



Witness Statement of Gholamreza Gholamhosseini

Name: Gholamreza Gholamhosseini

Place of Birth: Arak, Iran

Date of Birth: 24 June 1966

Occupation: Bus Driver

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: 10 October 2012

Interviewer: Morad Mokhtari (IHRDC Researcher)

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Gholamreza Gholamhosseini. It was approved by Gholamreza Gholamhosseini on December 25, 2013. There are 50 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 Gholamreza Gholamhosseini. I was born on June 24, 1966 in Milajard village in Arak. In 1979 I moved to Tehran. During my last years in Iran I lived in Ghaleh Hassan Khan, near Tehran. I was a bus driver.
2. I began working for United Bus Company of Tehran and Suburbs (“UBCTS”)¹ in 2005. I also joined the new Workers Syndicate of UBCTS.² In this trade union I worked to realize the lawful demands and rights of workers. These activities caused me some problems. I was arrested several times and imprisoned three times. The first time [I was imprisoned] was in 2005 and I spent 12 days in Evin. The second time was in 2009 when I was in Evin for 85 days. The last time was in 2010 and I was held in Rajaei Shahr Prison, in Karaj, for 6 months. Ultimately, on August 15, 2011, after being threatened by my interrogators, agents of the Intelligent Ministry, and UBCTS’s security office, I was forced to leave Iran. I left Iran using my passport.

Workers Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs United Bus Company

3. I think the Workers Syndicate of UBCTS was formed in 1968. During the revolution when the bazaar was in turmoil and trade unions were shut, this union was also closed down. In 2005 the union was reopened with the help of few activists such as Javad Mehran-Gohar³, a member of shoemakers union, and a number of UBCTS workers such as Ebrahim Maddadi⁴ and Mansour Osanlou.⁵
4. In May 2005, members of the Islamic Council of Labor⁶ and the Workers’ House⁷—which consider themselves as labors’ representatives—raided the headquarters of Tehran’s Bakers Union and attacked the UBCTS workers who had gathered there to form a union. The headquarters for Tehran’s Bakers Union is located on a street close to Hassanabad Square.



Workers Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs United Bus Company - Logo

5. As a result UBCTS workers became more eager to form a union. They wanted to elect union board

¹ Official website of United Bus Company of Tehran and Suburbs (“UBCTS”) (in Persian):

<http://bus.tehran.ir/Default.aspx?tabid=41>

² Official website of Workers Syndicate of UBCTS (in Persian): <http://www.syndicavahed.asia/>

³“*Dar vajeb boudan va dorost boudani sendica shakki nist*” [There is no doubt that having syndicate is necessary and right], (An interview with Javad Mehran-Gohar), Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, September 2000, available at (in Persian):

<http://www.ensani.ir/fa/content/274361/default.aspx> ; also: <http://www.ensani.ir/storage/Files/20120506074244-7010-104.pdf>

⁴ “Iran: Ebrahim Madadi re-arrested today”, [international trade union](http://www.ituc-csi.org/) Confederation, December 7, 2011, available at:

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/ebrahim-madadi-re-arrested-today>

⁵ “Frequently Asked Questions - Mansour Osanloo - Trade Unionism in Iran”, [international trade union](http://www.ituc-csi.org/) Confederation, available at: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/frequently-asked-questions-mansour>

⁶ According to a definition by the “Ministry of Cooperatives Labor and Social Welfare”, the Islamic Council of Labor is a council that includes labors’ representatives, a company’s employees, and the employer’s representative. This council would be held in any company that has more than 35 permanent employees. For more information see (in Persian):

<http://tashakolha.mcls.gov.ir/fa/tashakolkargari/shoraaslami>

⁷ Official website of the Worker’s House: <http://khanekargar.com/fa/>

members. The Ministry of Labor and Tehran's police gave us permission to democratically elect the board members of Workers Syndicate of UBCTS. Overall, there were 18 board members, including substitutes and inspectors. After these members were elected, the union held another election amongst its members and Mr. Mansour Osanlou was elected president. Mr. Ebrahim Maddadi was elected as the vice president. Others, such as Mr. Ata Babakhani were elected as inspectors.

