



Witness Statement of Mahnaz Parakand

Name: Mahnaz Parakand
Date of Birth: 1959
Place of Birth: Tehran, Iran
Occupation: Lawyer

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)
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Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was approved by Mahnaz Parakand on September 8, 2012. There are 64 paragraphs in the statement.

Background

1. I was born in 1959 into a traditional religious household. I did my high school studies in literature, and in 1977 entered the law school at the University of Tehran, where I was accepted to study law. I entered university a year prior to the Revolution, a time when there was a range of active student-based political groups. Given my religious family background, I was attracted to the activities of the *Anjoman-e Eslami* [the Islamic Association]. After the Revolution, *Anjoman-e Eslami* was divided into various factions that supported the *Mojahedin-e Khalq*. At that time I became an active supporter of *Mojahedin-e Khalq* at Tehran University.
2. I was arrested during the 20 June 1981 [30 Khordad] demonstrations, and spent five years in Evin and Ghezelhesar prisons. Subsequent to a series of harsh interrogations in 1981, in a room that only bore the name ‘court of law,’ where no justice was administered and no signs of justice found, neither by way of judgment, nor by atmosphere or procedure, I was tried and sentenced to death by execution. Later that year, however, the death sentence was reduced to life imprisonment. With that verdict of life imprisonment, I was incarcerated until 1986.
3. In 1986, a number of groups came to [inspect] the prisons on behalf of Ayatollah Montazeri. They pulled various dossiers and reviewed them. Given that I was arrested on 20 June [30 Khordad], and in fact there was no evidence in my file, I was ordered to be released along with some other detainees; hence I was freed that year.

Activities to Reinstate the Right to Continue Education

4. At the time of the arrest, I was in the third year of law school. After my release, I tried to re-enter university, but realized that they [the authorities] have suspended my status as a student, and thus I was banned from enrolling at the Faculty. This was the starting point of a battle to reinstate myself as a student in order to continue my education. I went to every organization I could access, including Iran’s General Inspection Office, in order to follow up my case and reinstate my student status so that I could complete my degree. Given that there was a large contingent of students with suspended statuses—many of whom had been in prison and many who were denied entrance for other reasons after the Revolution—the General Inspection Office had appointed a Review Board to consider cases of suspended students.
5. Finally, in 1988, two years after my release, I was given a letter reinstating my status as a student, with the condition that I would not engage in any political activities at the university.
6. I re-entered the Faculty in 1988 and graduated in 1990. Considering that entering a graduate program at that time was very difficult—particularly those who had been in prison stood no chance of further education—I stopped [my education] after a Bachelor’s degree.

Hindrances in Obtaining License to Practice Law

7. Subsequent to graduation, I replied to a job posting at the Iranian Bank of Commerce where I was hired on probation in its Legal Office. After one year, the *Gozinesh* [Human Resources] Office of the Bank realized that I had a political record and had been in prison. Hence I was fired from the Bank.
8. That same year, in 1993, I participated in the first exam organized by the Bar Association [to qualify] for an internship, and I successfully passed.
9. At that time I had no involvement in any political activities; however, about seven or eight months later, I received a letter indicating that “You do not meet the required criteria for obtaining a license to practice law. We wish you success in other fields of endeavor...” I then began a journey to pursue this matter. I realized that the letter was sent by the *Gozinesh* Office on behalf of the Bar Association, and the Bar Association rejected my application on the basis of this letter.
10. For nine years I relentlessly tried to obtain a license to practice law—first to obtain a license to article, based on which I could then practice law as a lawyer. Since 1999, frequently and persistently I appeared at the Bar Association and waited behind the doors at the Board of Directors to review my case and make a final decision, i.e., to approve and issue me a license.
11. The Bar Association was in turn awaiting approval of the Ministry of Intelligence to be able to issue an articling license for me. They had issued several [letters of] correspondence to the Ministry on this matter. As I recall, the Bar Association had sent four letters, to which they received a negative answer each time, preventing them from issuing the license. Each time I was rejected; each time I had to write another letter to re-apply, until the fourth time – that time coincided with the presidency of Mr. Khatami, during whose term the atmosphere was somewhat lenient. In 2000, the Ministry of Intelligence called me for an interview at the Ministry, which turned out to be a thorough interrogation. I was asked about my activities from the time of my release—where had I gone, with whom did I speak to, which old friends I had visited, etc. Finally, they asked me to draft an undertaking in my own words. I wrote: “I promise not to engage in any illegal act. Should I engage in any illegal action, I ask to be dealt with according to the law.” Ultimately, the Ministry of Intelligence approved me, based on which the Bar Association issued my articling license in 2002.
12. I did my articling with Mr. Abdolfattah Soltani (Attorney at Law). The period of articling was a year and a half. However, a month prior to the completion of my internship, owing to the date of the Bar examination and my readiness, I asked the Board of Directors to review my application to take the Bar. The Board decided that those who had about a month to complete their articling could sit for the Bar exam.
13. I passed the Bar successfully in early 2003 and obtained my Attorney’s License.

