



Witness Statement of Kajal Sheikhmohammadi

Name: Kajal Sheikhmohammadi

Place of Birth: Mahabad, Iran

Date of Birth: October 23, 1972/73

Occupation: Activist

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

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Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Kajal Sheikhmohammadi. It was approved by Kajal Sheikhmohammadi on June 21, 2012. There are 24 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 Kajal Sheikhmohammadi. I was born in 1351 (1972-73). I completed my schooling up to an eighth grade level.
2. My first experiences with activism were in the field of women's rights. But I wasn't alone. There was a group of us who would go and visit women at their homes. These women discussed their lives with us. After a while we gradually began to cooperate with the women's committee of a group called PJAK.¹
3. My activism began around 1999 when [Abdullah] Ocalan was arrested. His arrest awakened my political consciousness. My husband, Ghafur Mohammadi, is a noted human rights activist who worked with the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan [Kurdish acronym RMMK] with Mohammad Seddigh Kaboudvand. He previously served five years in prison. Around the time that they wanted to arrest me my husband had sent me my passport and immigration documents.

Arrest

4. In September/October 2009, I was arrested by the Intelligence Division of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps [IRGC]. I was arrested without being informed of the charges against me. Several months later, after five to six months of suffering in the IRGC Intelligence detention center in Mahabad and later in Mahabad Central Prison, I was finally informed that I was being charged with collaborating with the PJAK and being an active member of the Mothers of Reconciliation group.
5. At the time I had just had an operation for a thrombosis in my leg, and as a result I had several stitches. I needed to see a doctor about the stitches. My niece accompanied me to see a doctor. Since I still had stitches, I was unable to walk. When the doctor's examination came to a close, suddenly my phone rang and my landlord told me that I should rush home because my house was full of people from the IRGC Intelligence Division. I asked him why they were there. He told me that he did not know and that although he had tried to prevent the agents from entering the premises, they did not heed him. The agents had broken the door and a window and had entered my home.
6. When I got back, I saw that there were about ten agents in my home. They had turned my home inside out. As soon as they saw me they ran out and grabbed me. In shock, I asked them what was happening and they told me to be silent and follow them inside. Once inside, they asked me a few questions about my husband, who fled to Europe about three years before.. They asked me where

¹ PJAK is a Kurdish political and paramilitary group affiliated that has engaged in armed conflict with the Islamic Republic's regular military and IRGC forces. See <http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-World-Insurgency-and-Terrorism/Partiya-Jiyana-Azada-Kurdistane-PJAK.html>

my husband had gone, where he was at that moment and what he was doing. They told me that I had to go with them. I refused to go because I was still recovering, and I told them that they could ask me any questions they have at my place. They said that that would not work and that I had to go with them so that they could record my voice. They said that it would just take 5 minutes and then they would bring me back, since, as they said, “we know you are sick and all”. I told them that I would not go. They took me by force and told me not to speak or try to scream. They gagged and blindfolded me with some cloth. They put me in the car. I did not know where we were going. Along the way, they checked my cell phone. They claimed that it contained “counterrevolutionary music.”

Detention and Questioning

7. [I was still blindfolded, and they took me into the building by force.] Later on, I learned where they had taken me: the IRGC Intelligence Division’s detention center in Mahabad. We entered a room that had a bed. They did not sit. At the time I was unable to sit and had to either stand or lie down. They told me to be comfortable. I chose to lie down and they asked me a few questions. They asked me “why do you cooperate with the PJAK? What kind of work do you do with the Mothers of Reconciliation Group? Whom do you know?”, and other questions like that.
8. I told them that I did work with the Mother’s Reconciliation Group. When a Kurd would get killed in conflicts with the government (we call them martyrs), we would hold a ceremony to mourn them in private homes, but not out in public. For instance, the son of a friend of mine was martyred. In his memory, we held a ceremony. This was the main purpose of the Mothers of Reconciliation. They (the authorities) said that since he was against the Islamic Republic of Iran we should not hold mourning ceremonies for him. We ignored them.
9. I informed my family of my arrest myself. When I received the call from my landlord, I called my sister and told her that I was heading home. I told her that intelligence agents were at my place and I would take her daughter, who had accompanied me to the doctor’s office, back home with me and that we would return after that. I did not know that we would not return. In the detention center, I told the agents to send my niece—who was 20 at the time—home, but they refused to do so and they held her there too. My niece was with me from the time that they arrested us at 7 pm until 1:30 am. I started shouting and complaining about my niece, telling them “let the poor girl go home, whatever I have done, she had nothing to do with it, all she did was to accompany me to the doctor’s office.” They finally agreed to send her home, and that is how my family learned about my arrest.
10. I was in that room for 15 days, and I was interrogated for [that whole period of] 15 days, at which point they sent me to Mahabad Central Prison, which was just ten minutes away. Three agents had been questioning me [in the detention center]. One of them was from Orumiyeh and the other two were from Mahabad.
11. The IRGC Intelligence Division arrested me, [but] the Ministry of Intelligence [also] sent agents to interrogate me. [The agent from the Ministry] cursed the IRGC Intelligence Division. “These

