



### Witness Statement of Milad

**Name:** Milad\*

**Place of Birth:** Shiraz, Iran

**Date of Birth:** 1982

**Occupation:** Student

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**Interviewing Organization:** Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

**Date of Interview:** June 19, 2013

**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Milad. It was approved by Milad on December 27, 2013. There are 54 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.

\* Pseudonym assigned to the witness.

## Statement

### Introduction

1. My name is Milad. I was born in 1982 in Shiraz. I am gay. The experience of being gay in Iran was surely not a pleasant one. In all the years since I discovered myself until the time that I had to leave Iran there was a great deal of secrecy between me and my family, friends, teachers, and society.

### Sexual Orientation

2. It may have taken me a while to become familiar with the term “gay”. But as for my needs and inclinations and what I knew about myself, I reached that conclusion quite early. I think I was about ten or twelve when I realized I am not inclined toward the opposite sex. Luckily I did not have a problem with this. I did not think about why I am this way and that there must be something wrong with me. I was okay with this issue, meaning that I always liked my feelings. For this reason, I would not dig deep to see what this is or to find out if I’m dysfunctional in some way.
3. I think it was in university when a person, whom I had met rather randomly, told me this is how we are, and that’s our “category.” He told me about the phrase “gay,” and he explained how we find each other. In a sense I entered “gay life,” as my peers call it, at the time I entered university.
4. At the university, a number of my friends who were gay found me and talked to me, and they opened a whole new world to me. In all the years when I knew about my sexual orientation, on the one hand I was okay with it and was not too conflicted about it. But I did have conflicts with myself as it wasn’t something acceptable by others, so I always hid it. I had some problems at home.

### Family Life and Secrecy

5. My family wasn’t a very religious family. My sister was free to bring her boyfriend home and my brother was free to bring his girlfriend. They always asked me why I didn’t have a girlfriend. My family would say, “He’s a good kid. He doesn’t do that kind of stuff. He isn’t naughty.” But how was I supposed to stay a good kid? I had to have a relationship at some point. For this reason when high school was over, despite my attachments to my family and the city, I was very adamant about going to another city to attend university. I could have gotten into university in my hometown, Shiraz, but I decided to go to a place far away so I wouldn’t be at home. This way my family would not be interfering in my life. If I lived away from home I could claim that I have a girlfriend.
6. I always had a boyfriend since the age of ten or twelve, be it permanent or temporary. But everything was completely in secret and with fear. But there were times when it was just too obvious, like when you’re talking on the phone with another boy twenty-four hours a day, or when you’re together all the time. You come and go and sleep and wake up together. This was very strange for my parents. To this day I’m not sure if my family found out anything from the way I behaved. But we never had a problem with each other over this issue.

7. In all those relations with other guys you either had to ask them to make sure no one finds out, or they had to be mindful of it themselves. All the people I was romantically involved with had to conceal it as I did. Now I don't know if they were straight or if they had inclinations like mine. In any event, we were together. I think they had to do some hiding on their part. I think I was very lucky that I never ran into a problem because something could have happened at any moment.
8. My parents would not dig deep, but they would ask, "Son, what do you want to do? Do you have someone?" They would say these things in a half-joking manner. It bothered me that my family acted this way. I just didn't want anyone to find out about this issue. For this reason, I didn't return to Shiraz after a certain age. I was always far away. I would not even return during breaks in between exams. They wanted to come, but I would not let them come. I didn't want them to get too involved. I went to university in Ahvaz. None of the universities I selected were in my own city. They were all somewhere else, and I was accepted in Ahvaz, and that's where I went. I studied photography.
9. I always went to great lengths to hide my sexual orientation. To this day, the thought of it bothers me that there was so much secrecy at every moment of my life. If I didn't do this, I certainly might have run into a problem. For instance, when I was leaving Iran, I thought since I was leaving I should let my best friend know. I lost my best friend only because he found out I was gay all these years and had not told him. Had I told him, he may not have wanted to be my friend. When I told him, he did not have a bad reaction at that moment, but later he sent me a number of emails and letters and wrote, "I expected you to have told me who you are and what you're up to." I told him, "What difference would it have made if I told you? Would you not have befriended me?" He didn't respond, and that was the end of our friendship.