6. After that, the union was officially formed. Every Friday we held public meetings at the headquarters of Tehran's Bakers Union, which was located on a street close to Hassanabad Square. The workers would come to these meetings. They would express their views, talk about their problems and get advice about what they should do.
7. I joined the Workers Syndicate of UBCTS about two months after it reopened [in 2005]. The union, based on its statute⁸, educated us about what we needed to do if our legal rights were violated, how to demand our lawful rights and how to utilize the legal channels that every citizen must know.
8. UBCTS workers would come to the weekly union meetings and asked us to stage a strike. Union board members told us that striking should be workers' last resort; it should be used in a timely manner with knowledge and without making haste or error. The workers weren't informed and didn't know what a strike is. Union leaders published a flyer titled, "What is a Strike?" and handed it out to the workers. The flyer was published so that workers wouldn't keep asking about staging a strike; so that the workers would first learn what a strike is and how they are staged; so that the workers would understand striking should be the last resort.
9. However government officials thought the flyer was published to encourage the workers to strike. Immediately, on December 22, 2005, they arrested the union's board members and detained them. Mansour Osanlou (the president), Ebrahim Maddadi (the vice president), Seyyed Davood Razavi (the union's accountant), Mansour Hayat-Gheybi (the head of public relations), Abdolreza Tarazi (a member of the Executive Committee) Ali Zad-Hosseini, Saeid Torabiyani, Ebrahim Norouzi-Gohari, Yaghoob Salimi, Ata Babakhani and a few others were arrested.
10. After these arrests, a few of the more knowledgeable activists thought that we had no choice other than to strike. They believed that if we don't strike, the union board members would not be released. Therefore, UBCTS workers were forced into an unwanted strike.
11. In any case, December 25, 2005, was set as the day for the strike. At that time I worked for UBCTS in district eight as just an ordinary member of the Syndicate. I have always been just a regular member. On that day, I was working in the afternoon but I went to our terminal in the morning. There was a man who was in charge there. He said, "You are working in the afternoon shift. Why are you here?" I said, "The union has called a strike and I'm here to strike." As I was arguing with this man a few workers heard us. They joined me and stood by me. Other workers just continued working. It wasn't as if no one was working, but overall it turned out to be a decent strike.⁹ My friends and I stayed there that afternoon and I didn't work. Around 1 a.m. [on December 26, 2005, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf] Tehran's mayor, in a city of 20 million, was forced to go to district four of UBCTS. District four is located in Jannatabad and was forced to make some concessions and that's when we ended our strike.¹⁰

⁸ The statute of Workers Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs United Bus Company:

http://www.syndicavahed.asia/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26&Itemid=12

⁹ "Etesabi ranandegani sherekati vahedi Tehran", [Tehran Bus Drivers' strike], Iran-Emrooz website, December 25, 2005, available at (in Persian): <http://www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php/news1/5995/>

¹⁰ "Ba va'dei azadyi aazayi sendicayi sherekati vahedi otobusranyi Tehran as souyi shahrdar, etesab movaghatan payan yaf", [Following Tehran Meyer's promises to release the members of UBCTS, the strike was temporarily ended], Radio Farda, December 25, 2005, available at (in Persian): <http://www.radiofarda.com/content/article/315846.html>

12. Our first demand was for the union board members to be released. Our second was the right to have an independent trade union, which was the Workers Syndicate of UBCTS. Our third ask was to demand the legal rights that were violated by our employers. These were our three significant demands. Because of the mayor's promise, our first demand was somewhat satisfied; all union board members were released, except Mansour Osanlou. They made some promises in regards to our second and third demands, but [those promises] never materialized.

