



Witness Statement of Jahangir Abdollahi

Name: Jahangir Abdollahi
Place of Birth: Sardasht - Iran
Date of Birth: 1985
Occupation: Student

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

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Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Jahangir Abdollahi. It was approved by Jahangir Abdollahi on May 5, 2012. There are 30 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. I am Jahangir Abdollahi. I was born in 1985-6 in Sardasht. I am a Kurd. I was a master's student in Political Science at Tehran University.
2. I was arrested in early 2010 some time after a gathering in front of Tehran University to protest the execution of Ehsan Fattahian and thereafter spent four months at Evin Prison. I was released in May 2010 on bail and left Iran for Iraqi Kurdistan in December 2010.

Activities as a University Student

3. My political activities started in 2005. The first year I started studying in the university I met with some Kurdish students working in an NGO and commenced activities including involvement with the student journal afterwards. The first NGO I worked with was [a cultural organization] called Kaziveh [a Kurdish proper name meaning "Dawn"] in the Tehran University of Medical Sciences. We received permission for gatherings with the help of the Islamic Association of the university [an organization with ties to the government] and held [Kurdish-themed] ceremonies, for example annual commemorations of the anniversary of [the chemical bombardment of] Halabja.
4. We staged these ceremonies in Ferdowsi Hall in the College of Literature until our NGO was shut down by the *herasat* office (the morality police present in all government institutions) and the disciplinary committee of the university on the excuse of six months' inactivity on our part, but this was fabricated. Their true intention was to dampen the [political] atmosphere at the university.
5. The authorities had preconditions when allowing us have these gatherings, including a legal framework in which the speakers had to give their speeches, or the authorities had to see and our signs and the video clips that we wanted to show so that they could approve [or reject] them. They said we would be held accountable if we showed an unapproved clip and that our permits would be either suspended or cancelled. We got these warnings from the student club in the Foulad Building which worked under the University Students' Basij. There was a representative of the Supreme Leader, a Basij representative and number of student representatives in that camp who established the press monitoring board of the university and decided which plans and programs would be approved and which ones would be rejected.
6. I registered the first publication that I ran in 2006. It was named *Havar* [Roar], and it was a political, social, and cultural publication. It was shut down in 2007. Later in 2008 I managed to get the permission to run another magazine called *Ashti* [Reconciliation] which was a magazine dealing with social and cultural matters produced by the Kurdish students of Tehran University. This magazine was published until right before I was arrested in 2009. The permits for these journals limited their dissemination to the university, but we distributed them in Kurdish areas, too. In addition to cultural and social issues about Kurds, we also talked about political issues every now and then. For example we covered issues that happened in Kurdistan and were considered political and security issues. We also held some gatherings on campus about events in Kurdistan like executions, arrests, and the intentional burning of forests and discussions on native language issues.

7. Despite all of these risks and obstacles, the atmosphere of the university was good until 2008-09, when they started having harsh reactions and arrests and issuing heavy sentences. The atmosphere became more repressive and the events which occurred brought an end to all of our activities.
8. I was summoned once in 2007 and was interrogated for several hours. I was criticized twice, once for the memorial gathering on the anniversary of Halabja and once for a gathering we held for Simin Chaychi, a Kurdish poet. I was criticized because when giving her the prize, I shook her hand [in contravention of the Islamic beliefs prohibiting a Muslim man from touching a woman who is not his wife, mother, daughter or other close relative]. I was also arrested once in 2009.

Arrest

9. My arrest in 2010 happened because of my activities related to the case of Ehsan Fattahian, a Kurdish political activist and prisoner who had been sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment and was then suddenly sentenced to death. Just as suddenly, without any prior warning, Fattahian was executed. We talked with some of the representatives in the [national] parliament after his execution and they shared the issue with other representatives but there was no response.
10. We tried to hold a protest against his execution at the university on November 13, 2009. Some of the individuals who had been arrested previously informed us that they had been contacted by the Intelligence services and had been told that if we held a gathering, everybody would be arrested. So we postponed our gathering to November 16 and held it in front of the entrance of the College of Political Science. We staged a gathering that lasted for an hour and a half, after which seven people were arrested. I went into hiding for two months before returning to the university.
11. One day when I was in a café in the university, an intelligence agent came in. I looked at him and reacted very normally, because I didn't think he could be an interrogator or intelligence agent; he didn't look like one. I went back to the campus and he followed me. I kept an eye on him until I exited the campus and entered Resalat Street. He signaled with his hand to someone outside, on the street. It was then that I figured he was signaling to someone outside that I was leaving the campus. I turned to the dormitory bus but someone came forward and took my hand. I pulled my hand away. Then two more people came forward and showed me their guns and I gave up. They put me in a car and took me to Evin Prison.