### **University and the First Relationship**

10. At the university I realized there were some students who were very similar to me. One of my friends, who I'm still in touch with, gradually became close to me. We were neither studying the same thing nor were in the same class, but he wanted us to be closer and wanted to know who I was, and he treated me better than others. This went on and we became very close friends. Our families weren't there. We were like family with each other. To this day he has not forgotten that when he said the word gay, I said, "What's that?" He said, "What do you mean? You're twenty something years old and don't know what the word gay means?"
11. I was 21 or 22 at the time. I was in the first year of university. He then said, "That's how we are. I know you're this way. I noticed the way you look at things. I know how you like things." He said, "Is that how it is?" I said, "Yes, that's how it is." I was a bit afraid to tell him, but since we were close I thought nothing would really happen.
12. Later this friend of mine gradually introduced me to everything. He told me that there are a lot of people like us and that it would not be a bad idea for me to get to know some of them. He showed me some internet chat rooms and some friend-finding sites. I can tell you that at that time it was as if a whole new door opened before me and I entered a different world. I was okay with the same little world I was in, and I had no problem with it. Later, however, I realized that there were a lot of people in this new world. I went to one of those websites and realized there are many of them in a single city in Iran. It was like a breath of fresh air. Naturally anyone who just enters this kind of environment likes to search, see who these people are, and talk to them.

13. I studied photography and cinematography. I had the opportunity to be hired, but given that [my sexual orientation] might come up if they did an inquiry, I didn't even attempt [to work]. I was afraid that they might find something somewhere. I was extremely cautious. I just didn't want to cause problems for myself and my family, because I could not bear it otherwise.
14. I didn't meet anyone during the time I was in university. I was mostly studying or hanging out with the same close friends whom I had recently met. We enjoyed each other's company. I wasn't thinking of finding a partner. This went on until I finished school and tried to find work in Ahvaz, but Ahvaz is no place to live. Again I had to return to Shiraz. I went back to Shiraz and I met someone, and the first relationship of my entire life formed at that time.
15. I say this was my first relationship because I can't really use that phrase to describe what I had previously. They were on and off. Sometimes my boyfriends were around and sometimes they weren't. We weren't officially together. To this day I don't know if the people I was with were gay or straight.
16. He was the first person I was sure was like me. You could say we were officially together. I think his family knew about him, but they didn't really want to bring it up with him. But I'm not completely sure about this, and we did not talk about it much.
17. When we wanted to spend more time with each other it was mostly at their house. We were together for two years until he decided to leave Iran. When he applied, we thought it was unlikely for him to get a visa. But he lucked out and got a visa for Australia.

### **Military Exemption**

18. I saw a doctor in Shiraz to get an exemption [from the military service]. I explained to him that I wanted to get an exemption and I can't go to military service. He said that he didn't sign letters easily, and that I had to go through all his tests. He conducted some tests on me and the tests showed that I was homosexual. But he documented it as something different on purpose. In the letter he sent to the Military Service Office he said I needed sex-reassignment surgery (SRS). He did this to help me. But he never told me that explicitly. My boyfriend was a doctor. We opened the letter and he read it. My boyfriend said this not at all what I was. He said, "I know and you know that you're not transsexual."
19. He conducted various tests. He interviewed me several times. There were also some tests. One of the tests was the Rorschach Test. You had to look at some images and write and talk about them. Based on those they determine if you're gay. I don't know if the tests were wrong or he just wrote it down like that. His own diagnosis, right or wrong, was that I shouldn't be in the military service because of my sexual preferences. As soon as they saw that letter they said that I was exempt. From the time I started the process to the time I received my military exemption card it took less than two months.
20. Before going to the medical commission, the head of the Military Service Department looks at everyone. I think he met those who had to go to the medical commission in his room. He asked me to go to his room and take off all my clothes.
21. He definitely was not a doctor. He was wearing a military uniform. There was another person in the room, whom he asked to leave. Then he said to me, "Take off your clothes. Take off

your pants. Take off your shirt, and take off everything.” He touched me, looked at me and examined me. He checked me everywhere. He wasn’t wearing gloves. You can tell the difference between when a physician is examining you and when an ordinary person is examining you just to bother you. He was grinning, and he looked at me derisively.