First Imprisonment

13. We announced that if they do not release Mr. Osanlou we will have another strike on January 28, 2006.¹¹ This time the government took a decisive stance.¹² One day before the strike, on January 27, they arrested a large number of workers in their homes. I was also arrested on January 27, which was a Friday, as I was working.
14. As I was being arrested, I asked the people who were arresting me about their identification cards and arrest warrant. They told me that it is not my business to know who they were. In an unmarked Paykan [an automobile], they took me to an intelligence office located under Gisha Bridge. They began building a case for me; they wrote down my name and personal information. After that, they transferred me to a police detention center in Eshratyab Square in Tehran. From there, they put several of my friends and I in a minibus and transferred us to Evin prison. We reached Evin at around midnight and they put me in ward 240.
15. At first only 3 or 4 of my friends were there, but later more kept coming. About 600 to 700 people used to come to the weekly union meetings in Hassanabad and I saw most of them in Evin. I found out later that the 30 to 40 union members who were not in Evin had been informants.
16. They took me to be interrogated at 4 a.m. Even then, they didn't tell me why I had been arrested. I was only asked my name and then the first question that he wrote was, "Why did you go on strike?" I wrote down, "Because we want to get our rights." Then he wrote, "What was your objective in doing this?" I wrote, "What are you referring to?" He wrote, "The strike." I said, "As I said, we are demanding our rights." Then he asked, "If you are released, would you repeat your conduct?" I said, "Which conduct?" He said, "These anti-revolutionary stuff." I said, "I don't understand what you mean. I have rights in this society and I'm asking for those rights. I can't just be ok when my rights are violated."
17. This interrogation did not last long. It lasted about 50 minutes and during that time I saw that the number of people walking in the hallway was increasing. When I got back to my cell, because more detainees were brought in, there were two more people in my cell. One of them was Mr. Mohammad Eslami, may God rest his soul, who had been arrested at his house in Islamshahr. Another was Mr. Shams Ali Ramtin who had been arrested at a bus terminal. By 8:30 in the morning they had brought ten people to my cell. Mr. Shams Ali Ramtin said that officials from the security office and UBCTS were standing at service centers and when the drivers got out [security officials] would ask, "Which of these workers attended the Syndicate meetings?" That's how they had arrested people and brought them to Evin.

¹¹ "*Eelami etesab barayi azadyi aghayi Mansour Osanlou va eneghadi peymani dasteh jamei sheshom*", [Strike announcement for releasing Mr. Mansour Osanlou, and concluding the sixth collective agreement], Asre Nou website, January 24, 2006, available at (in Persian): <http://asre-nou.net/1384/bahman/5/m-etesab.html>

¹² "*Aazayi heiasi modirehi sendica bazdasht shodehand*", [The Syndicate board members were arrested], Asre Nou website, January 26, 2006, available at (in Persian): <http://asre-nou.net/1384/bahman/7/m-bazdasht.html>

18. While in prison, my bond was set at two million toman (approximately US \$ 2,200.00 in 2005). They gave me a piece of paper to sign. I really didn't know what to do with it. The writing on the paper stated, "I cannot pay the bond amount." They had me sign this paper less than 24 hours after my arrest and that's how they gave a legal appearance to what they were doing. They never asked if I could or could not pay for the bond.
19. I was in prison for twelve days and interrogated three times. I was released by paying a bond of two million toman. The next day I went to work and I was told that UBCTS' security office had ordered that I should not be allowed in the work place. Therefore, they didn't let me go [inside the terminal](#).
20. I went to the [UBCTS'] main office in Narmak. However, they didn't allow me inside there either. They told me they had an order from the Revolutionary Court that I cannot go back to work. All my other friends who had been released were faced with the same situation. We went to the Revolutionary Court and said that UBCTS is telling us they have an order from this court that we cannot work. The court told us they had not given such an order. The distance from the Revolutionary Court to UBCTS' main office was not far. A few of my friends who had motorcycles went back to the office and said that the court had not given such an order. The [UBCTS officials] said that if that's the case, [the court] should provide a written statement stating they had not given this order. So I wrote a letter for the Revolutionary Court.
21. I wrote that when I went to the UBCTS office they told me that they had received a letter from the Revolutionary Court that I cannot work. I wrote that if this is the case please sign my letter. Majid Matin Rasekh, an investigator at the Revolutionary Court, wrote: "The Revolutionary Court does not object to Mr. Gholamreza Gholamhosseini returning to work." He signed the letter and put [the court's official] seal on it. [This was the first document that I received](#). I went back to UBCTS. They said. "This is not the correct paper work. The investigator should address the UBCTS in the letter." Ultimately, even though I had the letter, they didn't allow me to go back to work.



