



Witness Statement of Rebin (Karim) Rahmani

Name: Rebin (Karim) Rahmani
Place of Birth: Kamyaran, Iran
Date of Birth: 23 September 1983
Occupation: Kurdish Human Rights Activist

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

Background

1. My name is Karim Rahmani, and I am known by my Kurdish name “Rebin” among activists and friends. I was born on March 27, 1983 in the city of Kamyaran. In Iran, I was a senior year computer science major at the University of Science and Industry in Arak.
2. I was arrested in November 2006 on the road between Karmanshah and Sarpol-e Zahab. I was sentenced to acting against national security and given a five year prison sentence in the lower court proceeding. At the appeal level, my sentence was reduced to two years. After my two year imprisonment, in October 2008, I was released from Dizel-Abad prison of Kermanshah. I left Iran in March 2011.

Activism during university years

3. In 2001, I was admitted to the Associates Program in Mining Engineering at Birjand University. In collaboration with the Kurds at Birjand University, we started an association and held Kurdish language sessions every week. We also had a quarterly called *Rojhelat*, which means ‘East’ in Kurdish. I served as managing editor for one of the editions, and contributed to other editions as well. This quarterly was published in both Kurdish and Farsi, and included subjects such as the history of the Kurdish people, cultural issues and the Kurdish situation from the standpoint of international law. We published this quarterly for five editions.
4. However following a complaint from the Intelligence Bureau and the Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) in Sanandaj [*Rojhelat*] was shut down by the institution of supervision for the student publications of Birjand University. They filed charges against me [for my involvement with the quarterly], but since I’d moved on to Arak University, the charges were left as an open case; it was not until after my arrest that I found out these charges had been made against me.
5. After completing my Associate’s degree at Birjand University, I was admitted in 2004 to a Bachelor’s program at Arak University of Science and Industry, and moved there. Since there was no Kurdish association [at Arak University], I was active in the university’s Islamic Student Association.
6. In 2006, me and one of my friends who majored in sociology, decided to conduct a study on the causes of drug addiction, AIDS and prostitution in Kermanshah. We worked for about five or six months on the study, interviewing and filming AIDS patients and drug addicts. It became clear to us that these crises in Kermanshah were a systematic trend deliberately programmed by the Islamic Republic itself.
7. For example, we documented one instance on film: across from Kermanshah’s Razi University is a residential area called Bagh Abrisham [Silk Garden]. There was a house there that had a small window similar to a newspaper stand, and some 40 - 50 drug addicts lined up before it every day as if standing in a bread line; they’d knock [on the door] and be handed drugs. We went and interviewed the neighbors, asking why they had not reported these incidents so as to have the house investigated and its inhabitants arrested? They said, “We’ve reported it a hundred times, and lodged complaints in person and by phone, but the authorities have not reacted.”

8. In our research, we met people who gave us information related to the role of some of the Kermanshah IRGC's officers and intelligence agents in the trafficking of drugs from Sistan (city) to Kermanshah and Orumiyeh. They sell half of it in Kermanshah and transfer the other half to Turkey through Orumiyeh and other regions.
9. When I was arrested, the interrogator said to me, "What a fool you are to fight for these people! We've made them all drug addicts and they no longer care about what goes on around them." That was exactly what the Intelligence interrogator told me.