Start of Professional Practice as a Lawyer

14. During my articling with Mr. Soltani, I realized that he has a number of dossiers belonging to student activists as well as ethnic and religious cases. It was obvious that I could not represent them at that time, given that as an intern my legal knowledge and experience had not yet prepared me for defending such cases in court. However, I read the files in the office and familiarized myself with such cases. I was always interested in human rights law, and the circumstances afforded me an opportunity to initiate my endeavors in this field.

15. The first such dossier was that of a student at Khajeh Nasir University, who shall remain nameless—as he might not wish that his name be disclosed here. I represented that case along with Mr. Soltani at Branch 26 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran.
16. We arranged to go to the courthouse to study the file. We went there in the morning, but the judge had not yet arrived. The judge on the file was Judge Hassan Zaré Dehnavi, (also known as Judge Haddad). We submitted our request to read the file and waited for approval. We waited until 11 o'clock until finally the judge called Mr. Soltani in, but did not let me in. I mentioned several times to the secretariat that we were pressed for time and we needed to read the dossier. About a half hour later, Mr. Soltani emerged and said, “Ms. Parakand, let’s go now, we will come back another day to read the file!”
17. When we left the building, I asked him why he changed his mind, given that we had spent the whole morning there! Mr. Soltani said that Judge Haddad had told him that he [Mr. Soltani] did not know who Ms. Parakand really is! He had told Mr. Soltani that I had an execution order, that I was a political dissident and an anti-regime provocateur. He questioned why I had been given a license to practice law!
18. Of course, Mr. Soltani was fully aware [of the situation]. When I went to his office, I showed him my letter of non-conviction issued by the Prosecutor’s Office, and since he was involved in the process of my application for a license he knew that ultimately it was the approval of the Ministry of Intelligence that allowed my license to practice.
19. Mr. Soltani explained to Judge Haddad that the Ministry of Intelligence had approved me and cleared the path to issuance of my license, and that I was a fully qualified lawyer licensed to practice. But Judge Haddad had said that it was not at all advisable [for me] to read such politically sensitive files and that he would not allow it. Because Mr. Soltani felt that he could not convince Justice Haddad that day, he decided to postpone the reading of the file and we left the courthouse.

History with Judge Haddad

20. During the 1980s, as far as I know, Judge Haddad was the prosecutor in Kermanshah. [Years earlier] we lived in the same neighborhood. We were neighbors and lived in the same alley. He was accepted in the law school of the Melli University a year before I entered law school at the University of Tehran. I even recall that I borrowed a Civil Code book from him to study. Such was our acquaintance. However, after the Revolution, he leaned to the [political] right, i.e., the regime, and I leaned towards opposition groups. This marked the start of the tension [between us], and he severely opposed me, and was aware of my state of affairs. Since he was my neighbor, he knew all about my arrest.
21. That is how Haddad knew me. So, when he saw me at the courthouse—of course I looked down immediately so not to face him—he recognized me and then went into his office—hence the long wait! And then he called Mr. Soltani and told him the things he said. He had told Mr. Soltani that “Mr. Soltani, did not you know these things [about me]?” But Mr. Soltani had said he was fully aware of the issues, and that I had been pardoned and cleared by the Ministry of Intelligence.