IRGC Intelligence idiots rush too much. We wanted to arrest you in the Tehran Airport. We had information that you wanted to leave. You had even reserved a flight. We didn't want to arrest you here. We wanted to arrest you at the Tehran airport so that your mother wouldn't know you that had been arrested. Your family would have thought you went to Europe.”

12. When I arrived there, I had no idea where I was. But I did see my interrogators because I was not blindfolded during my interrogations. Also, once I went to Mahabad Central Prison, I was not blindfolded. The conditions there were horrific. The prison was very dirty, and there were always animals and insects around. It was filled with cockroaches and people often got sick. The Ministry of Health sent a representative to inspect the prison's conditions once during my imprisonment. When we were asked whether we had any complaints, I brought up the cockroaches. The prison warden turned red in the face when I complained and insulted me afterwards.
13. One of my interrogators was named Mr. Haidari, but the others did not introduce themselves. They used Mr. Haidari's name, which is how I learned it. Haidari had glasses, and straight black hair with no beard. He was somewhat short and had a medium build. There was another interrogator that they called Haji Agha, who was tall and heavy-set with white hair and a short beard.
14. They never tortured me, but the repetitive questions were a form of torture in and of itself. Being sick in prison was a form of torture as well. I was in prison for 5 or 6 months. During these 5 or 6 months the stitches remained in my leg. In fact, that night that I had gone to see the doctor [before my arrest], I wanted him to remove the stitches.
15. My leg was in intolerable shape but the authorities at the IRGC Intelligence Division detention center would not [give me access to medical care] until I went on a three-day hunger strike. By that point, my leg was infected and puss was coming out of the wound. Even though I kept telling them to take me [to see a doctor], they would not. When they took to me to Mahabad Central Prison, I again requested [medical attention], but still they wouldn't take me. I finally went on a hunger strike, and it lasted about three days. They asked me why I was on hunger strike. I told them I was so sick that all of my stitches had gotten infected. I asked them why they wouldn't (treat) me. They told me they would provide me treatment if I ended my hunger strike, but I would not end my hunger strike until they took me to a doctor. Finally they took me to my own doctor outside the prison, who had performed my initial thrombosis surgery [before my arrest]. Since I was designated as a dangerous prisoner they sent four armed guards with me: two ordinary prison guards and two agents from the IRGC Intelligence Division.
16. I was taken to court around four and a half months after my arrest. Once I entered Mahabad Central Prison after the first 15 days [of my detention spent in the IRGC Intelligence Division's detention center], when I was interrogated daily, I was not asked any further questions. They left me alone. They just kept me prisoner there with criminals like murderers and other unfortunate people. I was with all of them in the same room: there were always twenty of us to a room. It took about four and a half months. I protested. I asked “why have I been arrested? If you have arrested me, why aren't you doing anything? At least send me to court to clarify my sentence. I don't want to stay like this, and if you continue this, I am going on a hunger strike again. If I am

detained one day longer than five months I will stop eating until I die.” They told me they would answer me and that at exactly five months they would take me to court, and that is exactly what happened. After 5 months [total] they finally took me to court.