Detention

10. I was arrested on November 19, 2006. This is how it happened: during the period I was conducting my research, one day I went by taxi from Kermanshah to Sarpol-e Zahab. On the road, officers asked for my ID card and when I showed it, they searched my bag and found some political literature. They arrested me on the spot and took me to Patagh checkpoint (between Karand and Sarpol-e Zahab). The official in charge of the checkpoint, whose name was Aali Baygi, made me strip down stark naked and whipped me with my own belt. Then he called the security division of the police in west Korand—which is now known as the town of "Dalahou"—and said, "We've got him. Come with officers and take him into custody." They kept me in a solitary cell for an hour and then transferred me to the Dalahou [police station] security division.
11. At the Dalahou security station they took me to a room—all I remember is that the door read "Intelligence." There were several plainclothes agents in the room. I sat there and after a minute, they brought a blindfold and tied my eyes, and straightaway the torture started. For almost four hours, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., he beat me and swore at me. Profanities, kicks and punches, handcuffs and ankle-cuffs [and other forms of ill treatment]. At the time I had a moustache; he pulled the hairs out one by one. He was savage. He told me, "Why did you want to go to Sarpol-e Zahab?" I said I was going there to meet one of my friends. He said, "Tell me what business you had there? You were being followed."
12. The interrogation continued until my interrogator's telephone rang; I later learned his name was Mohammadi. They informed him that the Intelligence Bureau has said that since my case involved matters of security, no one was permitted to interrogate me until I was transferred to the Intelligence Bureau. He left the room and did not return until 10 p.m. I was alone in the room. People kept looking at me through the window and saying, "You idiot! The Intelligence agents are coming to take you away. What have you done?" The only luck I had was that there was a military-service soldier at the station who was from [my hometown of] Kamyaran. He knew me and told me, "You're in for it now. They're going to send you to the Intelligence Bureau. Give me your [home] phone number so I can notify your family." I immediately gave him my number and he called my family later.
13. At 10 p.m., two men from the Kermanshah Intelligence Bureau came. When they removed my blindfold, I saw a camera in front of me and another one on the floor, videotaping me. Then the two of them grabbed me, dragged me out and threw me into a Peugeot car. We headed for Kermanshah. At 11 p.m., we arrived at the Kermanshah Revolutionary Court. The two officers showed a letter to the judge on duty, and told him the police security division had arrested me. The judge said he would issue a warrant to place me in police custody; he said these men (the ones who had brought me there) could not take me into custody. The agents told the judge, "This is a security case and we have to take him into custody; we won't turn him over to the police."

The judge got into an argument with them and said, “In this court, you are agents and I am the judge on duty.”

14. The Intelligence agent went out and called the Intelligence Bureau chief and said rudely, “This asshole judge won’t give us an answer. He says we have to take him to the Shariati Street detention center which is a police detention center.” Then the Intelligence Bureau chief called the head of Kermanshah Judiciary Bureau. They made so many calls to him that the judge finally agreed to put me in the custody of the Kermanshah Intelligence Bureau.

Transfer to Kermanshah Intelligence Bureau detention center

15. Around 12 p.m., they took me to the Intelligence Bureau detention center which is known in Kermanshah as the “Naft Square” detention center. At 9 a.m. the next morning, someone came to interrogate me.
16. My charges were stated as “acting against national security.” My interrogator asked me a few questions which I answered. For instance, he asked: When and where were you born? Who are your friends? Who did you work for? Who were you friends with at university? What were your activities at university? What were your plans in Sarpol-e Zahab? What did you want to do there? Are you in contact with Kurdish parties? And so on.
17. I replied that I had no connections [to Kurdish parties] and I’ve done nothing wrong. At 10 a.m., he said he’d go and get a one-month detainment warrant for me, and after that he’d be “at my service for a long talk.” He left and returned the next day; the series of interrogations began and continued for nearly two months.
18. Since I was a close friend and from the same town as Farzad Kamangar¹, [the authorities] were very sensitive on this point. I was arrested three months after Farzad’s arrest. They asked me what my connection to him was and what activities we had done together. Farzad was an activist and Teachers Guild council member in the city of Kamyaran. He wrote articles under a pen name for our magazine at university. The agents said it was reported to them that I had filmed in Silk Garden and other places. They asked if I was a spy. They said I worked for the West’s intelligence services. I saw that they may really stick me with charges of espionage, so I told them the truth. I said I am doing a study on the issue of drug addiction and AIDS in the Kermanshah region.
19. My cell [at the “Naft Square” detention center] was 1.5 by 2 meters. I was allowed to go to the bathroom three times a day and to shower and go outdoors in the yard once a week. On Fridays, when there was no interrogation, they’d take me to shower and get some air. The interrogator in charge of my case was dogmatically religious. I was under pressure both for being a Kurd and for being a Sunni. I said I don’t believe in any religion; I am neither Sunni nor Shiite. I don’t care about religion. I said, any religion I have should be none of your concern, and I don’t want you to ask me about it.