Judging the Competence of a Lawyer

22. Essentially, a judge does not have the right to prevent a lawyer from reading a file or to question their qualifications. Attorneys' qualifications are exclusively endorsed by the Bar Association. In issuing a license to a lawyer, the Bar Association approves the counsel's qualification to practice law. An intern with a license can be involved in a file as much as s/he is capable of, and once the lawyer obtains the status of First Degree Attorney at Law, s/he can provide legal representation for cases of any type. A judge does not have the right to interfere in this matter. Unfortunately, however, this is a trend set by the Islamic Republic, and frequently practiced in the Revolutionary Courts where a lawyer is told that s/he is not qualified to read a certain file. I was told this many times.
23. In the case of a student blogger at the Government Employees Prosecutor's Office, they called my client and they ushered us to what is called an 'internet room.' We went to the internet room, which is completely illegal, because if the interrogator has summoned [the accused], he must conduct the interrogation right there and then, and if there is an investigation officer involved, he must then conduct his questioning under the supervision of the interrogator in charge, and it must be made clear in which areas the investigation officer is canvassing information.
24. This incident took place at Branch 2 of the Government Employees Prosecutor's Office, and a certain Mr. Mohebbi, who is currently the interrogator at Branch 1 of the Prosecutor's Office in Evin, was then the interrogator of Branch 2—I believe this incident took place in 2007, when the government had started a raid on bloggers and those who were actively using the internet.
25. As my client and I were waiting for the interrogator to arrive, suddenly a person came by and in a peculiar tone addressed my client and said, "We don't see you here anymore! You don't come around!" This peculiar tone was all too familiar to me, because during my time in Evin prison I had to deal with interrogators, and I knew very well what an interrogator meant when he said "we don't see you anymore" in such derogatory tones. I realized that this person intends to intimidate my client. However, because the words he used were non-specific, I did not say anything and did not reveal who I was; they also did not know who I was. A few minutes later another person passed by and in response to my client's greeting him said, "I will skin you!" [Persian idiom; implying merciless treatment] and left.
26. Minutes later they called my client, and I went in with him as his lawyer. They refused to let me in and said lawyers are not allowed. This was when the 'Single Act' of Protecting Citizens' Rights (2004) had been ratified. The 'Single Act' had been recently adopted and these officers were not familiar with it. They refused to let me in on the grounds that lawyers are not allowed to be present during the interrogation process. I asked them to go and read Paragraph 3 of the 'Single Act' where it indicates that even if the accused does not have legal representation, but wishes to have the benefit of a lawyer, the opportunity must be afforded to him/her to consult a lawyer.
27. After much argument, they [the officers] stood their ground and rejected [my presence]! I spoke with the interrogator and asked about the person who made that comment to my client and why he was intimidating my client by saying that he would 'skin' him! The interrogator said that the person was the investigating officer. I said, "What kind of an investigating officer is he that he wants to 'skin' my client?" The interrogator realized that the situation was not favorable to him as the officer had

uttered these words to my client in front of me, so he said, “Please lady, you go and I will call the investigating officer.”

28. I waited and the interrogator called the investigating officer—unfortunately I had never seen the interrogator before so I don’t know what his name was. The officer returned after a half hour and called me. This time his tone had changed completely, and in a calm and friendly manner he said: “Of course we abide by Mr. Mohebbi’s orders... however, because the nature of this file is security-related, your presence is not advisable!” Given that they did not want me to be present during the interrogation, they decided not to proceed with the questioning at all and to send both my client and me away so that he [the interrogator] could consult his superior and see what he could do!

