



Witness Statement of Masumeh Ka'abi

Name: Masumeh Ka'abi
Place of Birth: Ahvaz, Iran
Date of Birth: September 1977
Occupation: Housewife

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)
Date of Interview: December 10, 2012
Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Masumeh Ka'abi. It was approved by Masumeh Ka'abi on December 3, 2013. There are 68 paragraphs in this statement.

The views and opinions of the witness expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center.

Statement

Introduction

1. My name is Masumeh Ka'abi, born in September 1977. I am a housewife.

Arrest

2. In March 2006 the security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran invaded our house for the first time. I was at home with my children but my husband was not here; he was out of the country. They invaded our house and we were outnumbered. They rummaged through the whole house.
3. They did not show us [any warrants or documents]. They said, "We are from the Ministry of Education and want to ask you some questions. Where is your husband?"
4. I believed their claim that they were from the Ministry of Education because my husband used to be a teacher. He also supported independence [for the Ahwazi Arab population] as a member of the al-Nahza ['Renaissance'] movement.¹ After he left Iran in 2006, they stormed into our house two months later, looking for him.
5. They came and rummaged through our house, took photos of my husband and asked me some questions. They separated me from my children, the children in one room, and I in another room. Then the conflict became physical and they wanted to take me out of the house by force. They came in two or three unmarked Peugeot. Two of them were plainclothes agents and the rest were all armed and in military uniforms. The two plainclothes agents were the men who said they were from the Ministry of Education. I let them in. About five or six minutes after they came in, the rest of them stormed in and rummaged through everything and created a mess.
6. They asked me some questions and I answered them. Then they said, "You have to come with us to the [local office of the] Ministry of Education." I said, "At this time of the night the Ministry of Education is closed! And besides that, I don't know you. Do you expect a woman to come along with all these men?" He said, "No, we will go somewhere to ask you some questions; afterwards you will return to your kids." I refused, and then we got into a fight. They hit me and dragged me by force. My children were very frightened and were screaming. I was also screaming.
7. They hurt me much more than I expected in the house. Then they dragged me and took me to the car with my kids. I was so frightened that I asked, "Where are you taking me?" They said, "Somewhere to ask you some questions." Then, when they took me, they separated me from my children.
8. My youngest son's name is Emad. He was eighteen months old back then. My oldest daughter was almost twelve. Another daughter was almost eleven, and my [youngest] daughter was nine or

¹ Rahnama, an Iran-based website covering the IRI's anti-terrorism efforts, claims that the Haraka al-Nahza was responsible for thirteen separate terrorist bombings in 2005-06. See <http://rah-nama.ir/fa/content/503/حركة-النضال-العربي-لتحرير-الاحواز> [in Persian]. The witness' arrest and the authorities' search for her husband closely followed the 2005-06 Ahwaz bombing campaign. See <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1059230.html>. Several Ahwazi Arabs were sentenced and executed for the bombings, but questions remain as to the nature of the evidence provided and the fairness of their trials. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4765962.stm.

ten. My other son was seven. I have three daughters and two sons.

9. My youngest son was in my arms. They took the other four children to the Information Bureau² of the Ministry of Intelligence and National Security (MOIS) in Falakeh Sad neighborhood of Ahvaz, which they call Amaniye.
10. They did not blindfold me when they took me from the house. It was several hours before they took my children away and interrogated me. I did not know what happened to my children after they took them away from me. But I did not let them take away my youngest son, because he was in my arms and he was very scared. I kept asking, "What did you do to my kids?" They said, "The children went back home and they are not with us." And then they interrogated me. It was almost 3:00 or 4:00 AM when they blindfolded me and put me in the Peugeot.
11. When they interrogated me, they asked, "Where is your husband? What is his profession? What does he do? Who are these people who come to your house? What are their names?" And I honestly did not know the names of the people who came to our house. How was I supposed to know? I am a housewife!
12. They threatened me a lot. They harassed me and they beat me at the Information Bureau. They beat me with something that looked like a cable.