¹ Farzad Kamangar was a high school teacher in the city of Kamyaran and a Kurdish rights activist who was executed, along with Farhad Vakili, Ali Haidarian and Shirin Alamhooli—all ethnic Kurds—on May 9, 2010 in connection with their alleged membership in PJAK (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, or Party of Free Life of Kurdistan).

20. During the day, since the pressure was severe, I'd try to force myself to fall asleep under a blanket (which was very filthy). The guard would come every half hour and wake me up and say, "Get up!" I'd get up and he'd make me do three or four squats and then say "now sit back down." They wouldn't let me sleep.
21. Twenty-one days after my arrest, a judge named Maleki came to the Intelligence Bureau detention center. He was a prosecutor from the Kermanshah Revolutionary Court. He told me that my charges included acting against national security—and how did I want to plead? I asked, "Why are you making these false accusations against me?" He said, "You wanted to research the addiction and AIDS problem in Kermanshah, and then publish your study saying that the Islamic Republic is behind it."
22. In January 2007, one day an interrogator told me that Farzad Kamangar is scheduled to be brought from Evin Prison to the Kermanshah Intelligence Bureau detention center. I'll never forget that I wrote a note for him at the detention center—I don't know if he ever saw it. A year later when I was taken to that detention center again, I was in the same room where they'd kept Farzad, because in the corner of the cell, I saw this sentence on the wall written by him: "Farzad Kamangar, member of the Kurdistan Human Rights Organization, be strong and endure." Kamangar had been cellmates for two weeks with a man named Zaraneh Naderi, who had been arrested on charges of smuggling firearms. I later met Zaraneh in prison. He told me that at the time, his interrogator had told him, "Do you know, this kid [Farzad Kamangar], your cellmate, is going to be executed!" When I was in prison, the same interrogator who'd tortured Kamangar, was in charge of my case too.

Transfer to Kermanshah prison

23. At Kermanshah prison, they took me to Ward 3. The same afternoon I was transferred to prison, my name was called over the PA (public address) system. The prison's head of security wanted to speak to me. He was an ex-MEK (Mujahedeen-e Khalq)—at one time, he'd been a prisoner here himself but had "repented" and grown a beard and had now become head of security at the prison. He asked for my name and information. He said, "When political prisoners come here, we make a file for them." Then they threw me into a cell with the criminal prisoners (the general prison population). There was no room and we all slept on the floor. The next morning, they called me again over the speakers. A soldier came and said: the prison warden wants to talk to you. I went to the warden's office; his name was Farzadi. He said they want to transfer me to the infirmary so I'd be more comfortable.
24. They took me to the Kermanshah prison infirmary on the second floor, to a room that read "Cardiology Division." I opened the door and saw four bearded guys in there. The guards said you have to stay here. I asked, "What is this place?" They said, "They made this room for political prisoners." I later found out that they [the bearded men in the room] were members of Al-Qaeda, they were three Iraqis and the fourth was an Egyptian. They had been arrested about six months ago. They had brought them to the infirmary, both so no one would know they were there and also so they wouldn't communicate with other prisoners. The Intelligence Bureau had asked the prison to not let us have contact with anyone until our cases were settled. I was at that infirmary for about a month.
25. I was allowed to make a phone call one time, and that was with a security officer sitting next to me. I spoke with my family. I was not allowed to speak in Kurdish. I said: I don't speak Farsi too well. They said I have to speak [to my family] in Farsi.

