



Witness Statement of Karim Dahimi

Name: Karim Dahimi
Place of Birth: Ahvaz, Iran
Date of Birth: September 23, 1971
Occupation: Teacher

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)
Date of Interview: September 25, 2012
Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Karim Dahimi. It was approved by Karim Dahimi on September 25, 2013. There are 66 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

Introduction

1. My name is Karim Dahimi. I was born in October, 1971. I was a schoolteacher and a resident of the Kuh Alavi neighborhood of Ahvaz. I am married and have three children.

Initial Activities

2. My [cultural] activities began in 1989. I received my high school diploma in 1989-90 and from 1991-93, I was a university student majoring in education. Our activities at the time were limited to the distribution of statements and having connections with other groups in Mohammareh, Fallahiyeh¹, Shush and other cities to hold cultural gatherings such as poetry readings. We did not engage in any other activities. Nevertheless, my file [with the security services] listed these activities as "intelligence-gathering" and "actions against national security." There was only one thing [that I did] that could have been considered very dangerous from the point of view of the Islamic Republic; my actions in relation to the sugarcane project. At night, we wiped out the lines marking the [confiscated] land so that the project could not be carried out.
3. The Sugarcane Development Company project was [initiated and] implemented in 1991-92. Privately-owned plots of land were confiscated [from several people] between Mohammareh, Abadan and Ahvaz. The confiscations of these agricultural properties caused many people to migrate. Seyyed Ahmad Mousavi, a *Majles* representative at the time², claimed that close to 15 villages along the banks of the Karun River were destroyed by the government.³ They gave people about 20 million Rials [roughly \$1,370,000 US at the time] per hectare for land between Ahvaz and Shushtar. Today the land in Shabiyah is worth more than 30 million Rials per hectare. It is all very fertile land.
4. Government policy in this regard was malevolent. They [the people involved in the project] would approach local supporters with whom they were in contact, such as Basij or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) members who had property [in the areas they wanted to confiscate], and they would buy land from three of them for a price that could have been higher. Then those individuals whose land was located in between these plots were forced to give away their property. Many [landowners] were killed [resisting the process], or ended up in jail as a result. There was even an investigation by the *Majles* after one person was killed in the region.⁴ They attacked some villages, for instance Shabiyah and Daqaqelah villages between Shushtar and Ahvaz, and threw some people into prison. Hundreds of people were forced to sell their land and migrate.

¹ In this interview the witness uses local Arab names for several cities in the region that are known by alternate Persian names to many people in Iran and the international community. Mohammareh is the Arab name for the city of Khorramshahr. Fallahiyeh is also known as Shadegan.

² *Majles Shora Eslami*, the Islamic Republic of Iran's elected parliament. Ahmad Mousavi has served as a member of the *Majles*, Vice President for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs under former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and as Iran's ambassador to Syria until 2011. See <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/08/21/163308.html>. See also <http://www.ivansahar.com/iran-executive-power.htm>. There are no records of the claim quoted above.

³ See <http://ettelaat.net/05-04/news.asp?id=4751> (in Persian) and <http://borwall.blogfa.com/post-255.aspx> (in Persian).

⁴ See <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/05/29/109946.html> (in Persian).

5. There is an organization called the Kowsar Institute⁵ which was in charge of a plan to divert water from the Karun River and to support the Sugarcane Development Company's project. Many companies are involved in this project. People used to grow wheat on the land that is now used for sugarcane cultivation but now they have been forced to migrate to other cities. The employment situation of the people is very bad. They are mostly unemployed or employed in the informal sector, and others have been dragged into less dignified activities.
6. People are trying to make a living. I know people who used to own date groves but their land has been destroyed. People made a living through date farm products, but now they are deprived. They were forced to migrate to the cities of Fallahiyeh, Ahvaz, Abadan and Mohammareh. Most of those who were living on the land surrounding Shushtar, for instance, migrated to the cities of Ahvaz and Shushtar. But it is very difficult for a villager to find a job in the city.
7. Most of our activities at that time were connected with this issue. Sometimes we issued threats against those who were involved in this project. These threats were limited; we would write letters and send them to the homes of these people. Nothing more. At schools and universities in the region, we handed out statements in order to shed light on the sugarcane project or other projects that were causing people to leave the region. At that time we had very few people in the region [Khuzestan] who came from the North [of the country] and other places. But in recent years many people came from Isfahan, Azarbaijan and Azna.⁶ As a school teacher and assistant principal, I witnessed myself that many of the students were coming from Azna. When we asked the families why they had come to Khuzestan, they would say that they had rented out their homes in their own cities and received loans or job opportunities to entice them to move to Khuzestan. This illustrates a policy that has been pursued by the government in recent years to change the makeup of the population.
8. At the request of the executives of one of the [sugar] companies, a plan was put in place for the construction of residences for 50,000 people in the town of Shirinshahr, which is a huge project that includes several thousand hectares of land. At the present time many of its residents work in the sugarcane industry. The Sugarcane Development Company's project is very extensive. It includes several thousand hectares of land. It employs a lot of people from Shirinshahr and Raminshahr now. These people are all from outside [Khuzestan], from cities such as Yazd. I was exiled to Yazd in 1999. On the bus going to Yazd, I noticed about 15 people who were all working for the Haft-Tapeh sugarcane project. When I asked where they were living while in Khuzestan they said the government had rented houses for them. They are giving these people employment opportunities and other facilities. When I was in Yazd, there were billboards advertising jobs at the Dez Dam [also in Khuzestan]. They even advertised giving shares to those who worked at the Dez Dam. But there are no such promotions in regions where Arabs live.