22. He provided no explanation. He saw my file, read it, and said, “Go get naked over there!” I didn’t say anything. He examined me for one or two minutes. He closed the file and said, “Now go to the medical commission.” This was in the Military Service Department in Shiraz. It was close to the Ali Ibn Hamze bridge. The only thing I remember is that it was on the second floor. His office door said “Military Service Department,” and he had three stars on his shoulder.
23. He then sent me to the medical commission in another building at the same Military Service Department. Everyone had to stand in line. They would call us in one by one. They saw people with medical conditions behind a curtain and checked them right there. The moment I walked in the doctors talked a little with one another and said, “He’s exempt.” I don’t know why they did that. One of them said, “You don’t need to ask him anything. He’s exempt.” Another one said, “No, let me ask.” But the first one said, “No there is no need.” I was given the exemption. There were four doctors in that room. They looked at your file before you went inside, and then they called you in.
24. There is a specific provision on the military exemption card. It says, for instance, Article 33, and when you look up Article 33, it says “illegitimate relations” or something like that.<sup>1</sup> I really don’t know [what it says]. [But it means that] this person cannot be a soldier as he’s not ethically qualified. This provision applies if you’re gay, transsexual, lesbian, or whatever else you are, but they don’t specifically indicate that a person is gay, perhaps because it’s a crime.
25. I lied to my family about my exemption. My actual exemption card is in Iran, and if they want they can easily go and see what Article 33 says. I don’t know if they have or not. I don’t remember exactly. I told them it was because of psychological issues. At first they said, “You shouldn’t have said such a thing. You won’t be able to get a job later.” I said, “Well, I got it.” As I said, I lied to them. They said, “Are you psychotic now?” I said, “No, but my doctor did this.” They thought my boyfriend was my best friend. I said Ali is a doctor and he has a lot of friends and acquaintances, and they wrote me a letter and I got my medical exemption. They didn’t inquire any further.
26. I wasn’t thinking about whether getting a military exemption on this basis could prevent me from getting a job. I just wanted an exemption. I really didn’t want to serve in the military. It was a nightmare for me. I can’t be sure because I never went, but based on what I heard, I could guess what could have happened there. When they see someone who is unable to defend himself, they do whatever they can to him. Ultimately I didn’t want to serve in the army for all these things. I was very lucky they didn’t send me to the medical examiner’s office, but they sent others to the medical examiner’s office to go through the physical examination.

## Arrest

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<sup>1</sup> Article 33, paragraph 8 of the regulatory code that governs medical exemptions from military service states that “moral and sexual deviancy, such as transsexuality” can be grounds for a medical exemption.