Limitations Imposed on Visiting Clients

29. Just to demonstrate how restrictions were not only limited to refusing permission to read dossiers, [but included visitations as well,] I share with you this anecdote. Subsequent to rampant national and religious-based judicial prosecutions, Mr. Soltani was tried on charges of ‘spreading rumors with intent to disturb public opinion’ before Judge Haddad, and I (Mr. Soltani’s legal trainee at the time,) became his legal representative. In that trial, notwithstanding all accused persons’ testimonies to the baseless nature of the charges, Mr. Soltani was sentenced to four months’ imprisonment. It should also be noted that at that trial all the defendants stated that they suffered cruel treatment in jail—and all their testimonies were recorded on video.
30. Because of Mr. Soltani’s file I had to see Mr. Mortazavi, who was then the head of Branch 1410 of the Government Employees [Court,] where Mr. Soltani was tried. Mr. Mortazavi did not issue the verdict himself; rather the judgment was issued by a substitute prosecutor by the name of Mr. Goudarzi. However, Mr. Mortazavi was still the head of the branch, from whom I had to seek permission to see Mr. Soltani.
31. According to the Executive By-Laws of the Prisons Organization, a lawyer is permitted to see his/her client as often as needed. The By-Laws indicate that the lawyer should obtain permission from the prison judge. Through this protocol, I had been able to visit my client a few times in prison.
32. At that time, Mr. Dadkhah, Attorney at Law, was also in prison, and his lawyer and I used to go to the facilities together to meet our clients. After a few visits, we noticed something! When I went to obtain permission from the prison judge to get a letter to bring my client from the ward for a visit, I saw that the lady who was writing the letter, had a [directive] paper under her clear desk cover that she reviewed and then she said, “Unfortunately, I cannot give you visiting permission, because here it indicates that in the case of Mr. Soltani and Mr. Dadkhah, their lawyers must see the judge before visitation is granted.” Thus I had to go see Mr. Mortazavi.
33. The few times that I went, Mr. Mortazavi did not even let me see who the judge was! He did not even let me inside the branch! After many failed attempts, I went back and said that it was absolutely vital that I saw my client, and I had to reveal why it was imperative for me to see my client—even though I was under no obligation to [provide these reasons]. I had taken on certain cases and it was not necessary for me to disclose such information to the judge. By law, the judge should have granted me visitation based on my request alone.

34. Even though I listed the reasons why I had to see my client, the judge refused permission. He then said, “You are a woman, why would you need to visit a man in prison anyway?!” It is utterly sad when a judge makes such a comment to a lawyer. In response I said, “I am a lawyer and my gender is completely irrelevant here. You should not even think of me as a female, or my client as a male. I am a lawyer, and he is my client. I have a legal duty to see my client, and you have no right to make such comments to me.”
35. Unfortunately, such incidents and encounters were not uncommon. For instance, on another occasion when Mr. Soltani was in temporary custody in 2005, and his file was at Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court before Judge Haddad, Mr. Soltani was represented by 12 lawyers, all of whom were trying to see the judge because Mr. Soltani had been in solitary confinement for four months and no one had any information about him. We wanted to know where he was and the status of his condition; therefore, we were all trying to see the judge. All the other lawyers, except for me, managed to see Judge Haddad, but I. All the other lawyers, except for me, were allowed inside. At the time of the trial, all the other lawyers, except for me, received notice of trial. After the trial, all other lawyers—except for me—received a copy of the verdict. That is to say, [Judge Haddad] completely cut me off from the circle of lawyers, and essentially refused to acknowledge me as a lawyer.

Restrictions Imposed on Registering Designations

36. Similarly, Judge Salavati of Branch 15 caused some troubles for me. On one occasion, Mr. Soltani and I represented an Arab political activist in Branch 15, and I had taken the designation to register. This was a month after Mr. Soltani’s first arrest and issuance of his acquittal by Branch 17 of the Court of Appeal that reversed the initial verdict of 5 years’ imprisonment and a ban from practicing law. The news had been publicized by the media. However, whether Judge Salavati had not heard or was just playing a game, he took the designation and examined it and after viewing Mr. Soltani’s name he said, “Mr. Soltani himself is in trouble, and banned from practicing law!”
37. I said, “Don’t you know that he was acquitted and the ban was lifted? He has taken on many cases now without any impediments! In fact, he never stopped working, inasmuch as the verdict was never final and binding.”
38. He paused and said, “And as for you, you just can’t practice!” I asked why I could not practice. He said, “You are restricted!” After much argument, he said, “Let me talk to the *Hefazat and Herasat* Office.”
39. This was very difficult for me to take. I wrote to Mr. Mobashsheri, the Head of the Revolutionary Courts at the time, described the encounter and asked him to penalize the judge, inasmuch as a judge does not consult with the *Hefazat and Herast* Office, which is under [Mr. Mobashsheri’s] authority. I asked that the judge be penalized for his actions and to allow for the designation.
40. In response, Mr. Mobashsheri said that he could not order a judge, but in his letter he asked the judge to proceed in accordance with the law...