Government Land Policy in Khuzestan

9. Forced migrations are also about the creation of a security corridor. This corridor extends from Ilam to Bostan. This is the border between Iran and Iraq, where [the government] has settled tribes. For instance on the two sides of Allah Akbar mountain there is a region called Om Al-Debesin, Bostan County. It extends from Khafajiyeh and Bustan to a road which leads to Shush. This is a vast region, and it includes the villages of Khazraj. They wanted to give the lands of the people of this region to the Basij. This issue led to some clashes and some even ended up in

⁵ This could refer to any of several similarly-named organizations. The Kowsar Financial and Credit Institute, for instance, is a subsidiary of the

⁶ Azna is a county (*shahrestan*) in Lorestan Province just north of Khuzestan.

prison.

10. No attempt is made to inform the public about these programs [in Arab-majority regions]. The people who benefit from the [sugarcane] project are from outside the region. Even some officials have objected to this situation. For instance the head of the local office of the Ministry of Agriculture in Khafajiyah sided with the people over this issue. After my exile to Yazd, I was sentenced to exile within Khuzestan Province for three years. I was exiled to a region between Shush and Dezful called Shavour. I witnessed people protesting there. The officials gathered the people and said they wanted to build a canal from the Shavour River. The primary occupation of the people of this area is wheat- and rice-farming, but the creation of this canal would make wheat and rice cultivation impossible. After a while people realized that this was just like the sugarcane project, the officials wanted to take their land. There were many clashes and some were thrown into jail. Whenever police cars enter the area people start to gather and youths would throw rocks at them and close the roads. It is because the land is their livelihood. For the people who have orchards and farms, their land is everything to them, and therefore they will defend it by any means, including protests.
11. This issue began several decades ago in Reza Shah's time and became more pronounced during the Islamic Republic. Immediately after the war with Iraq, the Islamic Republic continued these same policies.
12. About ten years ago, there were very few Lurs who lived here and came for work. But now there are many of them in these regions. And this is part of the Islamic Republic's policy. The reason is that the Lurs are tied to their own particular tribes and have their own distinct culture, customs and manners. They will never become Arabs. On the other hand, people from Yazd, Isfahan or Azarbaijan do not live in tribal systems. They do not have a group identity. The Lurs have their own particular group identity, with distinct customs and manners, clothing and ceremonies. Therefore if they increase the number of Lurs, they can change the demographics of the region. These people have come for jobs and their employment is related to the government.
13. According to figures published by the government of Iran itself, there were 16,000 martyrs [individuals who died] from the entire Arabestan [Khuzestan] region [as a result of the war with Iraq].⁷ Out of this number, 12,000 were Arabs. If Arabs in this region were completely against Iran, Iran could not have [succeeded] at all. Those Arabs who stood against Iraq did so because they knew that the existing hell would become a worse type of hell [if Saddam won the war]. They were suffering under one invader, but they would have suffered under a more horrific invader [if Iraq had won the war]. Right now some people say, "You Arabs had connections in Iraq." Yes, we did have a group in Iraq, a group that did not achieve anything in the Pahlavi era, or even during the revolution under Imam Khomeini. They dispatched some people to negotiate with [Ayatollah] Taleghani and [Prime Minister] Bazargan, but the result was only mass killings and executions. After the events of Black Wednesday, some members of this group were forced to go to Iraq much like the Mojahedin-e Khalq.⁸ Of course their numbers were much smaller than the Mojahedin-e Khalq forces.

⁷ In the absence of final figures, there is some debate on exact numbers, but the estimates quoted by the witness are not unprecedented. See <http://www.rah-nama.ir/fa/content/487/مردم-عرب-خوزستان-همواره-وحیه-ایرانی-خودرا-حفظ-کرده> (in Persian).

⁸ A Marxist-Islamist political opposition party founded in 1965, the Mojahedin-e Khalq supported the Revolution but later engaged in violence in an effort to overthrow Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Republic. The party is known by several acronyms including PMOI, MEK and MKO. See <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/mek.htm>.

Discrimination Against Arabs

14. It doesn't matter where an Arab lives, whether in Khorasan, Kurdistan, Baluchistan or Khuzestan itself. They are discriminated against everywhere. When I was in Yazd, I could see discrimination with my own eyes. For instance in a conversation I was having with one of my colleagues, he said students in one of the classes were "very Arab." He said this even though he knew I was an Arab. "Very Arab" means very lazy, inept and dumb. I will not mention any state-sanctioned discrimination regarding myself at the time because I had [a national security conviction] and I was in exile. We have never had an Arab governor. Of course, there may be Arabs in lower managerial positions. We have never had an Arab mayor in Dezful, Shush, Abadan or Mohammareh. But of course there are some Arabs in such positions who are stooges of the regime.

