



Witness Statement of Isa Savari

Name: Isa Savari
Place of Birth: Susangerd, Iran
Date of Birth: September 6, 1979
Occupation: Self-employed

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)
Date of Interview: December 1, 2012
Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Isa Savari, and was approved by Isa Savari on Feb 11, 2015. There are 64 paragraphs in this 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 Isa Savari, son of Mehdi. [I was] born on September 6, 1979 in Al Khafajieh [Sussangerd], [Susangerd], a city in Al-Ahwaz. [Before leaving Iran], I was self-employed.
2. I was imprisoned for political reasons twice. In 2007, I was sentenced to six years of imprisonment by Branch 4 of the Revolutionary Court in Ahvaz. I was conditionally freed from prison after three years. Then I was arrested on [the] border of [Iran and] Turkey in 2011. I spent eight months imprisoned in Dezful and then reached Turkey on December 30, 2011.
3. I was born into a family with a political background. My brother Musa, who is living in Norway now, was arrested in 1992. He spent one year in Karun prison. It's as if we were bred in a politically conscious environment. Due to racial, religious and other kinds of discrimination, political thoughts are prevalent among social, political and legal activists [here]. We absorbed these thoughts from our friends and contacts and [eventually] began our activities.
4. I was an activist in 2005, 2006 and 2007, even though our activities climaxed in 2005, during the 2005 demonstrations. [Nevertheless] we continued our activities until we were arrested in 2007.

Involvement in the 2005 Demonstrations

5. In 2005, when Khatami's presidential office made a public pledge, we printed and redistributed it amongst individuals and activists. The demonstrations began in April 2005, and lasted until around Eid al-Fitr¹ 2005 [November 2005].
6. During the demonstrations, we recorded videos of the protests and documented names, locations and photos of people who were arrested, to later submit them to human rights organizations, especially for the Al-Ahwaz Human Rights Foundation.
7. We produced as many photos and videos of the Basij² and police as we could. As you can imagine, making photos and videos proved to be a very difficult task during demonstrations. Eventually we sent photos and videos to many legal and political activists outside Iran.
8. I currently work in two areas. I am a legal and political activist and I participate in many TV programs.

Arrests and Interrogations

¹ The Breaking of the Fast, a religious holiday marking the end of Ramadaan. Id al-Fitr, ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA (24 July 2013 10:01 AM), <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/281653/Id-al-Fitr>.

² A paramilitary volunteer militia established by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. Hossein Aryan, *Iran's Basij Force*, Radio Free Europe (Dec. 7, 2008), www.rferl.org/content/Irans-Basij_Force_Mainstay_Of_Domestic_Security/1357081.html. The Basij are subordinate to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and were involved in the violent suppression of mass popular protest following the alleged rigging of the 2009 presidential elections. In 2014, a former Basij commander admitted to firing on protesters in 2009. See <http://iranpulse.al-monitor.com/index.php/2014/01/3602/iran-commander-admits-to-shooting-at-2009-protesters/>.

9. In prison, I saw prisoners who were not so active, but their sentences were ten, fifteen, or twenty years of imprisonment. When I was at the Ministry of Intelligence's detention center, my interrogator told me that if I was arrested in 2005, I would have been sentenced to thirty years in prison. However, as demonstrations in 2007 were not as tense as in 2005, they sentenced activists to six years or less. In prison, I saw some of my friends with whom I worked with on various activities. Some of them are still in prison, others have been freed. Some of them were arrested simultaneously with me.
10. My interrogator told me that [prison officials] issued the sentences themselves and it was not the judge's decision. He told me that court trials were used solely to make the process legal.
11. They did not tell us the interrogators' names, but someone told me [that my interrogator] was Mr. Sobhani. I do not know whether or not this was the case.
12. I did not see their faces, because I was blindfolded and they sat behind me. I did not even see the jailers who were inside the prison. He used to come in and interrogate me, and then I was interrogated or tortured by the executioner or jailor.
13. On July, 31 2007, I was arrested in the city of Al-Ahwaz in my uncle's [mother's side] house, located on Alavi Avenue. On that same night, two other friends of mine were also arrested. One of them, Abdol Rahman Heidari, lives in Australia now. [My other friend who was also arrested], lives in Ahwaz. The four of us were arrested on the same night. At the time of my second arrest we happened to be together and then, too, we were arrested together.
14. It was almost time for morning prayers when they knocked on the door. A relative of mine opened the door and they immediately captured him. Then [they sent him back to tell me] they wanted to have words with me. I was surprised. I thought I was dreaming. When I opened the door, the courtyard was filled with plain-clothes officers. They were security forces and some policemen who had accompanied them.
15. No one presented identity cards, a warrant or a court order for our arrest. Once I opened the door, they grabbed me and pushed me to the ground. They blindfolded me and took me into a car. I couldn't see a thing; they searched me. That same night, they went to my home in Al Khafajieh [Susangerd]. They searched my home and took all my Al-Ahwaz flags, and more than 600 or 700 manifestos.
16. They know nothing but insults. They continuously curse your religion and relatives. [All of them do that,] from jailer, to inspector.
17. They accused me of insulting the country's holy principles by insulting the twelve Imams. They did that even though they had no evidence to prove I had insulted the twelve Imams. I am Sunni, but some of my family are Shi'a. My mother and father are Shi'a.
18. They sent us to the Ministry of Intelligence [MOI]'s detention center in Chaharshir [neighborhood in Ahvaz]. There were two white buildings. They [the MOI agents who arrested us] sent us to the security forces' building. That same night the torture began. We did not know why they had decided to torture us.
19. There were at least twenty to thirty people. First they took us to the primary office [for registration] on Amanieh Avenue. Then they took us to No. 6 of the Ministry of Intelligence's detention center in Chaharshir, I saw more than ten or twelve vehicles when I opened the door.