Interrogation and Torture

13. The first time that they beat me was at the Information Bureau. But I do not know where they took me that night. I was so frightened and my son was scared and crying. I asked, "Where are you taking me?" And they said, "We can't just walk [around]. We are taking you somewhere to interrogate you." I stopped talking. We were on the road for about one hour. I could not see anything and I did not know where I was being taken.
14. When the car reached a certain point they took me out of the car. I walked for about ten minutes and then entered a hallway, or that is how it felt, since I could not see anything [because I was blindfolded]. And then all of a sudden they opened a door and said, "Come inside and after I close the door, take your blindfold off." I took the blindfold off when he closed the door and saw that my son and I were in a small cell.
15. My son was in my arms, and I was not willing to give him away. They said, "You cannot keep your child inside of the prison." I refused—I thought if I gave them my child that he might die. They said, "If we want, we can take your child away, but because of our faith we want your child to stay with you."
16. The next day, it was about 9:00 or 10:00 AM and they opened the door and said, "Blindfold yourself; we want to take you somewhere." I was very frightened. I was a single woman in a cell with all these men. And I did not know the point of all of this and what they wanted to do to me. I put my blindfold on. They said, "Come." I could not see anything. I said, "How am I supposed to be able to walk?" He was holding a newspaper and said, "Hold on to this newspaper. I will be

² Information Bureaus are the MOIS facilities that are open to the public in each locality, as opposed to detention centers and other MOIS offices. It has been reported that some Information Bureaus have their own detention cells (see, for example, http://zamaaneh.com/news/2009/03/post_8344.html), but the witness may also be using the phrase "Information Bureau" to refer to all MOIS facilities.

holding the other end. Follow me.” Then they took me to another room. It was an interrogation room. As I sat, I sensed that someone was approaching us. He said, “Sit right here until the judge comes and interrogates you.”

17. I was blindfolded the whole time, sitting silently in the room and I did not hear any noise. Then I felt someone come into the room. All of a sudden, something hit me on the neck. He abruptly hit me on the neck, and I was very scared. When I was being interrogated, they took my baby away from me.
18. They tortured me physically and emotionally. I said, “Why are you beating me? What have I done?” He said, “You have done all kinds of things! Your husband has also done all kinds of things.” He spoke with a standard Persian accent [from outside of Khuzestan province]. They all had the same accent.
19. They interrogated me every night. They tortured and insulted me with disrespectful words. They threatened to kill me, my husband and my children. They said, “We’ll execute all of you; we won’t leave even one of your family members alive.” They tied my hands and feet to a chair. I was bent over and tied to the chair like that for four hours. Then they would hit me with a cable.
20. After interrogations, they would take me back to the same cell without giving me anything to eat. I did not eat for two days. I heard horrifying noises [of torture] and I was terrified. I went crazy in that cell and screamed, “For God’s sake, bring a Quran or something so that I have something to do in here.” But to no avail. It was as if they never heard a thing.
21. After the interrogation, they brought my baby [back to me]. [He] was very scared, as if they had frightened [him]. They were telling [my] eighteen-month-old baby, “Emad, you are going to turn out like your father. When you grow up, you will be a counter-revolutionary just like your father.” In prison, I fed him just cookies or milk and similar foods. He got very weak and was very ill. I thought he was going to die. They said, “Give him to us and we will give him to your family members.” And I said, “Even if my son dies, my son and I will stay here and I will not give him up to you.” I was very afraid of giving my child to them.
22. Because of the beatings with the cable, my hands and feet are [basically] crippled. It is very hard for me to walk. The way they tortured me caused serious injury.

Sepidar Prison

23. After a month of torture, they said, “You have to go somewhere.” They would not tell me where they were going to take me. And when I asked, they said, “We want to execute you.” They tortured me with these types of statements.
24. They never explained my charges to me. I would say, “Since I am innocent, if you are Muslim, you would not execute an innocent woman.” They said, “You are a criminal and we will execute you.” I said, “Okay, execute me, no problem.” Then they blindfolded me and they put me in a car.
25. My son was in my arms. They blindfolded me when they put me in the car and I think we drove for an hour and a half. Then I realized that a gate was opening and the car continued on. They took me out and said, “You can remove your blindfold.” When I removed it, I saw it was a prison.