First Arrest

15. When I was a university student, I cooperated with a group called *Al-harakat Al-qawmiyah*. When I was arrested by the Ministry of MOIS and National Security (MOIS) on December 15, 1992, I was arrested along with most of the organization's activists. There were about 70 of us, but some of that number escaped. The charge against me was that I had acted against national security by having contact with *Al-harakat Al-qawmiyah*.⁹ I was given a three-year suspended sentence. At the time, the land confiscation policy in connection with the Haft-Tapeh sugarcane project had just been initiated, and my fellow activists and I distributed statements with the goal of stopping the land grabs, or at least in the hope that they would precipitate public demonstrations. The organization also demanded the reinstatement of Arabic names for Arab cities such as Khafajiyeh, Abadan, and Mohammareh. We also had other demands, such as the use of Arabic as the language of instruction in schools as well as other demands of the Arab people. These are cultural activities, but cultural activities tend to have a political aspect as well, and the government does not consider them distinct.
16. I was arrested by local MOIS forces on December 15, 1992. All in all, I was held in solitary confinement for four months. [I was arrested at] 11 o'clock at night. I was at my home in Ahvaz. Plainclothes agents came in four cars. They did not show identification when they entered my home [when they entered]. But as far as I can remember, my younger brother insisted and then they showed their cards. I did not see it myself because my mother opened the door for them. I recognized one of them much later. He was Mr. Hasani-Asl from the Khafajiyeh MOIS office. In fact the team that arrested me was brought from another county. It was a routine thing to bring forces from other regions. In some cases units from Tehran have come to arrest people. At first there were only two cars but later on I noticed two other cars had come from somewhere else. The car I was in had oil company license plate numbers with a blue plate.
17. When they put me in the car, there were two people next to me on either side. They blindfolded and handcuffed me. When the car left the main street near my home, they began to speak in Persian on the wireless device. I don't remember the details of what they said, but it was in connection with my arrest. I could not hear what was said on the other side of the line. One of the agents got off at a place near that area and another person got in. Then they insisted that I keep my head down. I don't know who got out of the car. I do remember the face of one of those who came inside my house. After I was released, I saw him when I had to make an appearance at the information headquarters [of the local office of the MOIS] twice a week, and then once a week

⁹ 'The ethnic movement' in Arabic.

after a while. I have forgotten his name but [his accent indicated that] he was from the town of Behbahan.¹⁰

18. Two months before my arrest, some of my friends were arrested for the same activities. The rumor in the region was that the arrests had been carried out by the MOIS. From the time I began my activities, I sought to identify those who collaborated with the regime, because I was from the region so I knew some of them. For instance, this Mr. Hasani-Asl, who was from Khafajiyeh, I knew him from before. Even though he did not have Arab ancestry, he had grown up among Arabs in Khafajiyeh and his family is allied to one of the Arab tribes. For a time, he was the deputy head and then the head of the MOIS office in Khafajiyeh. Now he is working somewhere else.

Interrogation

19. During interrogation at the MOIS office, one person usually imposes the pressure, does the beating and carries out the torture, while the other agent consoles. For instance after a day or two of torture, someone comes and says, "I'm not from this MOIS office. I represent a higher office." He then asks questions about the treatment by the interrogators, but nothing improves. They don't treat and deal with you in a uniform fashion. Later on I realized I was being kept at the Ahvaz MOIS office, behind Abuzar Hospital at the Chaharshir roundabout.¹¹ Most Arab activists are kept there as well. In the three or four months I was there, they did not take me out for some fresh air under any circumstances. In addition, I was only able to meet my mother and brother once towards the end of my four-month detention at the MOIS office. They brought me some clothes. That was exactly three months after my arrest.
20. In the Ahvaz MOIS office they would take a person into a room which was a meter and a half long, if I'm not mistaken. The room was entirely made of concrete and had a small hatch in the bottom. During my detention the only time I was not blindfolded was when I was in this room. Of course whenever the hatch was opened—for putting food inside, for instance, or if there was a knock on it and it was going to be opened—I had to put on my blindfold. When the interrogator or someone else came to take me to the interrogation room, I had to put on blindfold. At that time I asked for a book. They didn't give me one. I remember when I wanted to go to the bathroom they would put a lot of pressure on me by prohibiting me from going, which was a form of torture itself. I would knock on the door so they would take me to the bathroom. They would suddenly open the door with curses and insults and hit me in the stomach and chest.
21. During interrogations, the interrogator can never be seen because of the blindfold and you never hear their names other than "Hajj Agha" and "Seyyed".
22. I was interrogated so many times that I don't remember the exact number. In the beginning of my detention I was interrogated two or three times a week. Interrogations rarely happened on consecutive days. I was also interrogated after my trial and before I was sentenced. Every time a sentence is handed down, it's exactly what the MOIS has asked for. This is what the MOIS people themselves say. One time one of them asked me, "Are you afraid of being executed?" I said, "I'm not afraid because my execution is not a decision in your hands. In any case, there is a God and

¹⁰ A Persian-majority town in eastern Khuzestan. See <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/behbahan-also-pronounced-behbehan-iranian-city-and-county-sahrestan-in-the-province-of-kuzestan>.