41. I was again refused access to the branch; therefore, I had to file the letter at the Revolutionary Court Head Office, where the letter would be registered and put on file. A few days later, I went to follow up to see if Judge Salavati had read the letter and whether he had reconsidered his position?
42. Judge Salavati stuck to his position and said, “I have to speak to the Bar Association and verify your qualifications?” I said, “To verify my qualifications, you need to see my license; if I hold a valid license then I am qualified and can designate myself [as a lawyer] on a file.” But he refused, and said that he had to speak to the Bar Association. In the end, I do not know whether he ever corresponded with the Bar Association!
43. Later on, we found that the trial proceeded without notification to me or Mr. Soltani. That is to say, the defendant had been tried in our absence and the judgment had been issued, and sent for appeal.
44. Our designation, therefore, proved futile in that branch! Meaning, even though Judge Salavati had the designation, he never registered it; a copy must still remain in Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court along with my request for instructing the judge to register it, and my complaint against the judge to the Head of the Revolutionary Courts. Subsequently, I also reported the incident to the Bar Association, and wrote a letter of complaint to the Judiciary office in charge of citizens’ rights. I filed various complaints and reported the wrongdoing of Judge Salavati. After some time when I went to Branch 15 concerning another dossier, I was received with respect. This time, he [Salavati] took my designation and registered it and in a friendly manner said: “You’re good at making complaints, Ms. Parakand!” By then I had forgotten the incident, and asked with surprise, “What complaint?,” to which he responded, “[Complaint] to the Bar Association, to the head of Judiciary, to the head of Judiciary office in charge of citizens’ rights; your letters!” I then realized that he had been made aware of all the complaints. It shows that pursuing these matters through legal channels were in some ways fruitful, and made a difference!

Threats against Human Rights Lawyers

45. After the 2009 presidential election life became very difficult for lawyers, a large number of whom were actively involved in human rights cases. These lawyers were either associated with the Center for the Defense of Human Rights, or with the Law Offices of Mr. Emadeddin Baghi, who assisted those who could not retain a lawyer, or those who had political charges against them and were not aware of their rights. I myself witnessed, on several occasions, that a number of such lawyers were summoned to the Revolutionary Court where they were subject to interrogations by the Intelligence Officers and were warned not to take on cases of this nature, which, unfortunately, was effective in many cases, and some decided to reduce their involvement by taking a fewer number of such cases. The result was that after the 2009 elections, the number of lawyers who accepted human rights cases decreased; hence those still active in this field became more visible.

Restrictions on Court Appearances

46. Prior to the 2009 presidential elections lawyers faced certain restrictions in entering the Revolutionary Courts, but [the restrictions] were not so blatant and severe [as they are now]. In fact, lawyers could attend court, but faced more challenges in accessing judges and/or accessing the file—which is a tale of its own! However, [after the 2009 presidential elections] the authorities began imposing more limitations on lawyers entering Revolutionary Courts. The process was such that the

accused person or other individuals required in court entered a waiting area where they would have to get a letter. Lawyers had to get approval from the branch to be let in. On many occasions the judge was not available, or, even if he was, other administrators such as Mr. Fallah or Mojtaba in Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court would have the power to allow or forbid the lawyers to get in.

47. After the 2009 elections, however, authorities devised an automatic system, whereby anyone having business in court, be it an accused person or lawyer, would have to take a number from the machine and wait—just as you would in a bank—until your number was shown on the screen. Then you would approach the staff who would issue permission to enter. This made it very difficult for the lawyers, inasmuch as at times we had to attend trials at 8:30 in the morning, or we had arranged to first attend a court at the Revolutionary Court and then appear in another court at 10:00 a.m., and this process made it very difficult and inefficient. I note that up until I [left Iran], lawyers had priority in filling out the request form, and waited to be called, and if they were given permission, they could attend court.

