. I concluded that the option of leaving Iran, losing the 500 million tomans and working later to repay that money would be better than going to prison for eight years. Plus, I could continue this fight and my education as well. Thus, in November 2011 I left Iran and went to Turkey. After that, they sent many summons for me in Iran.

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<sup>8</sup> "Summons for Foad Sojoodi Farimani, son of a martyr and a PhD candidate, who was barred from study for his eight year prison sentence", KALEME, November 16, 2011, available at: <http://www.kaleme.com/1390/08/25/klm-80368/>

**Harassment after release from prison**

50. After prisoners are released in Iran, sometimes people would visit their families saying they are buddies with the presiding judge and if you give them money, they can have your case dismissed. One of these guys got very close to us. He knew too much about us. After I left Iran he began harassing my family in Mashhad to get some money out of them. He would go to our door, yell and scream and broke our windows. No matter how many times my family called the police, it was never investigated. It got to a point that he even broke our door, got into our house, broke my mother's leg, my sister's arm and put a knife under my ten year old brother's throat.
51. My mother went to the court and filed a complaint against him in Mashhad. The judge turned around and told my mother, "Ms., bring your son back from the U.S. instead." After that, my mother went to Evin prison in Tehran and asked them to stop this man. They said they are not involved. I still don't know if this man was sent by Evin people or was sent by another group in Mashhad. When he attacked our house, he stole my mother's cell phone, jewelry, her checkbook and even my younger brother's Xbox [a game]. All of this happened in front of the police. I have never seen anything like this: for someone to do such things and be protected by the police and the judicial system.
52. I left Iran in November 2011. Currently I'm a visiting researcher at Eindhoven University, which is located in the southeast of the Netherlands. I'm an assistant researcher and advise master students. My future is uncertain because I still don't have residency.