¹¹ As the witness indicates, many Ahwazi Arab activists have been detained in the MOIS detention center in the Chaharshir neighborhood of Ahvaz. See, for example, <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/witness-testimony/1000000371-witness-statement-of-saied-alboghbaysh.html>.

the judge will issue the sentence." The agent said, "I myself am the judge." Before my sentence was issued, the interrogator said to me, "You have not properly explained a few things about a few people and some other things and since you might be executed, explain them to me." There is another example that proves that sentencing is not in the hands of the judicial branch. When my brother was on trial, I went to court along with a lawyer to see the case judge in order to pay the bail set for the case. The judge was talking on the phone. He asked the person on the phone, "Sir, for Dahimi's case I issued a sentence of five years in prison and 15 years in exile. Would that be sufficient?"

23. One time when I was being interrogated, someone behind me struck me hard on my head which caused it to bleed. The mark is still there. At the time I was not given access to medical services.

Trial

24. Over the four months that I was at the MOIS office, I was taken to the Revolutionary Court in the Kian Pars neighborhood of Ahvaz three times. There were two judges at that time. One was Judge Azizi, who was the judge in my case, and the other Judge Naghavi. Both of them were clerics.
25. The court's procurator did not explain the charges against me. He only asked a few questions. From the very first days during the investigation at the MOIS office they would give you a form where they ask about your first name, family name, friends and biography. When I asked what was I being accused of, the agent in charge said, "Arab masses." I was surprised to hear that. I thought that the person who had prepared the file was incompetent. At my trial when the court assistant asked what I had been charged with, I said, "Arab masses," and he said there was no such crime or else all Arabs would have been charged! I said that was what I was told at the MOIS office. I was taken to the assistant prosecutor one time, and twice to the judge. The first time I went before a judge they explained the charges, and the second time they issued a sentence.
26. The first time they took me to court, I was blindfolded and taken into a room. Apparently the court system at the time worked in a way that first there was the assistant [who filled an administrative function] and then the judge issued a verdict. This procedure is different now. Instead, a procurator is taken to the detention center at the MOIS office, but that was not the case during my detention. Recently I discovered that the assistant prosecutor's name was Haj Hasan Kaka and he was the assistant prosecutor in most of the recent execution cases in 2006 and 2007. He was a relatively short man with a brownish face and a beard. They say recently he has been wearing glasses as well. Haj Hasan Kaka works at one of the courts in Tehran.
27. The second court session was to explain the charges and trial proceedings. It only lasted a few minutes—and without the presence of a defense lawyer. When I told the judge I want a lawyer, he replied, "Your statements will be better than a lawyer's. The lawyer will say the same kinds of things as you." I was 20 or 21 years old and did not know anything about the law. There are many deficiencies. Many of our friends do not have an education and cannot speak Persian and do not have access to a translator or a defense lawyer. The judge read the charges against me and asked me to defend myself. There were two other defendants at the trial proceedings. The trial for all three of us lasted less than an hour and a half. My own trial lasted less than 20 minutes.
28. I was charged with acting against national security by having connections with the al-Harakat al-Qawmiyah counter-revolutionary group, carrying out activities in Hamidiyeh, Ahvaz and

Khafajiyeh, being a core member of the organization, distributing statements, and hiding some books. Of course none of these [books] were found at my place; only later did the authorities find a typewriter that someone had left with me some time ago. Meanwhile none of the charges against me were against the law. Many homes have historical books and typewriters. The other accusation against me was espionage. I asked the judge, "What does espionage mean?" He said, "Collaborating with foreigners." At the time I had not gone farther than Bostan and didn't know how many kilometers away Iraq was. I also may have gone to Mohammareh once on behalf of my school. How could I have committed espionage if I hadn't left the country?

29. I don't know exactly what they meant by "espionage." Were they talking about the illegal crossing of a border? There was nothing [in my actions] that could be described as espionage. Even the authorities themselves failed to provide any specifics regarding this accusation. According to the MOIS office's view, all the active groups at that time were being supported by Arab countries. I know many of these groups and organizations and none of them had any connection with foreign countries whatsoever. As you know, the penalty for espionage is death, but all the 70 youths who were arrested were sentenced to prison or exile, including myself.
30. After another session in court, I was again transferred to the detention center of the MOIS office. Towards the end of that four-month detention, they took me to court again. In that session I was given a 20-year suspended jail sentence. After that, if I ever committed another crime my 20-year suspended jail sentence would be enforced. I was released after four months and then I was forced to present myself [every day] for three years.