Some of them were police vehicles and some other vehicle belonged to plainclothes officers. It is located near Imam Hussein University that operates under the direction of the Ministry of Intelligence.

20. They started to torture us once we arrived there. We did not know what our charges were. They did not give us any opportunity to ask why we were being tortured. One night I asked them what we had done. They did not answer. They only added that we were anti-revolutionary and Wahhabi.
21. They shouted at us and said it was the end for us. They said they would keep us there until our hair turned the color of our teeth. That was all. The next day they took us to Sepidar Prison to take our fingerprints. Then we were sent to court.
22. We spent 57 days at the Ministry of Intelligence's detention center. Then they sent us to Sepidar Prison. After spending a couple of months at Sepidar Prison, they sent us to Karun Prison.
23. During the first week, they questioned us every day in the morning, at noon, and again at night. After a week, they questioned us twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays. Since they had taken our documents, flags and manifestos, they asked us how and why we had them. We told them we had them because we had a personal interest in them. What we had done was not a crime. They told us that our situation [detention] was the result of our activities.
24. They recorded our email accounts [and passwords]. Since we sent emails from Internet cafes, they had records of all of our correspondence. We did not delete the letters we had sent abroad, which included our legal activities and the names of [other] prisoners.
25. Based on what they told us about our phone conversations, it seemed they had had us under surveillance for three months. They had been surveilling our telephone conversations, cell phone conversations, etc. They brought us flags and manifestos and asked why and with which organizations we had been working with. They wanted to know which parties we were working for. We did not work with any parties, but they accused us of doing so.
26. We used Yahoo Messenger and they had records of our conversations. They did not share any audio or video examples, but they repeated things I had said over the phone. We used IranCell as our cell phone service provider. We were told that Irancell is under the control of the IRGC.³
27. Ultimately, we faced three charges, "disseminating propaganda against the regime," "acting against national security through contact with groups outside of Iran," and "insulting the country's holy principles by insulting the Twelve Imams." The charge of insulting the country's holy principles by insulting the Twelve Imams was later dropped.
28. We were still sentenced to six years of imprisonment as a result of the two other charges. One year of the [six-year] sentence was based on the charge of "propaganda against the regime" and the remaining five years was for "contact with groups outside of Iran." We had been collaborating with a Saudi website, which was the reason for the additional five years of imprisonment that was added to my sentence. I was almost twenty-eight years old at the time.

³ IRGC control of Iran's main telecommunications companies including IranCell has been confirmed through numerous sources. See, for example: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/andygreenberg/2011/04/26/how-iran-became-the-worlds-worst-internet-oppressor/>.