26. I realized it was Sepidar Prison later [from one of the prison authorities]. After I removed my blindfold, they handed me over to the head of the prison and left, saying, "We turned you in, our work with you is done." They took me to the women's ward. This was the first time I was in a prison, so it was very difficult for me.
27. During the period [after my arrest but before my transfer to Sepidar], I did not receive any news about my family or my kids. I did not know what was happening outside, or whether they were dead or alive. They did not let me make phone calls.
28. When I was in prison, for [the first] two weeks I was forbidden from having visitors and forbidden from phone calls, so my family did not know that I was in prison. They put me in the quarantine ward and did not permit me to stay in the same ward as the other prisoners. My son and I were in a small quarantine cell. I begged them to let me make a phone call to inform my family [so that they could bring things like] clothing for my son and me. They said, "We are not allowed. We have an order saying that you are forbidden from having visitors or phone calls."
29. After two weeks the authorities of the prison informed me, "Today you can make phone calls and have visitors. You can call [your family] to bring something for your child." After the phone call, my family came to visit me. They were happy to see me and repeatedly asked questions such as, "Where were you?" and I told them everything. They said they had not managed to obtain any news of my fate. They had asked how long it had been since I had been transferred to the prison. I said it had been almost two weeks.
30. For about six or seven weeks I had no contact, no visits. I had no news of [my family]. Then, for almost six months after I came out of solitary confinement I was still in prison. After six months, they said that [my family] could post bail in order for me to leave. They called my family and told them to post bail. My bail was one billion Rials [roughly US \$110,000 at the time]; they used the deeds to two houses to post my bail.
31. I did not know what [my charges were] and so I asked. They said, "You are a separatist like your husband." Three months after my release on bail, I still did not know what my sentence was. I had no idea. They did not take me to court until six months after I left.
32. My father went to court to see what my sentence was and asked, "What is my daughter charged with that you demand such a high bail? What did she do?" They told my father, "Your daughter is a separatist." My dad was surprised and told them, "My daughter would not get involved in such things and is not educated enough to go after such activities. She is always at home." They told my dad, "You do not know your daughter well."
33. After three months, they released my bail documents and I was acquitted. But they did not stop harassing me. They were always after me. They sent people to pick me up and take me to the Information Bureau of the Ahvaz MOIS office, where they would interrogate and question me.
34. I was never officially summoned, they would call my father. They had my father's number. They harassed him, even though he was an old man. They harassed him with insults and their tone [of voice]. They were not respectful. They [should] respect the elderly, but they did not respect anyone, big, small, old, young—they treated them all the same.
35. The [authorities at the Ahvaz MOIS office] called my father and told him to bring his daughter to their office. Then they separated us and interrogated me for several hours. They sent someone to pick me up once a month to question and interrogate me. I was fed up. I was tired of all of the

harassment. They asked a lot of questions, such as, “Do you have any news of your husband? Does he call you?”

36. I did not know where my husband was. I had no news [of him]. I did not know if he was dead or alive. They pressured me, saying, “You have to tell us where your husband is and what he is doing. Does he call you? Does he talk to you?” They harassed me so much with such questions to the point that I felt like they were crushing my soul.
37. They threatened my, saying, “You have to say where your husband is, otherwise, we will kill you and your children.” They constantly made these types of threats. I swore that I did not know of his location but they did not accept my claims. I swore that I had no information about my husband, that I did not know where he was, or even whether he was dead or alive. I said I had no news of him. They retorted, “You are lying.”
38. Every time I went to the MOIS Information Bureau I could see the interrogators. I do not know their names because they never used any names, instead they used terms like *hajji*³ or such. I would recognize their faces. One of them was tall, bald and had a very large nose. The other one had a beard and his hair was a bit long and he was short. The next one was very tall; I still see him in my nightmares.
39. Since I was scared, I still have nightmares of those people. He was very tall and he had a distinctly shaped mouth, as if there was something between his lips. He scared me a lot. Another one that I remember was wearing a black suit, and his beard was very black also. One of them was completely bald. I saw them and I still remember them.
40. I was blindfolded when they interrogated me [at Setade Khabari]. Every month my dad took me, [it] became a monthly duty. It was almost 2008 when I left there. I was tired of everything.