Employment Discrimination

31. Before all of this, I was just beginning a career as a schoolteacher employed by the Ministry of Education. But I was fired upon my release [from my first arrest]. Six years later, during the Khatami administration, I returned to work. Some regulations changed during the Khatami administration. My [original] three-year suspended sentence ended during this time. I followed my expulsion order through the National Employment Organization and the Majles in Tehran and I was able to get employed again. As a result of these follow-ups, I had to go into exile for five years and work and live in Yazd. Therefore I was able to go back to work. I was in Yazd for a year and a half, and the situation had improved relative to the period before the reforms.
32. I have two orders of expulsion [from teaching]. One of them is a preliminary expulsion, and the other is related to my change of status which was orders of exile in two different places, one in Yazd and the other within Khuzestan Province. After I returned from Yazd I was forced to live in exile in Shavour in Khuzestan Province, away from my own region. Of course I was supposed to be in exile in Yazd for five years, but I appealed and managed to return to Khuzestan after a year and a half.
33. I went through a rough time during the six years I spent between prison and work in Yazd. I did not have any particular run-ins with security organizations, but I was under psychological pressure. For instance, during that time I used to teach a few hours a week at a private school where the principal was my friend. They put a lot of pressure on this school and they even put pressure on me by spamming my phone. For instance they would call and say, "it would be better if you do not work there." I looked into these disturbing calls through the regional phone company and the court in order to put controls on the phone and find the source of the harassment. But of course they did not give me any information. The disturbing calls became so bad that my family was forced to cut off the phone. I went to other places to find work but I was

not successful. I had a criminal record and companies do not hire anyone with such a background.

Torture and Detention

34. I was tortured and now for many years I have been suffering from sleep disorder and I constantly go to hospitals. In the past 20 years I have been under constant pressure related to exile [within Iran], nonstop surveillance and the arrest of my brother. For instance, security agents came to my house several times, even when I returned to work as a teacher, and summoned me to the MOIS office's information headquarters. Once, for instance, they summoned me there because they had received reports that I had said things during the elections. They pointed to my past expulsion and warned me [to be quiet].
35. When they took me to court, there was an area behind the court building where cars are parked. As soon as we would get out of the car they would blindfold us and lead us to court. During this process an interrogator would accompany us. [The one who accompanied me] said he had been to the war front. I explained to him that I was a teacher. He told me he had studied up to eighth grade and was continuing his education at night.
36. During my time at the MOIS detention center, they executed a member of the Mojahedin-e Khalq. His name was Dr. Salighehzadeh. He was a Persian. I spent a few nights by his side. At first we were together in a solitary cell and then we were transferred to the general ward. I was there for three nights, if I'm not mistaken. This was also a form of psychological pressure: they would put you next to a person who was awaiting execution. The reason they did that was to show the prisoner that this was the situation and that they might face a similar sentence. Apparently this was the second time [Salighehzadeh] had been arrested. The head of the detention center came to me once and said, "Karim! You see this man who used to be a member of the Mojahedin-e Khalq and has been in contact with them again? Now he has been condemned to death. You must be careful..." This was the kind of pressure they would impose. I witnessed Dr. Salighehzadeh's execution with my own eyes inside the detention center.
37. The national security-related executions¹² at that time took place either inside a room within the detention center, where they would even take a few prisoners to watch the execution, or they were carried out inside the prison. There have only been a few executions of political activists on the street, recently some have resulted in widespread demonstrations. For this reason the government has recently resorted to secret executions. They have changed their mind, and are carrying out executions inside the prison. For example, in July the three Heydarian brothers were specifically executed in cities where they had never resided. Two of them were executed in Dezful and two in Abadan. Meanwhile the regime told the people that these individuals were involved in the drug trade and were criminals. The people did not find out that [the victims] were political or cultural activists.
38. Several of my friends have been in prison for many years, for instance Ghazi Heydari, an engineer and a well-known intellectual in the region. He only held debates and engaged in intellectual activities. He would never carry out political activities that had security implications. He has been detained for the release of a film and is currently being tortured torture at the MOIS

¹² In the interview, the witness literally says "Intelligence Ministry executions", highlighting the general public's perception that all national security cases are investigated, brought to trial, and judged by the MOIS, even though the IRI's judiciary is nominally in charge of the legal process in all cases, including national security cases.

office detention center in Ahvaz.¹³ This is the same detention center I was in. But the MOIS office also has several secret locations, which is against the law. According to Iran's code of criminal procedure, the accused cannot be held at a secret detention center.¹⁴