Torture and Trial

29. Several types of torture were carried out. One tactic was when they would put the prisoner on a bed and tie his hands and feet to the bed bars so that he couldn't move. They would also put a piece of fabric into the prisoner's mouth in order to prevent him from speaking. Then they would hit him using a cable or a pipe, and continue the torture until the prisoner was unconscious.
30. Another torture method was when they would put a prisoner on a chair, tie his left hand and both feet together, gave him a pen and piece of paper [in his right hand] and would begin asking him questions. If he didn't answer, they would hit him—using a cable or pipe—in such a way that he would fall to the ground.
31. When I was arrested in 2011 for the second time, they tied my neck with a rope and told me they wanted to hang me. They pushed the chair from under my feet for one or two seconds. The rope was made of cotton.
32. When I was released, I had blood clots in my feet, as a result of having had them tied several times, on top of it being very cold inside the rooms [they would torture him in]. When I was being tortured, my undershirt would stick to my back. The room was filled with the smell of blood and putrefaction.
33. When you go for interrogations, at Sepidar Prison, they just state your charges and you either plead guilty or not guilty. That is all. However, during the trial, which began on Feb 19, 2008, the judge used to laugh at me when I defended myself. The judge was Mr. Toriki at Branch 4 of the Ahvaz Revolutionary Court. He told me he did not believe me. I asked him, if he did not believe me, what was the purpose of having a trial? It was just the judge and me inside the courtroom.
34. [I was never briefed] I was arrested on July 31, 2007 and they announced my charges the day after my arrest on August 1, 2007. Ayatollah Behbahani was the judge at Branch 12 [of the Revolutionary Court]; he was the one who informed me of my charges. I was blindfolded when they took me for trial. However, my family attended later [sessions] and they were able to identify him. They told me he was a cleric.
35. I was then tortured until October 22, 2007. I was kept in solitary confinement the entire time. Until that point, I was kept in the detention center of the Ministry of Intelligence office of Ahwaz. They sent us to prison on October 22, 2007.
36. I was kept in Sepidar Prison from October 22, 2007 until December 19, 2007. They sent us to Karun Prison on December 19, 2007. I was at Karun Prison from December 19, 2007 until my court date on Feb 19, 2008.
37. The trial session lasted about twenty or twenty-five minutes. They told me I had confessed to some charges. I told them my confessions had been obtained under torture. I told them they, too, would have confessed had they been in my situation. They forced me [to confess]; they threatened that they would hurt my family. How could I not confess? The only option is to confess so that they'll leave you alone.
38. During the investigative [interrogations] phase, they threatened my family. They arrested my father several times. They also arrested one of my brothers.

39. The second time I was arrested, near the border of Turkey, was different. They put a girl in the ward adjacent to me and informed me that she was my friend Mansour's daughter. They asked me where my friend was [he had escaped to Turkey at the time].
40. They were after him but he had escaped. They asked me where my friend was. They told me they would hurt his daughter if I did not answer. They told me I owed it to my community, since we have a tribal community. I cried and asked them to set the girl free.
41. They even asked me to participate in a non-political film the second time. They asked me to speak about families of activists who were outside of Iran. They dictated things about the families; things that did not make sense. I refused to participate in the film. What they wanted me to say about them was not even political. They did not leave me alone [about this] even after I was freed from prison. They kept calling me. I had to escape in order to avoid forced participation in such films. I do not know if they intended to broadcast the films on Press TV or somewhere else. It was not clear to me.

First Term of Imprisonment in Sepidar and Karun Prisons

42. The first time I was arrested, I was with 300 prisoners kept in Ward 6 of Sepidar Prison. Most prisoners slept in the courtyard. It was winter. They covered the courtyards using plastic sheets, but it would still leak when it rained. Some prisoners were sick with tuberculosis. We were kept in the same ward with thieves, addicts and murderers. They did not separate us and I didn't feel safe. We complained to the heads of the prison but they did nothing.
43. They held more than 500 prisoners in Ward 6 of Karun Prison, by contrast, although there were more spaces available in the same prison. The situation was even worse than in Sepidar Prison. We could not even get close to the heads of the prison [to register complaints]. Whenever an official came to visit, they locked the doors and we were not allowed to see him. Again, we were held in the same ward as thieves and addicts.
44. Other prisoners told us that they obtained drugs from them [the prison guards]. They smoked opium inside the cells. We could not object, because they were [drug] addicts. We complained and wrote letters saying that we cannot live with them. We even asked our families to write letters. However, nothing changed. We witnessed the deaths of some [drug] addicts. They were sick with tuberculosis.
45. They had a medical center in Karun Prison, but it was not helpful. When they saw our prison cards and realized we were political prisoners, they said, "Put this separatist in the trash." They treat addicts and political prisoners differently.
46. The guards and interrogators spoke Farsi with us. There were some Arabs among them, but more than ninety per cent were Fars. I could not tell from their accents which region they were from.
47. We were active even in Karun prison. Once I wrote a letter to a human rights organization which they took from my mother. They summoned me to the Ministry of Intelligence for ten days.
48. They did not torture me because they had already sentenced me to six years of imprisonment. They just inquired why I resumed my activities. I said I cannot keep silent [about the situation and the sentences I see]. They said I should have been grateful that I only had six years of

imprisonment, because if they had arrested me in 2005 my sentence would have been thirty years [in prison].