22. As time passed, more of my coworkers who had been arrested were released. Three days after our arrest they started releasing us. Those who had been less persistent and had less knowledge about their rights were released sooner. After nineteen days everyone except the union board members had been released. Mr. Ebrahim Maddadi, Mr. Ebrahim Gohari and Mr. Yaghoob Salimi were released on March 19, 2006. They had been imprisoned since January 27, 2006.
23. After the Norouz holidays, in early April 2006, we gathered in front of the UBCTS [office]. Once again, they didn't allow us in. There was a man named Ahmadloo who was the head of the security office. People who had worked with Ahmadloo said that he was Judge Matin Rasekh's brother-in-law. He came and told us that he cannot do anything for us and that he is waiting for his supervisors to make a decision. We told him that UBCTS' highest official is its president. However he said, "No. We know who should give us the order [to take you back]."
24. A number of our friends advised us to go the Ministry of Labor [Ministry of Cooperatives Labor and Social Welfare]. We went to the Ministry of Labor but they refused to review our complaint. When a worker loses his job, legally he has one month to go to the Ministry of Labor and file a complaint

against the employer. The Ministry of Labor has to set a date [to review the case]. The East Tehran Labor Department was in charge of reviewing all complaints filed in Tehran. The head of this office was Mahmoud Safari.

25. When they refused to accept our complaints we requested to meet with the head of the office [Mr. Safari]. After a few days, we were finally able to talk with him. He told us that he was aware of our case. He said that Mr. Hassan Tizfahm, whom at that time was the head of Tehran's Labor Department, had asked him to resolve this case by informal mediation. He promised us that if our case was not resolved in the next three months he would step aside [from his position]. The language that he used was not appropriate for an official. We told him, "It is not necessary [for you] to step aside from your position. Just accept our complaint. If you are able to resolve our case by mediation, we will drop our complaint." But he didn't agree.
26. After that, every day a few of us would go to the East Tehran Labor Department located in Tehranpars and sit there until the end of official hours. Every day, at 7 o'clock in the morning a few people from Tehran's security police and the Intelligence Ministry would come and stand in front of the office of the department's head. This lasted about two months. We kept going there.
27. One day, I went to the Majlis to visit representative Fatemeh Aliya. She had told Shargh newspaper that the Majlis wants to talk to the leaders of the Workers Syndicate of UBCTS and address their issues.
28. I told Mrs. Aliya, "I read what you had told Shargh. I'm a member of the Syndicate. I have lost my job and now I have come to you." Then I told her that they had fired us. I told her, "Now I'm not allowed to go back to work and I cannot afford to take care of my wife and children." She said that she would resolve my problem. I said, "This is not only my problem. My coworkers have the same problem." She said that for now she would give me a letter so that my problem would be resolved and that right now I should not worry about other people. In either case she wrote a letter to Mr. Mohammad Jahromi, the Minister of Labor. I think Mr. Jarhomi had recently become the Minister of Labor during Mr. Ahmadinejad's first term as President. [Ms. Aliya] also wrote a letter to the head of UBCTS.
29. I took her letter to UBCTS and handed it to them but they didn't give me a receipt. I took the letter that was written for the Minister of Labor to the Ministry on Azadi Street. They gave me a receipt but told me I should take the letter myself to the Ministry's central office on Siye-Tir Street because the bureaucratic process takes a long time. I took the letter to that office and they told me they would send it to the East Tehran Labor Department, located in Tehranpars, where my file was. After that, the letter got lost and it was never found.
30. In May 2006, we went to the Commission for Citizens Rights located in Tehran's courts. Those who have complaints about the legal system or officials in the judiciary could go to the Commission for Citizens Rights and file a complaint there. Mr. Alireza Avaie was the head of this organization. There is a law that says [in case of legal dispute between an employer and employee] the employer must pay the employee 50 percent of the monthly salary until the case is concluded.¹³ With the help of [the Commission for Citizens Rights] I was able to receive half of my monthly paycheck, which was 106,000 toman [approximately US \$ 115.00 in 2006]. However in the spring of 2008 even this payment was cancelled.
31. After we had gone back and forth for a year and the Ministry of Labor was under international