Brother's Arrest

39. About four months after [my brother's disappearance], my family finally figured out that he was being held at the MOIS office's detention center. This is after we complained to the information bureau [of the MOIS office]. According to what my brother told me later on, he had been arrested by Ahvaz MOIS forces while he was walking in the street towards a shop. He was only able to make a phone call to the family for the first time four months after he was arrested.
40. No one witnessed my brother's arrest on the street in order to inform us of the incident. So we complained to the information office and they referred us to the Revolutionary Court and they referred us to the MOIS office. In the initial days the MOIS completely denied having held [my brother]. But then they said they would investigate and inform us. After a while they called me on the phone and said, "Your brother wants to speak to you." This was after exactly four months.
41. My brother's arrest took place on a Friday, on the 26th of February, 2007. It was around August [of 2007] when we succeeded in seeing him in prison. They had transferred him there from the detention center for the purpose of the visit. My brother said the interrogator had been sent to the detention center to explain the accusations against him. On visitation day, I witnessed my brother being returned from prison to the detention center of the MOIS office. On that same day my brother gave me a pill to carry for him, a Tramadol-100 pill. He said the pill had been beneficial to him. My brother's rib and chest cage were broken during interrogation and there was bleeding. The drugs he was given for medical treatment show how torture techniques have truly progressed with the passage of time. This is an example which perhaps only a few people have mentioned. When a prisoner is given Tramadol-100 pills there are serious side effects. Many of these people like my brother will suffer physical problems. Typically, this drug is given to addicts.
42. The prison official who was monitoring our conversation said, "Rasoul, we will give this pill to you ourselves." My brother has been tortured a lot in prison. He said I had stood above his head and told him to confess or else the agents would kill me. My brother says that he has even seen our youngest brother, Ali Dahimi, who is paralyzed and is studying in Syria, in prison. He said agents had told him they had brought Ali to prison. It seems these delusions were the result of the torture he has suffered in prison. This form of torture has been used on several activists, and has caused a lack of trust between some Arab activists. This has even led to some fights. My brother told me that during the first days of detention he had said that Karim Dahimi is not his brother, but his cousin because he feared that they would arrest me too—because of this [lie] he endured a great deal of torture. My brother also told me that once during torture a man had stood above him and said to him, "You have become very tired. Drink this glass of water." As soon as he drank the content of the glass, which was oil, he fell to the ground and from then on does not recall what he said. My brother's lawyer said my brother has only signed the first four pages of his confessions

¹³ Ghazi Heydari is currently in prison in Iran. He was most recently sentenced to five years' imprisonment in addition to a preexisting ten-year term. See <http://hra-news.org/en/arab-activist-received-new-five-years-imprisonment-verdict>.

¹⁴ Article 4 of the Prisons Organization Implementation Regulations (*Ayin nameh ejrai sazman زندan ha*) defines detention centers as locations for the detention of suspects until the promulgation of final charges with the full knowledge of the appropriate judicial authorities. See <http://www.prisons.ir/index.php?Module=SMMPageMaster&SMMOp=View&PageId=27> (in Persian).

and on the other 50 pages he has only put his finger print. Of course my brother's lawyer mentioned this in court but the case judge replied, "Should I believe [the prisoner's] testimony or statements by the MOIS [Ministry]?"

Trials of Ahwazi Arab Activists

43. The charges leveled against my brother included *moharebeh*¹⁵ and one of these new charges, such as acting against national security. Before the revolution, Arab activists were typically charged with collaboration with communist and Nasserite parties and being a fifth column. During the Iran-Iraq war, anyone who was arrested was charged with espionage and counter-revolutionary activities. Then after the war, the accusations brought against Arab activists were *moharebeh*, acting against national security and Wahhabism.
44. For example there was an Arab political party which was called the Wefaq Party which was formed during the reform era, and it even had a representative in the Islamic Consultative Assembly. In 2006, this party was accused of *moharebeh* and banned. Even some of its members were arrested and many also left the country. The only policy of this party was to implement the suspended laws of the Islamic Republic, meaning articles 15, 19 and 48 of the constitution.¹⁶ Other than that, they had insignificant demands such as having an Arabic language newspaper and television station. This party was also very close to the Islamic Iran Participation Front.¹⁷ They were not in any way close to the parties that have separatist aims.
45. The accusation leveled against my brother is that he and a few other people intended to go to Tehran and plant a bomb. A man named Ahmad Marmazi was executed in connection with this charge. According to my brother's lawyer, this person had come from his own city to Ahvaz to see my brother. Information about this meeting, which took place near the local coroner's office, is available in the case file in precise detail. The verdict against my brother precisely refers to an issue which is illegal [sic]. There was an incident where several people attempted to commit armed robbery against a bank in Hamadan. One of them informed the police before the crime took place and all of them were arrested with their weapons. These individuals were exonerated and released by an Appellate Court.

Brother's Sentence and Current Condition

46. Despite this, the verdict against my brother states that he is condemned to five years in jail and 15 years of mandatory residence in Touyserkan [in Hamedan province] on charges of acting against national security [due to his alleged involvement in this robbery]. This verdict is based on a report by the MOIS headquarters of Khuzestan and statements by the accused about getting cash to purchase bomb equipment. Before my brother was arrested, one of his friends borrowed two million Rials [roughly 200 USD at the time] from him on the street. I don't know if one can purchase bomb material with that much money or not.