Prosecution

17. [I was tried in] Branch One of the Revolutionary Court of Mahabad in February/March of 2010. The judge was named Khodadadi. My trial lasted ten minutes. That is not a trial! They asked the same repetitive questions: “why did you assist PJAK and the Mothers of Reconciliation?” They knew the names of some of the mothers [members]. They would say “you know these names. Why do you say you don’t know these names?” I said “I do not know any of them. I am not a [member of] the Mothers of Reconciliation. These are just my friends.” He said “No. These are the Mothers of Reconciliation, [and you collaborate with] these people whom you call friends.” I said no. I had a lawyer whom my husband had hired. The lawyer was a friend of Khodadadi. In his defense of me, he said, “during the period in question she was so sick that she could not engage in any political activism.” [The trial] took five minutes. Officially, I was sentenced to two years in prison. Ultimately they said that after [serving] five months [in prison] I could be released on bail.
18. Over the course of ten minutes they asked the same redundant questions, but it was for show. They don’t admit it, but they determine the verdict beforehand. A week after I left prison on bail, the verdict came. I was sentenced to two years in prison. I went to formally protest [the sentence] with my lawyer. With my lawyer I said “Mr. Judge I did not accept any of these [charges]. And you accepted [my argument]. So why have you sentenced me to two years of imprisonment?” He said, “Honestly, sister, I am a nobody here, it was the IRGC Intelligence Division who determined the two year sentence.” He [the judge] himself said, “When the IRGC Intelligence Division tells me I have to sentence you to two years, I am obliged to implement their instructions. I am a nobody here.” I asked “Judge, then why did you study so much to become a judge?” [He said] “In political matters we cannot [independently issue judgments].”
19. The judge suggested, “If your husband is in Europe, why don’t you go to Europe?” I told him I had paid one hundred million [Toumans, roughly \$100,000 at the time] in bond. I said that I had left a 100 million bond and that I was not leaving, but I did not mean it. I said “go to Europe for what? Return the 100 million and I will go.” Once I said that to the judge, the judge said “no sister, why would you spend two years in prison? Go, escape.” He himself showed me an escape route [to take to Iraq]. I believe that he did this because he was friends with my lawyer and he had sympathy for me since I was a woman and I was injured. But I can’t say if he was trying to get something out of me. [To be safe] I told him there was no way I was leaving. But as soon as I emerged from the court, I contacted my husband to tell him that I needed to escape.

Exiting Iran

20. Twenty days after I received my sentence, I crossed the Iran-Iraq border illegally and went to Bashou, in IraqI Kurdistan. I wanted to go to Europe.

Family

21. They harassed my brother a great deal. During the course of my detention from September/October 2009 to February/March 2010, he would try to check on my file on a daily basis to see what my situation was. Once the judge even told him “if you come around asking about your sister’s file again, I will have you arrested too. Why do you keep asking about this file?” Everyday, officials at the courthouse would threaten him. At the same time, they told me in jail that no one was concerned about me: “Let’s see Ocalan come and free you,” they said, “your family isn’t even asking about you!” When I left Iran for Europe, they arrested him. They claimed that he had previous knowledge that I was leaving. He doesn’t say much on the phone, but he still gets suspicious calls from people speaking Persian with Persian (not Kurdish) accents asking questions such as “why did your sister leave? Where does she live? Well, you are going to serve her two years’ sentence.” and other questions like that.
22. When I left for Europe, they arrested my daughter as well. The same IRGC agent who previously interrogated me also arrested her. My daughter is 22—she was 18 or 19 at the time. The IRGC wanted to use her to determine my whereabouts, but her husband made clear that we did not have any contact and she was released after one night. She was not tortured.

Habibollah Golparipour

23. [My name is mentioned in Kurdish political prisoner Habibollah Golparipour’s trial court judgment.] The Mothers of Reconciliation used to work with Habibollah Golparipour from time to time. He collaborated with us on our usual activities: he would typically direct us to different places where people were holding ceremonies for deceased loved ones, like in Bukan, Orumiyeh, Sardasht, and other cities.
24. I was arrested two days after Golparipour. During one of my interrogations, they brought him in front of me. He was blindfolded and his foot and hand were broken. They asked if I recognized him. I said no, and they retorted that he had confessed to knowing me. I rejected their assertion again. I suspect that a smuggler known as Salaam, who smuggled books from Iraq for Golparipour, and to whom Golparipour had previously introduced me [gave the testimony linking me to Golparipour]. He was arrested along with Golparipour, but then he was freed two days later whereas Golparipour has been sentenced to death. I find that suspicious.