Attempt to Flee Iran and Capture

41. A year had passed, or more, since my release. I ran away to join my husband. I ran away with a fake passport because they had banned me from exiting the country and even took the birth certificates of my children and myself. They did not leave us any choice.
42. All of my children were with me; I had them in my fake passport. We took an airplane from Tehran to Syria. When I got there, I [was trying to] put my affairs in order so that I could go to my husband. I was there for six months.
43. Then I managed to find a way to leave through the UN. Unfortunately I did not succeed. Syrian Intelligence arrested me and submitted me to the Iranian MOIS. Then they flew my children and me from Syria back to Tehran.
44. I stayed in a room in the airport for almost two days with my children. After two days they put me and my children in a car. I asked where they were taking us. They said, “We are taking you somewhere to ask you some questions. Then you will go back to Ahvaz.”

³ *Hajji*, a term meaning one who has completed the religious pilgrimage to Mecca. Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* 161 (2d ed. 1997).

Interrogation of Children

45. They took us to an MOIS office in Tehran and blindfolded us all, even my little boy and my daughter who wears glasses. They took her glasses away. She cannot see anything without her glasses and unfortunately, they never gave them back. They interrogated my children and me for about a week.
46. They interrogated my children in front of me. Later when they separated us, they interrogated them again. For the first time, they put me in an interrogation room, separate from my children, and interrogated me. They put my elder daughters in separate rooms. When we saw each other again, they told me, "Mom, they put us in a room and interrogated us."
47. They asked my children "How did you go from Ahvaz to Syria? Who helped you? Who were you in contact with? Do you have any news of your father?" And so on. My children were young at the time. My oldest daughter was under fourteen.
48. They said that we had to go back. Two people in plainclothes escorted me and my children onto a plane. One of them sat next to me, the other sat next to my daughters. They took us to Ahvaz. It was a large Iran Air [commercial] flight carrying lots of passengers.

Return to the MOIS Information Bureau

49. When we got to the airport, the agents from the Ahvaz MOIS office were waiting. When they saw my children and me, we were handed over and put in a car. They continuously said things like, "Ms. Ka'abi, long time no see," and laughed saying, "Where were you going? Do you think we would let you go to your husband?" I said, "What have I done? Why did you ban me from exiting the country? Why are you opposed to my lifestyle?" They said, "That is not the case. Put those thoughts out of your head." They took us to the MOIS Information Bureau and my interrogation and savage beating there took a while.
50. They beat me up in front of my children. After the interrogation, they separated me from all of my five children, even my youngest son. They said, "You have to come with us." I said, "Where?" They said, "You know where!" My children cried and grabbed at me, saying, "Do not take our mom away, take us wherever you are taking her!" They told my children, to stay there, and that they would just ask me a few questions and then we would be back. Then they forcefully separated us, put me in a car, and I did not know what they were going to do to them. I did not know where they were or what was happening.
51. No matter how many times I asked, "What did you do to my kids?" they said, "Your children are fine. They were taken to your father." When I saw my children again I found out that they interrogated my daughters after they took me away. They were frightened. They threatened them a lot.
52. Then they took me to the same place that they took me to the first time, the same cell, and they kept me there for a month. I could hear my children getting tortured. I asked them if it was my children's voices that I heard and they said, "Yes, we are torturing your children." I said, "Why are you doing such a thing? What have they done?"
53. But they were not really torturing my children. They wanted to scare me. I heard awful noises. While I was in the cell [I thought] I was hearing the sound of my children being tortured. I heard

these noises so much that it drove me crazy. I thought they had my kids and that they were torturing them. I was so scared. I can't forget it. I will remember it forever.