Evin Prison

12. On the way to Evin Prison they told me that they had arrested me for the distribution of narcotics and that they had received reports that I was a drug dealer. My eyes were open until the entrance of the prison. Then they opened the gate and blindfolded me and entered the prison. We entered a hall. From behind me, I heard sounds of lashings and talk of execution. This was an attempt to scare me, and it was the first scene I encountered in Evin. Then they put me in a cell.
13. The cell was 2 by 3 meters. There was a tap and a sink, but it didn't have a bathroom. It was dark and the light bulb in the lamp had burned out. It is possible that it didn't even have a lamp. The only light in the room came in from the small window. I was in the cell for the night. The next morning at 8 AM they woke me up and took me for interrogation. Listening to their voices I figured there were 5 interrogators. They beat me up before even asking me anything. Then they started asking questions while beating me.

14. I felt dizzy and didn't know what to say. Then they put a piece of paper in front of me and asked me to write my information. One of them told me to write my charges. I said I didn't know what I was charged with. I asked if I was supposed to write drug trafficking. He asked why I thought that. I said they had told me so. I said I didn't know and they had to tell me about my charges or I was not going to write anything. He told me that I had been charged with participation in gatherings. Then they asked me about the November 16th gathering. They claimed that I had a connection with Kurdish political parties and had participated in vandalism.
15. I had no connection with Kurdish political parties although I had given some interviews to television networks run by Kurdish political parties but the agents didn't know about that because I had not used my real name in the interviews. They only had some photos of me from the rally. There were about 100 agents at a rally in which there were only 80 of us participants. They put about 10 photos of myself from the rally in front of me. I spent 60 days in solitary confinement and had 14 interrogation sessions, each from 8 in the morning till 8 in the evening.
16. My family found out about my arrest through my friends and Kurdish satellite TV stations that knew about my arrest. After 43 days, on a Friday, they came and asked me to go out of the cell. They didn't interrogate on Fridays. I asked why (they wanted me to go out)? They didn't say anything and just asked me to go out. They put me in a car and took me to a hall where prisoners had visitors. About 20 prisoners talked to their parents there. I asked my family to hire me an attorney and tell all Kurdish satellite TV channels about my condition.
17. During the interrogations, there were days when three people would hit me, slap me in the face and kick me all at the same time. When there were two interrogators, one of them would act as the good cop and the other would be the bad cop. They would force me to sit in front of the wall with my legs crossed and my head down. I sat like that for 3-4 hours and my legs went numb and sometimes an interrogator would sit on my back or put a heavy bag on my back so that I could not move. On two occasions, he told me to stand up after several hours of that, and since my legs were numb, I fell down. The first time, I passed out, and the second time he punched me in the back and I passed out as a result. Once on the third day of a hunger strike they took me for an interrogation and forced me to stand up until I passed out.
18. The charges they brought against me after these interrogations were cooperation and assembly against the system and propaganda against the system. The other charge was that I allegedly had connections with Kurdish political parties, which, they claimed, constituted actions against national security. I spent two months in solitary confinement and two months in the general ward 350 which was also called the workers' ward.

Cellmate of Farhad Vakili

19. When Mr. [Farzad] Kamangar, Mr. [Farhad] Vakili, Mr. [Ali] Heydarian and Ms. [Shirin] Alamhouli were executed, I was in the prison. I was a cellmate of Farhad Vakili for about 30 days in ward 350. During that time, he explained his case to me in full. Vakili and Heydarian were arrested in a house in Tehran. [One day] the agents waited at the house until the afternoon when Farzad Kamangar arrived there and they arrested him. Kamangar had nothing to do with the cases of Vakili and Heydarian but they combined their cases in the court. Vakili said that during the interrogations they would strip all three of them naked and beat them. Farzad Kamangar acquired a limp and by the end of the interrogations he had lost the use of one of his eyes.