¹³ It is based on the note of article 19 in the Labor Law. See the Labor Law (in Persian): <http://www.mcls.gov.ir/fa/law/266>

pressure, the Ministry agreed to accept our complaints. The arbitration committee in the Ministry of Labor ruled that a number of workers, including myself, should return to work. The committee also voted that a number of other workers should be fired.

32. On May 14, 2007, for the first time, the West Tehran Labor Department in Ekbatan ruled that I should return to work. Even with this ruling the UBCTS would not let me work. I went [and asked for the court order] to be carried out. This state of affairs continued in the same way.
33. One day in the spring of 2008, I was on the BRT¹⁴ [express] bus lane in Tehran and coincidentally saw Ardeshir Moghimpour Bijani¹⁵, the UBCTS president, who goes by the name Hossein. He was in Ferdowsi Square and was managing the bus lines. I knew him. I got out of the bus and introduced myself to him. He told me if there are people in UBCTS who don't allow me to get in the building and meet with him, I should try to see him during conferences and other events.

Second Imprisonment

34. I found out at that on June 24, 2008, during a ceremony for Woman's Day, Mr. Bijani the president of the UBCTS, would be at Azadi Stadium [which can seat 12,000]. I went there and stood in front of the stadium door. I wanted to see Mr. Bijani and talk to him. However, Major Najafzadegan approached me and asked, "Why are you standing here?" I said, "I'm standing on a public street. Do you own the street? You go ahead and do your job." He said, "You can't stand here." I said, "If you have a [court] order that prevents me from standing here, show it to me?" He got mad and began cursing at me. He ordered [my arrest] and they put me in a car and [took me away](#).¹⁶
35. I was held in a solitary cell, in ward 240 of Evin prison, for 85 days. My family had no knowledge [of my whereabouts] and I was not allowed to make a single phone call. This was the second time I had been arrested.
36. After 85 days, I was released on a 100-million-toman [approximately US \$ 104,000.00 in 2008] bond. They had given my case to the public court in the judicial complex in Qods, located close to Poonak. There, I was found not guilty.
37. After I was released, I filed a complaint against Major Najafzadegan who had arrested me. I took my complaint to the Military Court, but they told me they don't have jurisdiction. They sent my complaint to the Revolutionary Court. So, I filed my complaint in the Revolutionary Court. Two months later, in the courtroom, Judge [Aliakbar] Heydarifar¹⁷ read the charges against me as the defendant. I said, "How could that be? I'm the one who has made a complaint." He said that he has been given an order to do this. Once again, [in order to stay out of prison] I had to put down a two-million-toman bail. I called my colleagues and they came and got me out. This complaint was in regards to my second arrest.
38. The second time I was released from prison I was contacted by Kargozaran newspaper. I gave a [long interview](#) about what had happened.

¹⁴ Bus Rapid Transit

¹⁵ Official website of Mr. Ardeshir Moghimpour Bijani (in Persian): <http://www.hossein-bijani.ir/index.html>

¹⁶ "Tehran bus union man arrested in new attack", International Transport Workers' Federation, June 25, 2008, available at: <http://www.itfglobal.org/news-online/index.cfm/newsdetail/2290>

¹⁷ "Tasviri: Ghazi Aliakbar Heydarifar, ghaziyi kahrizak", [Picture: Judge Aliakbar Heidarifar, judge of Kahrizak], Entekhab website, available at: <http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/61149/%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%AD%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%81%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B6%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%87%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B2%DA%A9>

