



Witness Statement of Hamed Khajeheian

Name: Hamed Khajeheian
Place of Birth: Shiraz, Iran
Date of Birth: 18 September 1984
Occupation: Contractor

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: September 22, 2012

Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Hamed Khajeheian. It was approved by Hamed Khajeheian on 28 March 2013. There are 26 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 Hamed Khajeheian. I was born on September 18, 1984 in the city of Shiraz. I was a contractor for the Shiraz Electric Authority. I was fired from that job and then I became a cook in a restaurant. I am a member of the Nimatullahi Soltan Ali Shah Sufi religious order.¹

Religious Views

2. My paternal relatives are Sufis, but they follow a different Sufi order.² I am not a member of the order that my father follows, because I discovered some contradictions in their doctrine and because I am educated and independent-minded. I switched sects and joined the Nimatullahi Soltan Ali Shah order.

First Arrest

3. It was either 2006 or 2007 and a building had [recently] been erected for the Nimatullahi Sufis of Bushehr. We held a ceremony over the course of three days. During the ceremony we held prayers³ and recited from [the poets] Hafez, Sa'adi, and Rumi.⁴
4. I don't precisely remember what month it was when we held this ceremony and I was arrested, but I remember that it was in the winter, because I was wearing a jacket.
5. When the third day's session ended, we all said goodbye to each other and prepared to leave. About 10 people exited [with me]. Unmarked vehicles and plainclothes forces were there waiting for us. They arrested me and two of my friends. Of the 30 to 35 people who were present that day, only the three of us were arrested. [In my opinion it is clear that] everything had been decided beforehand, because they only took three of us. We were distinct [from other participants] because each gathering has one host and one manager, who must be different people, meaning that they are distinct from the normal people or adherents who participate in the gathering.
6. I was the host of the gathering, and at the same time it should be mentioned that that *khaniqa*⁵ had been built in my name. The permit was in my name. It did not take long between the completion of construction of the khaniqa and my arrest. The khaniqa was completed about six years ago. We couldn't determine whether we wanted to build a khaniqa or a *hosseiniyeh*.⁶ Ultimately we built

¹ A Sufi order founded by Shah Nimatullah, a Syrian Sufi master residing in Iran in the 14th century CE. See <http://www.nimatullahi.org/>.

² There are many different Sufi orders, typically called silsilihs, which each trace a lineage to different founders. Beliefs of these communities vary. See <http://islam.uga.edu/sufismorders.html>.

³ See <http://www.nimatullahi.org/our-order/practices/spiritual-method.php>.

⁴ These revered Persian classical poets all explored elements of Sufi mysticism, and in turn their poetry is of special importance to Sufis. See http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/viewpdf/default.aspx?article-title=Islam_Sufism_and_Poetry_by_Patrick_Laude.pdf.

⁵ A Sufi place of worship. See <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1270>.

⁶ A gathering place in Shi'a tradition. See <http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/1821110>.

the khaniqa as a normal residence in Bahonar Street in Bushehr. The permit we had was also for a normal residence.

7. They showed us ID cards indicating that they were from the Ministry of Intelligence and National Security (MOIS).⁷ In general, they looked like all other plainclothes agents. One of the agents who approached me was bearded, but the rest were clean-shaven.
8. They approached me and said that I was under arrest according to an arrest warrant, which they showed me. It was written on the warrant that due to the establishment of a site contrary to Shari'a, speaking against Shari'a, and holding ceremonies contrary to Shari'a, certain individuals must be arrested. They handcuffed and shackled us, but they did not blindfold us. Then they put us in three [separate] black Toyota Landcruisers.
9. They were very violent during the initial arrest and the whole ride [to the detention center]. How do you think they act when they arrest someone for speaking contrary to Shari'a, how do you think they treat them? It's all slaps, insults, or some combination of the two. They asked us from where we received our orders, why we had built [the khaniqa] without the proper permit and used a residential permit instead, and why we were guiding people to act illegally there. We tried to evade their questions. Every evasion led to a smack in the ear or a kick. They kicked us several times.
10. [I believe] that they [the authorities] discovered our group the same way they located the late Seyyed Khalil Alinejad in Sweden and killed him⁸ or killed Fereydoun Farrokhzad.⁹ In any group--whether religious, political or artistic--whatever problems it faces originate within the group itself. We Sufis are generally simple people, and we trust people and offer them our friendship quickly.
11. They took us to the MOIS office in Bushehr, at the Bisim intersection. I realized where they were taking me because they hadn't blindfolded me and I could see the Bushehr MOIS office clearly in front of me. I was in solitary confinement there for around six months. I think that I was interrogated a total of five times, each interrogation lasting for long durations. It would be better for me not to be reminded of it.
12. I was charged with speaking against Shari'a and holding nonreligious beliefs. Those charges were based on the fact that I had joined a Sufi order and revered a *qutb* [in Sufi tradition, a *qutb* is a spiritual leader who serves as a believer's connection to God].¹⁰ When someone reveres a *qutb* in