¹⁵ Often translated as "waging war against God", *moharebeh* is a national security crime in Iran that is punishable by death. See <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/02/abdolfattah-soltani-according-to-law-and-sharia-throwing-stones-or-breaking-windows-do-not-constitute-moharebeh/>.

¹⁶ Article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran deals with language rights, Article 19 ensures equal rights to citizens regardless of ethnicity, and Article 49 deals with government obligations vis-à-vis private property rights. See <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution.html>.

¹⁷ A reformist party that reached its zenith during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami from 1997-2005. See <http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/parties/mosharekat/>.

47. At the present time my brother has completed his six-year prison term. The extra year was added on top of his original five-year sentence because they did not include his initial detention in Karun Prison as well as the new prison in Sheyban. He is currently in exile in the small town of Touserkan, which is no bigger than the size of a street! He cannot work there and he is forced to present himself [at the MOIS office] every morning at 8 and every afternoon at 6.
48. My brother's case, just like mine, was in the hands of the MOIS from the very beginning. He endured one week of torture before confessing that he is my brother. They tortured him severely. When the MOIS office arrests someone, they are completely aware of his identity. When I myself was arrested, the interrogator had all the information relating to my father, mother, relatives and place of birth. My brother was afraid that they would arrest me as well and so he refused to say he was my brother and as result he was tortured for a week.
49. My brother was an athlete and manager of a body building club. He was a strong and energetic young man. But when I visited him, he was very weak and thin. And he complained about bleeding. He did not say what they had done to him. He only said he had been tortured and that he had a broken rib.

New Torture Methods

50. Nowadays when a detainee is blindfolded and unable to see, they bring a person in front of him. At that moment he hears the voice of one of his friends, or a relative or member of his family. I've spoken to many recently [released] prisoners who say they also heard the voices of their relatives. This is a new phenomenon that I never observed during my stay at the detention center. This is a new kind of psychological torture. My own brother recalled that he had seen the paralyzed feet of our other brother in prison, or had heard my own voice telling him, "Rasoul, talk, confess, or else they will kill me." This is while our paralyzed brother was in Syria at that time and I may have come with other members of the family to the information section of the MOIS office to follow up on his arrest, but they never took me into the prison for this purpose at all.
51. My brother said that during torture, six people [interrogators or other detention center employees] were around him. Of course I do not know if he was blindfolded at the time or not. These people would take his arms and legs and throw him against the wall. That's why his rib was broken.
52. One of the reasons for his illness is torture. In addition there's the problem of weight loss and bleeding. This was a person who used to have a sturdy body but today he is weak and thin. What have they done to him? He has withered.
53. Sometimes I was taken in for an interrogation at night. Several times they came after me at two in the morning. Of course I cannot say that they woke me up because I was under such stress and fear that I could not sleep comfortably and I was almost awake all the time. When I was detained in 1992, they would turn off the light in the prison cell at nine at night. During interrogation they put me in a room. Of course because I was blindfolded I cannot say for sure that the place was a room. But it was definitely a different location. The distance [from my cell] was less than 20 meters. There, they would ask questions and in a way give their own answers as well. During interrogation they would first put pressure, make threats and hit you. And if that did not bring about the desired result they would torture you again. Most of the time the interrogator would ask questions but I don't know if I was being punched by one or more persons behind and around me. Recently some friends who have been detained have said that the agents are hitting with batons,

which is a new thing. In my time in detention, the agents would hit with their fist or a stick. Slapping was also common.

Abtahi's Letter and Second Arrest

54. After my release from prison and my subsequent firing I reduced my activities, but I resumed them during the reform era (1997-2005). During this period, my activities were limited to participation in gatherings, poetry readings, and instruction of local youths in cooperation with cultural associations, until I participated in the Al-Ahwazi Association and thereafter the Patriotic Arab Democratic Movement in Ahwaz. It's worth noting that the Wefagh Party was active during this time.
55. In 2005, a letter attributed to former-Vice President Mohammad Ali Abtahi addressed to the head of the Planning and Budget Organization was published. It suggested policies that would result in demographic changes in the region. People demonstrated [against it] in Arabestan [Khuzestan province]. In fact this letter [was written in] the middle of Khatami's [second] presidential term, but was leaked towards the end. At the time the letter was in the hands of Mr. Mohammad Nawaseri, but he did not publish it, hoping that the policy of the Islamic Republic would transform.
56. The disturbances that followed [the leak of the letter] lasted for 20 days and many people were arrested. I remember people started to demonstrate from our neighborhood. But after passing just one street, Basij forces on motorcycles with "Oh Fatima" and "Oh Blood of God" written on them began to fire bullets towards people who had gathered by the Governor's office and were demanding an apology from the president. But unfortunately the security forces, the police and the Basij did not allow this to happen. From the very first hours, the plainclothes people on motorcycles chanting religious slogans began to confront the people. Then the security and police forces got into action. They also dispatched forces from Tehran because the situation in the region had turned into a crisis. Later they also brought commando forces from Khorramabad into the region. Their actions were beyond violent. Their intention was not to bring calm, but to create fear and terror.
57. I was released after a few days of detention. Although I was not detained for very long, during my transfer from Basij custody to the IRGC Intelligence Division, a great deal of pressure was put on my tailbone, which still causes me trouble today. Later, one day I was in school and the situation was completely normal. We left the door open so that the parents of the students could follow them inside. Suddenly I saw baton-wielding individuals who came close to us and wanted to enter the school in order to stop the kids from setting tires on fire. I told them I would not cooperate with them because we have left the school door open so that the mothers can take their kids out. Because of the chaotic situation, the local representatives of the Ministry of Education instructed us to deliver the kids only to their mothers. When I opened the school door, I was surrounded by men and women. This was happening during normal school hours and whenever someone opened the door the security forces would start firing bullets. The situation was terrible. This happened exactly on April 15.¹⁸ Then, on the following Wednesday the situation deteriorated again. April 15th, 2005, is a very famous day. After that day, the crisis continued for 20 days.
58. I was arrested at 10 in the morning, at the same time when the demonstration started. At first when I was leaving the area there was no one there. But ten minutes later I noticed they had blocked the road. I was in the car on my way to the hospital to visit one of my relatives. I had