Threats and Intimidations

48. Before I describe the threats against me, I would like to share with you an anecdote from one of my trials. Up until then, I thought that only Judge Haddad imposed certain restrictions on me—since he knew the details of my case—but then I realized that other judges were also aware of my past. I represented a leftist student at Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court. At the trial, first they wrote the synopsis, and then the court clerk, who was sitting beside the judge, called my client over to where he was sitting. I objected to this motion, and said that my client must sit with his lawyer and I would not allow him to go there.
49. At this point, Judge Moqiseh—whose trials in Branch 28 bear little resemblance to a judicial trial, and are more like battlefields, inasmuch as he is notorious for creating an atmosphere of rage and tension owing to his antagonistic attitude—yelled at me and said, “You are deliberately causing havoc in court. You yourself are anti-revolutionary and were jailed by the regime. Tell me, do you believe in this regime?” I realized that I, too, had to raise my voice like him to be heard. I objected to his manner of conduct, and said, “You have no right to ask me such questions. This is considered investigation of one’s belief, and you are committing an offense by questioning me. Your comments are out of line and inappropriate. My private matters have no place here. This is not my trial; this is my client’s trial and we can only discuss matters relevant to the case before the court.”
50. I realized then that Judge Moqiseh was also aware of my background. After that incident, every time he saw me he would make comments such as: “You have not been arrested yet?” “They have not come after you yet?” Or when he was in a particularly good mood, he would say, “Will the day come when I can conduct your trial?” One day when I had gone to read my clients’ file at Branch 28, I saw that a judgment against one of my colleagues, Mr. Khalil Bahramian, was sent to be typed and Judge Moqiseh was waiting in his office for the typed copy. When he saw me, he said, “I wait for the day that I issue a verdict for Ms. Mahnaz Parakand!” There were other such comments as well. For instance, once when I was at Branch 15, the judge commented, “I heard you were arrested!” All these remarks were, in a way, threats and intimidations.

Defending the Leaders of the Bahá'í Community of Iran

51. In this case, my clients were the seven leaders of the Bahá'í community of Iran who had been in solitary confinement in Evin prison for two and a half years. Solitary in the sense that two ladies were in one cell and five gentlemen in another area in individual cells separate from other inmates. They were in Ward 209. During this two and half year period they had no visitation with defense lawyers. Even our designation letter was taken by the Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office and given to them for signing; that is to say even for signing the designation letter we were not granted permission to see our clients.
52. Many times we tried to obtain permission to see our clients; ultimately, about a month prior to the trial date we were granted permission to see them. One time I went to Evin prison at 8:00 a.m. to visit them, and waited until 2:00 p.m. at which time the guards brought only two of the men. They said because it was Ramadan [the holy month of fasting in Islam] and they wanted to close early, I could only see the two men, and that I would have to return another day to see the others. We knew well that if we were to come another day, we would encounter further obstacles. For instance, there was no guarantee that they would accept the same permission for a visit the next time. Therefore, I had to go see Judge Moqiseh and ask him to call the prison authorities to validate the same permission for the next visit so I could be sure that I could see my clients on the next visit.
53. Reading the dossier, I realized that Judge Moqiseh has summoned the Intelligence Officers and interrogators to be present in the trial. I spoke to him first and indicated that Intelligence Officers and interrogators have no right to be present in court, but he disagreed! He said, "We have summoned them, and they have to appear in court as experts." I did not say anything else, and decided to address this issue in court, given that such action was completely against the law. If these officers and agents were to testify as experts, they would have to meet the qualifications of 'experts' as defined by law, whereas these individuals clearly did not meet such qualifications by virtue of being interrogators and agents, whose job is to intimidate and create an atmosphere of fear and terror, and thus their presence in court would create nothing other than the said emotions! Furthermore, we witnessed that in the first two hearings the judge did not allow any of the defendants' family members to be present in the courtroom, but the officers and agents were seated in court. Owing to this reason, and my objections, the court sessions were postponed a number of times.
54. On one occasion in particular, in a small 3x4 meters courtroom, they arranged two rows of three chairs to sit six people, and two rows of sofas beside the judge's desk. I entered the room and saw that there was a media crew present and that the room was packed. Our seven clients, Mr. Esmailzadeh and myself were all present in the room—and in fact the room was so packed that they added a few chairs for us to sit. To begin with the prosecutor sat beside the judge—which was completely inappropriate and against the law. I repeatedly objected to this arrangement and said that the prosecutor should not be sitting beside the judge and must come down to the prosecutor's stand, inasmuch as he is the adversary party. Furthermore, the agents of the Ministry of Intelligence were all placed on the sofas. I was the last person to enter, and I realized that they locked the door behind me from the inside!
55. I immediately raised the issue with my clients and said that this situation is not legally acceptable. The families of the defendants had all come and were made to wait downstairs, and none were

permitted to enter the courtroom, while the room was filled with interrogators and Intelligence officers.