⁷ The MOIS is active in the harassment, surveillance, arrest, interrogation—and allegedly the sentencing—of political dissidents, human rights activists, journalists, and members of religious or ethnic minorities in Iran. See, for example, IHRDC, *No Safe Haven: Iran's Global Assassination Campaign*, (May 2008), available at:

<http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/3152-no-safe-haven-iran-s-global-assassination-campaign.html#.UVXslmXqRn8> and IHRDC, *Murder at Mykonos: Anatomy of a Political Assassination*, (March 2007), available at: <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/3150-murder-at-mykonos-anatomy-of-a-political-assassination.html#.UVX5MheS66U>. See also <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2013/01/iranian-spies/>. See also <http://www.persian.rfi.fr/ايران/۲۰۱۳۰۱۰۴-اخبار-اطلاعات-ايران-۴۰۱۳۰۱۰۴> (in Persian).

⁸ A Kurdish Iranian musician and master of the spiritual instrument called the tanbur; Alinejad died in a fire in Sweden in 2001. It is not clear whether Alinejad was murdered, but some have alleged that the Islamic Republic was behind his death. See <http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/enigmatic-death-iranian-émigré>.

⁹ An Iranian entertainer and political activist who was stabbed to death in his apartment in 1992. While there have been no convictions in connection with his death either, it is widely believed that he was the target of an assassination ordered by the MOIS. See, for example, <http://www.payvand.com/news/03/jan/1058.html>.

¹⁰ See <http://books.google.com/books?id=BMNQNOHXKQMC&pg=PA111&lpg=PA111&dq#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

Sufi tradition, it means that you accept them as your messiah.¹¹ I wasn't informed of the charges against me until two weeks after my arrest.¹² During the first three weeks I was interrogated twice, and then I remained imprisoned for a long time until the next three interrogations.

13. The interrogators wore clothes with collars similar to those worn by clerics. He was [they were] completely clean-shaven. I did not know the interrogators' names but I could see their faces. But no one knew their names. There's no doubt that he [they] used a pseudonym. They insulted us and claimed that we worshipped the devil. Any question that I didn't answer was reciprocated with violence, whether a slap in the ear or a kick. I was also tortured once: they beat me with batons or with their boots, and my left testicle sustained damage. They quickly took me to the MOIS hospital after that.
14. I was only allowed to use the bathroom once a day and they fed me once per day. When I was released I went straight to a hospital because my whole body was in pain and I had developed health problems. I had become very weak and lost a lot of weight. I never had visitation privileges in prison. Nobody even knew where I was.
15. The two others who were arrested with me had experiences similar to mine. Before they released us, they made us write letters promising not to speak against Shari'a or the government.
16. After I was released they told me that I would be under surveillance and to watch my conduct. After that I didn't take part in the [Sufi] gatherings in Bushehr as often. Instead I would attend gatherings in Shiraz that were assembled by the [Sufi] shaykh of Shiraz or gatherings in Tehran under the tutelage of the supreme Qutb, his excellency Majzub Ali Shah Gonabadi.¹³

Second Arrest

17. I did not have any other encounters with the security services until my two books were published. One of them dealt with the Quran's treatment of sodomy and the other was on the subject of Islam and politics. The former never received permission to be published, but I put it on my blog as a PDF file. But the second was published: Islam and Politics was cleared for publication by the Ministry of Guidance.
18. It was spring, after New Year's 1387 [March 20, 2008]. The police¹⁴ came to my place of work in two squad cars and showed their identification cards and an arrest warrant and arrested me. They

¹¹ A particularly sensitive topic in the eyes of the Shi'a clergy who dominate the Iranian religious and political scenes. See <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/232524/ghaybah>.

¹² Article 32 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran requires that detainees be informed of charges immediately upon arrest. See http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch03.php. In this case, the witness was presented with charges in writing in the form of his arrest warrant, as required by Article 32. But apparently those charges were modified by the time of his first formal hearing.

¹³ An influential leader of the Sufi community in Iran, Majzub Ali Shah is the master of the Sufi order followed by the witness. He has been subject to harassment in recent years. See <http://iranian.com/main/blog/freethought111/regime-summons-nur-ali-tabandeh-majzub-ali-shah-revolutionary-court.html>. See also <http://www.majzooban.pro/en/biography/3-hazrat-majzoub-ali-shah-the-present-master-of-the-order.html>.