54. Their goal was to find my husband; they constantly said, "We will catch your husband and execute him. Do not think that we will not be able to catch him. We are after him. Do not think that he got away by leaving the country. We will find him." They said things like this to the point that I thought they had arrested my husband.
55. Once they said, "We arrested your husband," and I said, "Why don't you let me see him?" They said, "No. We will not let you. We will hang him, and we will hang you too." A month passed and I still had no news of my children. They did not let me talk to them on the phone. But they had given my children to my family after a week [of detention].
56. Every night they interrogated me and physically and psychologically tortured me. I said, "You are Muslim, you pray, you believe in Islam. How could you do such things?" They said, "We aren't Muslim, who said we're Muslim?" I swore to the Quran and God and they laughed at me and mercilessly tortured me. They had no mercy.

Return to Sepidar Prison, Trial and Continued Interrogation

57. During this whole month, they tortured me psychologically and physically every night. I imagined what they wanted to do and I was so scared. After a month, they took me to prison and I was there for about three months. After three months, they said they were going to give us a sentence.
58. I had permission to have visitors and my family came, but I did not see my kids at all. And they took everything [that I had packed in my luggage] away from me. My children were not allowed to come to visit me, so only my mother and father came. I asked to see my children a couple of times, but they said that the MOIS had ordered that I was not to see my children. I heard from my parents that they were doing fine.
59. I was in Sepidar Prison for [another] three months this time. It looked familiar. Then they took me to the Revolutionary Court where they asked if I knew my sentence. I said I did not know my sentence. They said, "You are sentenced to four and a half years' imprisonment." I said, "For which crime? What is my crime? My crime is that I wanted to leave and be with my husband?" They said, "Yes, it is a crime⁴, and your second crime is forging documents and maintaining contact and collaboration with your husband, who is a separatist."
60. I did not have access to an attorney and the authorities did not inform me of the nature of my charges before they took me to the Revolutionary Court. There were two judges. One of them wore a suit and the second one had a turban and was a [Shi'a] religious cleric. They asked questions, mocked me and laughed. Then they took me back to prison.
61. Some months passed, then they took me to the MOIS Office again. Even though I was in prison, they still did not leave me alone. Every once in a while they took me to the MOIS Office. Each time, they put me in a car, blindfolded me and took me to the cell that I was in before to

⁴ It is unclear whether the judiciary authorities were referring to sentencing under the IRI's restrictive exit policy or whether she was charged with fleeing a previous prison sentence pertaining to her first arrest. See <http://iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000351-islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five.html#7>.

interrogate me. I told them that they had sentenced me already and I was already in prison, so why wouldn't they leave me alone?

62. "We just want to ask you a few questions," they said, "How are you doing? When they would take me there, they asked questions like, "Any news from your husband?" I said, "Of my husband?" They said, "Yes, tell us." I said, "I am in prison, how could I have news of my husband? That is not even possible." They said, "Of course it is possible. Your husband calls the prison and you talk to him." I said, "That is not true." And they made fun of me and laughed.
63. They said, "Your husband comes here sometimes to come after you." I said, "If my husband comes here, why don't you arrest him?" They said, "We are waiting to see what happens to him, to see what fate has in store for him." After about two-and-a-half years I got sick, so badly that even now I go to a psychiatric clinic for therapy and my hands and feet hurt from the times they tied me to a chair for hours. I cannot remember how many times they tied me to a chair. It was too many times to count.
64. They did not tie me to the chair in prison. They did that kind of thing in the room where they took me to be interrogated. They have a place where they take criminals in such a way that they would not know where it is. No one can see this place because everyone is blindfolded.
65. After two and a half years, I got very sick. They did not do anything for me in prison, so I got to the point of paralysis and I could not even stand up. At that point the prison doctor examined me and told the head of the prison that I was in really bad condition and that I had to leave for treatment. The head of the prison said that he had no power in this matter and the MOIS had to accept it and issue an order.

Escape

66. After a while, I became very, very ill and they gave me one week to post bail, leave to cure myself, and then return. I accepted. My father posted bail and I was released from prison. Again, my bail amount was one billion Rials.
67. I escaped Iran during that one week. I did not return to prison. I went to Turkey illegally. My kids had gone before me. I was in prison when my children went to Turkey to be with their father. They went through Iraq.
68. My husband left Iran legally with his passport. He was an active member of the al-Nahza movement during this period. The officials were after him and they wanted to arrest him because of his activities. He realized this [and that is why] he left Iran.