27. Everyone was pressuring my boyfriend to throw a party after he got his visa. They said, “Now that you’re leaving we may never get to see you again. You got a boyfriend but you never threw a party.” His family really tried to talk him out of it. They said, “Don’t do it. You’ll run into a problem right when you’re about to leave.” But he said, “I’ll just throw a small party. I want all of us to be together. I want to say goodbye to everyone and leave.”
28. The party was in the early summer of 2007. There were only ten or fifteen of us, and all of us knew each other. My boyfriend’s father stayed home [where the party was], but the rest of his family were out. They had a really large house. He stayed in the house to make sure nobody got drunk or got into a fight. The door was open.
29. Shortly after the party started [authorities] raided the party and arrested us. They were *Basijis* in plainclothes.<sup>2</sup> Every time I recount it, it’s as if I’m reliving that day. It was awful. They were savage. We hadn’t served drinks yet. No one still knows how they found out about the party. Even the music wasn’t loud. Not all the guests were there yet for us to be loud. There is a really big question about how they found out and came there.
30. They weren’t armed. They were just holding batons. They put all of us against the wall and blindfolded us. You’re in a far worse condition when your eyes are closed. You don’t know what may happen to you at any moment. They hit us with batons and shouted at us. They beat us mostly on our legs but also on the head. They pushed us. When they wanted to take us outside, they shoved us and didn’t care if we were going to fall down or that something might happen to us. We could bump into anything. My partner’s home was on the second floor, and they had rented out the first floor. They pushed us downstairs. We kept falling down the stairs.
31. There were some empty liquor bottles in the sideboard [of the house]. They were washed and did not even smell of alcohol. The [plainclothes *Basiji*] took those bottles and brought them there so they could tell the court that we drank alcohol, and to add drinking to the charges. They searched every inch of the house. They arrested my friend’s elderly father too.
32. At the time when they raided and arrested all of us, only two or three came inside. But more joined later. They had wireless radios. They broke everything as they walked. They were very profane when they arrested us. They said whatever they wanted. They left nothing intact at that house. They broke the windows. They broke the television. They threw us inside a car.
33. They beat me up a lot when they were arresting us. They mostly hit me on my leg and head with a baton.
34. I don’t know what kind of a car it was, because I was blindfolded. I think it was one of those vans with a lockup in the back. They pushed everyone in the back of that car. They would just shove you toward the car and push you inside until you finally landed somewhere. Then they put everyone on top of each other one by one. Unfortunately for me, I was the first to be thrown inside. They told me to lie down on my stomach. Then a bunch of people kept falling on me.

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<sup>2</sup> Basij is a volunteer-based militia force. Formed as a volunteer fighting force during the Iran-Iraq war, Basij is now controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). To enforce the morality code of the Islamic Republic, Basij forces often confront and arrest men and women for “inappropriate” attire, or that which is not in accordance with Islamic norms of dress.

35. Later on we realized our whole bodies were bruised. While inside the car I thought that I might die right then and there. I could not breathe. Many people were on top of me. There were ten to fifteen of us, and they put everyone on top of me.

### **Detention**

36. They took us to a detention facility, and later when we opened our eyes we realized it was the detention facility belonging to the *Basij* on the Khalili Street in Shiraz. People were even afraid of walking past it. For instance if a woman was to walk by it in those days she would fix her *hijab*.
37. We were in a state of intense fear. We had heard that there was a picture of a hen or a rooster laying eggs on the door of that facility, implying that they would [rape] anyone who was held there.
38. We were in detention for three days. No one knew where we were, because they had also arrested my friend's father. That poor old man was not in good condition. We would hear his voice when they wanted to arrest us. He asked and begged saying, "I know all of these people, and they're good kids."
39. Another thing that was very frightening was that when we were in the detention facility they would say, "All of you will die before you appear in court. We'll kill you. We'll kill you for the crime of sodomy and for being like this." They knew we were gay in advance. They even called us "faggots." We were all gay men. One of us later changed [his sex], but he wasn't a transsexual at the time.
40. They didn't give us food or water for three days. Our eyes were closed and they would say, "You're not allowed to open your eyes." We were all somewhere like underneath a staircase, meaning that [the roof on top] was sloped, and it was completely dark. Our hands were tied from the back. They didn't even come to untie our hands. We were blindfolded. They also threatened us at the beginning saying, "If we come and catch you with your eyes open, we'll do this and that. We'll beat you up and blow your head if we see anyone opening their eyes."
41. They also took our phones. We had no communication devices. They took our belts and shoe laces. They emptied our pockets. They beat up one of the kids so hard that his clothes and pants were torn. They punched and kicked us, and they also hit us with batons. One of my friends raised an objection, and they hit him so hard he was bruised. They came in once in a while and opened the door to make sure nobody moved or talked. [They would say] "Who are you? What did you do? If you have any information, give the rest of them away. Who do you know?"
42. They didn't take me for questioning. They kept questioning one of the guys. We asked him what had happened. He said, "They asked some ridiculous questions like: 'Where's your family? Where is this? Where is that?'" He was happy to say they asked for his family's information. He said, "Someone might come and get us out of here." This went on until they opened the door and came in on the third day and said, "Go inform your families. You need to appear in court."
43. They insulted us in the detention facility. They said some very rude things to us in front of our friend's father. They said, "Do you even know what kind of [expletive] these people are? Do