20. During the time I was in the same ward with Vakili, they came and called him and asked him to write a pardon plea for the Supreme Leader. Apparently the three of them had been given that option. They had told them that if they wrote the plea they would not be executed and they would just be sentenced to life imprisonment. Vakili responded, "I am not going to write such a plea. Announce my sentence, whatever it is. I have no reason to ask the Leader for a pardon. I have not done anything that needs to be forgiven." Two weeks later, they executed him.
21. Once, when we were in the ward, the representative of the prosecutor and some inspectors came to investigate the conditions of the prison. We had 150 political prisoners in our ward. Vakili had been sent to our ward for two weeks at that time. That day the prisoners asked the prosecutor's representative some questions. At the end when the representative was going, Vakili told him that he had questions about his case too and explained what his charges and accusations were and told the representative that he had been sentenced to death but that thereafter they told him that his death sentence had been commuted, but that now he was in limbo. He told the prosecutor's representative that he wanted some certainty about his sentence: was he going to be executed after all, or had the sentence indeed been reduced? The representative promised to follow up, and after two weeks all of them were executed. The day they executed him, we were playing volleyball. The guards called him and asked him to go to see their commander, and then they executed him.

Trial

22. During my detention, they took me to the courthouse, before Judge Pirabbasi [the chairman of Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran] one time. My first attorney was Mr. Mohammad Oliaifar, but they had not informed him about the date of my trial and he was not there. In the court they told me that my case was very substantial. I told them since my attorney was not present I didn't want to talk. That was when the secretary of the judge came to the room and said that my attorney was there. He used the word "bait" [to refer to the arrival my attorney] and I was surprised. I could not imagine why they wanted to arrest Mr. Oliaifar.¹ The next day, I saw him [imprisoned] in the ward.
23. My next hearing was two or three weeks later. This time Dr. Nasser Zarafshan was my attorney. I defended myself in court, and Mr. Zarafshan offered a defense of me as well. They set 100 Million Toumans bail [\$100,000 at the time] and my family bailed me out after four days. I was released on May 14, 2010. I had been in prison for four months.

Freedom

24. After I was released, I returned to the university to enroll for the next term. But neither could I enroll, nor did they officially tell me that I was expelled. Since they had not returned my laptop and cell phone [after my release], they called me to go to the prison to get my belongings. When I went there they asked me what I had and had not done and finally told me to go home because my possessions had not been found yet.
25. After a while, 30-40 agents attacked our home in Sardasht. I was not home at that time so I managed to escape. I spent some weeks in villages around the city and then my brother informed

¹ Mohammad Oliaifar, an attorney notable for defending political prisoners, was eventually released from Evin Prison in April 2011 after serving a one-year prison sentence for a crime of spreading propaganda against the regime 'through interviews.' See <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/35732/> (in Persian).

me that they (the government) were planning to arrest me [again]. As such, I was forced to cross the border to Iraqi Kurdistan with the help of smugglers on December 7, 2010.

26. I talked to Kurdish-language television stations in Iraq. Government agents threatened my family in an attempt to lure me back, make me keep silent or leave Iraq. Once, they detained my brother for a week.

Iran's Kurdish Region and Elections

27. Mr. Khatami was the first person the people counted on. They put their hopes in him but they were making a mistake. Anyway, during the Khatami era there was some political freedom, freedom of speech and freedom for the newspapers. You could criticize [the government during the Khatami presidency]. Based on what we have heard, [we perceive that] the atmosphere of the university was more open at the time. I entered the University in 2005 when Ahmadinejad came to office and at that time the [political] atmosphere was extremely restrictive.
28. In the first election won by Ahmadinejad [2005], I did not want to vote. I was not yet in university at that time and they said if I did not vote they would not allow me to enroll in the university. I cast my vote without checking any of the names, just to have the election stamp on my ID certificate.
29. In the second election won by Ahmadinejad [2009] I couldn't vote because I was in Tehran and I didn't have my ID with me, but I was a Karroubi supporter. A number of Kurdish students, including myself, had some meetings with Mr. Karroubi and Mr. Karbaschi [Karroubi's campaign manager]. We discussed our desires and they accepted them. Those desires were for increased ethnic rights, discussions about native languages, and women's rights. We told them that we would officially support them. We did supported them in Kurdish journals and on the internet (blogs and websites). We even managed to make some of the Kurdish (satellite) television networks support them. We officially campaigned for Mr. Karroubi in the Kurdish region.
30. After the results were announced, there was silence in the Kurdish region [regarding the outcome] and we didn't stage protests. They [Kurds] had their own reasons [not to have any protests], because if they had staged any protests in the Kurdish region, they [the government] would suppress them (the people) as "counter-revolutionaries". The [political] oppression in the Kurdish region is both more widespread and more severe, and would certainly have been brutal.