¹⁴ The regular police of the IRI, called the NAJA (an acronym for their Persian name, *Nirou Entezami Jomhuri Eslami Iran*). NAJA has been implicated in many of the IRI's human rights violations. See <http://www.uskowioniran.com/2011/06/iran-police-naja-sanctioned-by-us.html>.

took me to the police station, and then to Adelabad Prison in Shiraz.¹⁵ They treated me normally. They didn't hit me. They were more interested in [carrying out the instructions of] the arrest warrant. Three days later, they took me to the Revolutionary Court in Abrishami Street in Shiraz. The judge's name was Hojjatoleslam Kazemi. I did not have a lawyer for the first session, but I was assigned a court-appointed attorney later.

19. I was informed of the charges against me during the first session. I was charged with the authorship of the book. I believe they recorded it as 'editing books contrary to Shari'a.' This time I was in prison for a year during which I was taken to court seven times. My court-appointed attorney did not present a competent defense. I felt like they had deprived me of my right to an attorney for a second time.
20. I was able to have visits from my parents every two weeks. I was released for two weeks on bail for a deed for one of my father's properties in Bushehr, which had a value of over 50 million Toumans [over 40,000 USD at the time]. [During this two-week period] I fled and with the help of smugglers I crossed the border from Iran's Kurdish region to Iraqi Kurdistan, and from there I went to Van in Turkey to seek asylum, but the Turkish police arrested me in Van and returned me to Iran.
21. This time they detained me in Shiraz, where I was imprisoned for another seven months. All in all, I endured about two years and one month of imprisonment: six months in the detention center in Bushehr [during my first arrest], one year in Adelabad Prison in Shiraz, and then another seven months after trying to flee.

Judgment and Exclusion from Formal Employment

22. During this final spell [of imprisonment] my judgment was issued, stating that I did not have permission to work or speak anywhere and that I was to be under surveillance. When I got out, I started doing normal work to pay my living expenses, because my father didn't have any money anymore, and he had also lost his property [because I fled when I was out on bail]. For the next two years I was a cook in a pizzeria in Shiraz. My focus was on my work and I didn't even participate in the Green Movement¹⁶ or vote in the elections.

Conditions of Sufis in Iran

23. Nor was I in contact with other Sufis, except occasionally with [Mazlum Ali Shah] who encouraged me to be patient, as always. Sometimes I would hear that another Sufi had been arrested.¹⁷ In my own estimation, around 300 Sufis have been detained in Iran, and two Sufi

¹⁵ See <http://www.majzooban.pro/en/sufi-news/3156-separating-of-jailed-gonabadi-dervishes-in-wards-of-shiraz-adel-abad-prison.html>. See also <http://deathpenaltynews.blogspot.com/2013/02/iran-8-hanged-in-shiraz-adelabad-prison.html>.

¹⁶ See <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/election-2009.html>.

¹⁷ At the time of publication two Sufi dervishes in Evin Prison in Tehran are on hunger strike in protest against their treatment. See <http://www.en-hrana.org/all-imprisoned-gonabadi-dervishes-in-ward-350-started-hunger-strike>. See also <http://www.majzooban.org/en/sufi-news/3902-jailed-dervishes-in-ward-350-alireza-roushan-and-mostafa-abdi-on-the-fifth-day-of-hunger-strike.html>. The repression of Sufism by IRI authorities has also taken the form of the demolition of their recognized places of worship. See http://www.rferl.org/content/Iranian_Authorities_Destroy_Holy_Sufi_Site_In_Isfahan/1495342.html.

clergymen, Mr. Jazabi, the shaykh of Isfahan, and Mr. Haeri, the shaykh of Tehran, have been arrested twice each.¹⁸

24. The Sufi community always requested permission to engage in *jihad* [from its spiritual leaders]. But their message was always that if we showed patience everything would work out, and we never challenged them.

25. In Iran today many young people have found their path and according to the information I have the population of Nimatullahi Soltan Ali Shahi adherents grows daily—not to exclude other orders, as all Sufis are brothers. Everyone has the same path. This is a source of joy for me, because our numbers were very low when I was arrested. There were just a handful of us. But now, thankfully, all of the youth are finding their way to poverty [Sufism].¹⁹

Escape from Iran

26. I left Iran legally with a passport and went to Ankara and was granted refugee status by the United Nations.

¹⁸ See <http://www.ihrv.org/inf/?p=412>. See also <http://www.majzooban.pro/en/sufi-news/2213-funeral-ceremony-of-honorable-great-late-shaikh-haj-shamseddin-haeri-qershad-ali-q-held-in-ward-350-of-evin-prison.html>.

¹⁹ Note that the witness uses the word ‘poverty’ here as a synonym for Sufism, which emphasizes the spiritual value of an ascetic lifestyle. See <http://www.nimatullahi.org/books/spiritual-poverty-in-sufism>.