you know the kind of filth you let in your house? You are like them too!” They beat that old man more than us. They would kick him. The poor guy was sitting in front of the door. They would see that poor man the moment they opened the door. To come in, the [official] would kick him aside and come in.

44. There were fifteen of us. They interrogated three of us. When the [interrogated detainees] returned they were shaking and crying. The [*basiji*] told them something like, “We’ll kill you. We’ll do things to you. Go tell the rest of them that’s what’s going to happen to you.”
45. Those guys would say, “They made threats. Oh God what do you think is going to happen to us?” One would say it wouldn’t happen, and another would say it would. One would cry. It was horrific. Then after three days they came and said that we needed to contact our families. They also got a pledge from us, and said that we must post bail and appear before court. My family posted the deed to our house for my bail.
46. I don’t remember my exact charges, but they were related to having homosexual relations and consuming alcoholic beverages. They had found gay pornography at my boyfriend’s house.

### Leaving Iran

47. We were supposed to appear before the court in a month and a half. In the intervening period, since my boyfriend’s parents were very rich, they were able to pull some strings so he could leave [Iran.] God only knows how much money they spent so that he would not even have to appear in court, and luckily my boyfriend left. When he was leaving he told me not to stay in Iran. I said, “Where do I go? How do I go? I’ll go to the court. They don’t really want to do anything. They can’t do anything. They can’t prove anything. We hadn’t done anything.”
48. My boyfriend said, “I’ll make the arrangements for you. I’ll contact one of my friends.” I wasn’t even thinking about this at the time. Luckily we were not prohibited from leaving the country. I had a passport and didn’t need to obtain one. I wouldn’t have had time to go get a passport and leave the country before the court date. I did not say anything to my family before the court date. I said, “I want to go to Tehran.”
49. We didn’t retain an attorney. I don’t know about others.
50. I first went to Tehran. I spent a day with a friend I had met in college. I then borrowed some money from him. My boyfriend had also given me some money. I went to Turkey from Tehran. I left because I was afraid of appearing before the court. Anything could have happened there. I don’t know about the rest. I didn’t stay in touch with them. This was in June or July 2007.
51. I later found out that they had fined my family. The fine was 20 million tomans.<sup>3</sup> I didn’t tell my family about my plans to leave Iran because I was sure that they wouldn’t let me leave Iran and be separated from them. Also, the deed to the house was used for bail.

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<sup>3</sup>This amount approximately equals \$21,390 per the exchange rate in 2007.



52. I broke it to them that I had left Iran after being in Turkey for three months. They thought I was in Tehran and asked me to return. They were very suspicious of course. They said, "How could you be in Tehran, if we don't have a phone number to reach you?"
53. After that incident none of us came into contact with each other out of fear. We couldn't find each other or talk. I never heard from them. Later in Turkey I was constantly in touch with my boyfriend. He helped me to go where other LGBT persons were and to connect with his contacts in Turkey. I spent 22 or 23 months in Turkey.
54. From the moment they arrested me, I thought I died. I have no idea how I packed and left. I was afraid because one of the things we were charged with was illegitimate [relations]. After all we were all guys. All of us who were there were supposed to appear before the court. I thought if one of them said something it could be very dangerous. I gave up everything and ran away.