56. The judge asked the defendants to introduce themselves. One of the defendants stood up and introduced himself as the spokesman of the group and said that they will be represented by counsel. I then said that before I begin my defense I have something to say, and the judge allowed it. I demanded that either the judge had to declare this court an 'open court' and publically announce the presence of the Intelligence officers and the interrogators, in addition to the fact that the [courtroom's] door was locked from the inside, or declare the hearing 'in camera.' The judge refused, and said, "No, the hearing is 'open' and these individuals are called as 'experts.'" I then asked, "What kind of an open court is this that the door is locked from the inside and the families of my clients are all standing downstairs and none of them is allowed in court, while the interrogators are present?! What role do the interrogators play in this trial? The sole intention for their presence here is to intimidate the defendants."
57. Judge Moqiseh displayed outrage and said, "Your only intention is to disrupt the procedure..." My colleague, Mr. Esmailzadeh then stated a number of other objections, and the judge realized that the situation is not good, so once again he adjourned the proceedings.
58. Again, in Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court with respect to the case of the seven leaders of the Bahá'í community, the judge, who must remain impartial, addressed the defendants as "members of the perverse Bahá'í sect," to which the lawyers and defendants all objected. I directly addressed the judge and said he had no right to use that phrase. He claimed that he used the phrase based on the indictment. I responded, "The indictment has used the phrase because the prosecution is the adversary party, and that is why the prosecutor must be present in court to be challenged. The judge must be impartial, and has no right to duplicate a language used by the prosecutor." All these issues, including the fact that again the families were not allowed in court, once again resulted in the postponement of the trial.

Collaboration with the Center for the Defenders of Human Rights

59. From the inception of the Center for the Defenders of Human Rights, I tried to stay involved with this Center. Similarly, when the Committee for Collaborating Attorneys, and then the Committee for the Defense of Women and Children were established I became a member of both, and from the beginning I represented a number of cases that were referred to the Center. These involvements, as well as my personal history, exasperated the situation and added to the reaction of the Revolutionary Court judges to me.

Leaving the Country

60. In the middle of the last court session of the seven Bahá'í leaders, I raised my hand to object to the manner in which the prosecutor was conducting the case, when suddenly Judge Moqiseh shouted, "Don't you say anything. You yourself were an accused before me. You yourself were convicted by me. You have no right to say anything." All these were signs and warnings targeted at me. All these were intimidations, and indirect threats.

61. At the trial of Nasrin Sotoudeh, Attorney at Law, in early 2010, the prosecutor included a series of documents from various files from the Committee for Defense of Women and Children belonging to the Center for the Defenders of Human Rights. These disclosures included minutes from the women's committee and had my signatures as well as those of Mrs. Sotoudeh on them. Based on these documents, the prosecution was claiming that we were members of the Center, even though many people whose signatures were on these documents were guests who were specifically invited for a particular reason and not necessarily members of the Center. At recess, during the course of the trial, the prosecutor said, "We have the exact file for Mrs. Parakand, Mrs. Ghanavi, and Mr. Soltani." He then turned to Mr. Soltani and me and said, "You wait for it!" Then added, "You haven't received your summons yet?" That was when we realized that the threat was serious, and we expected to receive a notice anytime.
62. These measures were organized and planned, because a week later Mrs. Ghanavi was summoned to Evin for questioning after which she was released on bail. She was asked to give an undertaking to not represent such cases.
63. The first day after the [Persian] New Year holidays in March 2011 when I returned to work, I saw that I received a summons to appear before Branch 3 of the prosecutor's office to 'respond to the charges' against me. The word 'charges' indicated that there is more than one charge, and that all three allegations against Nasrin Sotoudeh were now [lodged] against me as well.
64. They gave me three days to report in person. First I decided to go, then reconsidered given my background and the threats I received here and there, i.e., Judge Haddad's remarks about my execution order, and questioning my license to practice, and in general, the recurring mention of 'execution!' When I was defending Mr. Soltani in 2009—after the 2009 elections Mr. Soltani was put in solitary confinement for 7 months—Judge Mortazavi said, "This Mahnaz Parakand had an execution order against her and should not be on these files." So, the word 'execution' was obviously lingering on their minds, and given my background and knowledge I had of those I represented—particularly those with a history of incarceration, who had been rearrested again—I knew just how severely they could be treated and what harsh verdicts issued against them. And because I did not want to be stopped, I decided to leave the country. I had a valid passport and I travelled legally to Norway.