¹⁸ See <http://www.unpo.org/article/2356>.

nothing to do with the demonstration. They were suspicious of us because the person who was with me was active in elections and poetry gatherings and so forth. It seems the security agencies had already prepared files against activists and identified some individuals beforehand. Even one of the officials later said, "Our problem is with two thousand people." This means all of these individuals had been identified beforehand.

59. When we reached the inspection stop sign, we were arrested by the police. It's worth noting that they originally told us to pull over because there was a problem with my friend's license plate, but in reality they [the IRGC] had some people under surveillance and they arrested many others the same way. Then, they handed us over to the Basij. We had been arrested on the street without being shown a warrant. Their excuse was that one of the numbers on the car license plate had faded. They handcuffed and blindfolded us and put our ankles in chains as well. Many other people had been arrested and were being held at a Basij base.
60. During my few hours' detention in the Basij base in Lashkarabad, I heard the voices of people being tortured severely. Since I was blindfolded I didn't see anything, but after awhile, presumably when people were attacking the base, I heard a Basij member say "Hajji, they're burning the office! Should we shoot?" In response the relevant officer ordered out transfer, and they quickly transferred my friend and I. I don't know if anyone else was in the car with us.
61. [I later confirmed that] because of the large number of detainees in the area, people attacked the Basij base and set it on fire. The base was not entirely destroyed but the area around it was damaged. The agents fired bullets at the people, and were able to take a few [detainees], including myself, by car to the local office of IRGC Intelligence Division.
62. There, they asked us questions about past incidents. For instance my friend was questioned about the Al Jazeera network. They said we had brought this television channel to Khuzestan. But this was not the case at all. This network had come to the region and made reports about the people with permission from the Ministry of Guidance. At that time the Al Jazeera network had done a few, very brief, reports about the region's culture, labor issues, the Haft-Tapeh project and the issues related to its lands.
63. We entered the detention center and as soon as we got out of the car they put blindfolds on our eyes. Of course at that time the region had been divided, such that the area from Karun towards Hamidiyeh was under the control of a battalion of police forces and some Revolutionary Guards who had been brought in from Khorramabad. The other side of Karun was jointly controlled by the Basij, Revolutionary Guards and the MOIS forces. The reason for this was that the crisis was not in one area, but several areas.
64. That night, I was interrogated by someone who did not speak Persian very well. He was either Lebanese or Iraqi. He wasn't Ahwazi, because his accent in Arabic was very distinct from the typical accent of Arabs in Ahvaz. The Islamic Republic uses forces from Arab countries like Lebanon, Iraq, and some of the Persian Gulf countries to oppress its citizens. In the days of the *intifazeh* they used such forces extensively. Apparently they do the same thing in Tehran and other cities as well.

Release from Prison and Departure from Iran

65. I felt confident in the hands of the IRGC Intelligence Division forces, because they did not have any information about me when I was arrested. We were at the Basij base from 10 to 12 at night

and when the people attacked [the base] we were taken to the IRGC Intelligence office. At the Basij base we were asked a few questions during an interrogation. Next we were searched, and then they filmed us. At the IRGC Intelligence office I said, "I am surprised. In the morning I teach a class. In the afternoon I am a school assistant, and then I run classes at night. Why have you arrested me?" The agents did an investigation and realized I was telling the truth and I had not participated in street demonstrations and had not been following this matter. After three days, I gave them my identification card, which was not a big deal, and I was released [on bail].¹⁹ After that I was summoned by to the MOIS office through the Ministry of Education's security office and I was asked some general questions.

66. After this incident I was not expelled from my teaching post again, but the MOIS office did put pressure on the school principal as well as the personnel office of the education department and as a result I was dismissed as the assistant principal and transferred to a workshop. I was in a very bad situation for several months, while being under intense surveillance as well. Meanwhile my brother was arrested in 2006 and the pressures doubled. During a visit with my brother I finally decided to escape from the country.