39. After our strikes and what happened with the UBCTS Workers Syndicate, the government had become quite sensitive towards us. For no reason they would fire workers who were not well educated about their rights. A few of my friends and I formed legal groups for workers. We were trying to promote the Syndicate and also educate workers about their rights. In the summer of 2009 we also got [business cards](#) for this purpose with our name on it.
40. On October 10, 2010, they raided my house to arrest me, however I wasn't home. Instead, they arrested my 15-year-old son and took all the documents that I had at home.
41. This time, because they had arrested my son and confiscated my things, I gave an interview to ILNA [Iranian Labor News Agency]. In the interview I said that four people, in plain clothes, had gone to my house and introduced themselves as agents of the Intelligence Ministry. I said, "They did not have a warrant and instead, like thieves and hostage-takers they entered my house with guns. They pulled their guns on my children, searched my house and took all my documents."
42. Because I kept getting arrested and had been imprisoned twice, I kept the little money that I had in my wife's bank account. I did this because in the morning, when I left my house I wasn't sure I'd be back at night. [The plain clothes agents] had taken my wife's bank documents. That month was really the worst days of our lives. It is very difficult when you have money in the bank but you are unable to take it out.
43. In any case, I spoke about this to ILNA as well. After that, Voice of America and Radio Deutsche Welle called and I told them the same thing. Later my interview was aired from the Mojahedin-e Khalq's (MEK) TV channel, Simaye Azadi. But I had never given them an interview.

Third Imprisonment

44. I was in hiding for close to a month. On November 3, 2010, while my colleague, Saeid Torabiyani, and I were in an Internet cafe in Gohardasht, in Karaj, I was arrested. They blindfolded me and, as they were beating me, they transferred me to Rajaei Shahr prison.¹⁸
45. During interrogations they kept saying that I'm connected to the MEK. They said, "Why else would they air your voice?" I said, "Maybe they got my interview from ILNA or Voice of America." This time, they tried hard to say that I'm connected to the Mojahedin. I did not admit to any of it and stressed that I'm only a worker who will continue fighting for his lawful rights.
46. I was in Rajaei Shahr prison when one day they called me and took me to [Shahid] Moghadasi Court at Evin prison. They said, because of the business cards that we had made, I was charged with impersonating a lawyer. Therefore, while I was in prison they built [another case](#) against me for making the business card.
47. Mr. Hassan Saeidi, Mr. Habib Rezapour, Mr. Morteza Kamsari, and I, Gholamreza Gholamhosseini, have filed a complaint against Mr. Ardeshir Moghimpour Bijani, the former president of UBCTS. After five years this complaint still has not gone through the legal process and has not been finalized. However, because of a business card that we made, there was a trial held in two months and we were found guilty. We were each sentenced to pay a 300,000-toman [approximately US \$ 158.00 in 2011] fine. We appealed and less than a month later the appeals court confirmed the trial court's ruling. The

¹⁸ "Another attack on Vahed Syndicate members", International Transport Workers' Federation, November 5, 2010, *available at*: <http://www.itfglobal.org/press-area/index.cfm/pressdetail/5332>

case was final.

48. When the plaintiff is a government official, they break the law very quickly and clearly; they accuse us of anything and rule against us. At the same time four workers have been waiting for five years and our complaint has not gotten anywhere yet.
49. After spending six months in Rajae Shahr Prison in Karaj, on April 28, 2011, I was released on a 30-million-toman [approximately US \$ 15,800.00 in 2011] [bond](#).¹⁹
50. One month after my release, in branch one of the Revolutionary Court in Shahriyar, I was found guilty of propaganda against the government and sentenced to [one year in prison](#). I appealed the court's ruling and my case was sent to the appeals court. Meanwhile, on August 15, 2011, I left Iran. I used my passport in exiting Iran. The appeals court confirmed the ruling against me. By that time I had left Iran.

¹⁹ “*Gholamreza Gholamhosseini az aazayi sendicayi sherekati vahed azad shod*”, [Gholamreza Gholamhosseini, one of the members of UBCTS Workers Syndicate was released], The Committee for Defense of Political Prisoners, April 28, 2011, available at (in Persian): http://komitedefa.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2744:1390-02-08-06-44-18&catid=14:1389-02-03-00-43-53&Itemid=57