49. It was the first chief interrogator who said these things to me. He was the same interrogator that I had when they arrested me in 2007. He was the same man who interrogated me when I was sent from Karun prison for ten days. He was also the same man who interrogated me in 2011. In 2011 he told me “it seems that you want to always be beside me.” I remember his voice.
50. After they sentenced me to six years of imprisonment, they sent me to Karun Prison. I was there until August 2, 2008. Then we were transferred to Behzisti Prison in a region located almost fifteen kilometers from Ahwaz. I was there until I was freed, so exactly three years total. I was freed on July 15, 2010. Three years during that imprisonment and another eight months in 2011.
51. In total I’ve been imprisoned at four different prisons: Karun, Sepidar, Clinic and Dezful. Dezful Prison is the worst, even worse than Karun. Each ward contained fifty to sixty beds, which meant each ward should have a maximum sixty-person capacity. The prison’s capacity in total, at most, is 100 prisoners, and that’s if forty prisoners sleep in the courtyard. However, they kept 500 to 600 prisoners in these wards which only had fifty to sixty beds. At Dezful Prison I had five cellmates.

Second Arrest and Imprisonment in Dezful Prison

52. [After I was released I tried to leave Iran], however they followed and arrested me on the borders of Turkey. The Border Police of Sarvar arrested me at the Sarvar border in the Orumiyeh region [of northwest Iran]. They transferred me to the Ministry of Intelligence detention center in Orumiyeh. I spent two days there. They did not torture me there.
53. Then, they put me in a place called “the break room” for twenty-four hours. They tie your hands and feet for twenty-four hours and open water valves. It was April 2011. It was hot. I had to drink water like a dog, since my hands and feet were tied. I was in my underwear. After twenty-four hours, I could not speak. They took revenge on me.
54. This time our activity was only to arrange an anniversary for the 2005 demonstrations in Al-Ahwaz. Our activity was not that serious. The worst case could be [framed as] propaganda against the regime. But they do not care about charges [anyway].
55. My friends are still in prison. I was freed on bail because of my health. My health was in poor condition at the time.
56. I had become too weak as a result of continuous torture. In Dezful Prison, they put me in a ward with some savages. They were not prisoners, they were savages. For eight months, I had no visitors or phone calls. From the time I was imprisoned to the moment I was freed, I had no visitations with my family. They [prison authorities] did not allow anyone to speak to me.
57. I slept near the prisoners’ sandals. Whoever came out of water closet would put his wet sandals above my head. I did not have the right to sleep on a bed. They treated me like an animal.
58. The head of Dezful Prison, Mr. Zamani, told them to put me in a [horrible] place, to live like a dog. Finally, I asked a prisoner to call my family so that they could help me out. I had reached a

point that I could not talk. They had to free me on bail. The bail was 2 billion Rials (about \$65,000 US in 2011).

Freedom from Prison

59. I was freed, but my friends are still in Dezful Prison. One of them is my relative, I will tell you his name My relative with who I was arrested with is still in Dezful Prison and his fate is still undecided. I had no interaction with him in prison. Everyone was held in separate wards
60. After I was freed, my family took me to Imam Khomeini Hospital in Ahwaz. I spent fifteen days there. After that, I stayed at home but security officials kept calling me, threatening me not to attempt to escape or talk to anyone.
61. For my bail, we used title deeds of three houses that belonged to my relatives which totaled 2 billion Rials. The houses were located in the village.
62. I was freed on October 12, 2011. Almost one or two months later, I reached Turkey, on December 30, 2011. It was wintertime. I went straight to the UNHCR offices.
63. Since my departure from Iran, they summoned my younger brother. After my first arrest, they fired one of my brothers, a sergeant in army. I have the document to prove this.
64. I do not have the right to speak with my family, since they [security agents] have told them not to call me. Only God knows how badly I want to speak with my mother and father, but I cannot. I do not speak with them for their own safety. They have summoned them several times, even though they did not commit any crime. This is about me. Their phone calls are being monitored; families with politically active members are under surveillance.