26. After a month, they summoned me again and said someone had come for me from the Sanandaj Intelligence Bureau; I was transferred there. Then the same interrogations about Kermanshah were asked of me about Kamyaran. Such as: Who do you know in Kamyaran? Which persons have you worked with? Did you do the same activities in Sanandaj as you did in Kermanshah? Do you know Farzad Kamangar? Have you collaborated with Kurdish parties? [And other questions]. The good thing about the Sanandaj Intelligence Bureau was that, unlike in Kermanshah, I was not tortured at all. They kept me there for a month.
27. After about 30 days, they transferred me again from Sanandaj Intelligence Bureau to Kermanshah prison. They handed me over to the prison at 11 p.m. The prison guard on duty called the warden and said, "They've brought that political prisoner Karim Rahmani from Sanandaj, what should we do with him?" Then he said to put me in Ward 9. On the way, the guard who took me there asked "Are you an execution case?" I said no. He said, "Then why do they want you in Ward 9?" I said, "Why, what's Ward 9?" He said, "It's for death row inmates—prisoners who've raped or murdered other prisoners or used drugs. Ward 9 is known as the "Lessons Ward"—for teaching lessons to these types, or for prisoners with death sentences."
28. It was a large room, 3 by 5 meters, with its own bathroom. But there was no yard and no blanket either. The prisoners in there were real hoodlums. The first day I entered the room, they said "You're political—keep to yourself and leave us alone."
29. I remember one of my interrogation sessions at the Intelligence Bureau detention center in Kermanshah City when the interrogator told me, "There is a phrase here called 'under-bedding.' Prisoners with long records or death sentences or 10-15 year terms for murder, who are sexually frustrated—when a young prisoner arrives, they gang-rape him under the bed, this is called 'under-bedding.'" My interrogator told me this still goes on, meaning: watch out, if I order it, this will happen to you. I personally witnessed the rape of two prisoners.
30. In ward 9 or the "Lessons Ward", we were 11 inmates [in total] and ten were chronic drug users. They stopped taking drugs only when the guard made rounds. These were real bullies. I was lucky they didn't do anything to me. There were two men convicted of theft, who were from low-income families—these two became addicts in prison. When they were brought to this ward, the bullying prisoners called these two guys "Vach." This is slang for "sex slave," for satisfying their sexual lusts. I witnessed firsthand that at nights, they'd draw the blanket up on both sides and rape [the two men], who couldn't stop them, because the rapist always had a blade ready. They weren't even afraid of the prison guards. I was kept in the "Lessons Ward" for about a week.

Trial

31. On March 6, 2007, I was taken from Kermanshah prison to the Revolutionary Court in Eslamabad-e Gharb. Since the town of Dahalou did not have a Revolutionary Court, my case was sent to Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court in Eslamabad-e Gharb. My family had come there too. The presiding judge, Judge Mahmoudian, said he wanted to give me the death penalty. Then he said, "Is a ten-year [prison term] good? Five years? Three years?" He bantered with me in this manner; then said, "Five years. Go to prison until you learn to value the Islamic Republic, and learn not to go to university only to work against the regime." The judge said, "I wished my son would be admitted to such university—then someone like you gets admitted and studies and now works against the regime!"

32. Then the judge said, "I'll give you five years. If you object, I'll make it harder for you." I wrote a couple sentences as my defense and signed it. The judge issued me a bail of 50 million tomans [USD \$50,000]. My family put up our house deeds as collateral for the bail. But the house deeds were rejected and I remained in detention and was not released. I had an attorney in my first trial, but he was not accepted. Every time he went to the Intelligence Bureau, they'd harass him. For this reason, no attorney was willing to take on my case; they were all afraid. They'd say, "The Intelligence Bureau is making this case difficult and we can't take it on."
33. Two months after the first trial, I myself wrote an appeal plea and challenged my verdict. My case was sent to the Appellate Court and my family hired a good defense attorney for me. The judge told my attorney that he could only reduce my sentence, and since I didn't have a prior record, I would be released early. Both my attorney and my family warned me, "Don't do anything anymore, so your case won't get worse." In May 2007, Branch 4 of the Appellate Court reduced my sentence to a two-year prison term.
34. In 2007, I was quarantined at Kermanshah prison. One day they summoned me and said, "You have a court order and must appear in court." [At court] I saw an Intelligence agent was there, a man known as 'Haji.' I asked, "What's going on, Haji?" He said, "You're going to be our guest for a day or two." He took me to the Kermanshah Intelligence Bureau, known as the "Naft Square" center.
35. In the Kermanshah Intelligence Bureau they asked me if I know someone named Farzad Ghobadi. I said yes. He is a distant relative of mine and I'd see him at the Student Association. They told me, "Farzad Ghobadi had joined PJAK and has recently returned to Kermanshah. You must cooperate with us and come into town with us to arrest him." I said I'd do no such thing. For 25 days, they pressured me. I never understood why they needed me, since they already had his [Farzad's] photograph and description. After 25 days they told me, "Since you refused to cooperate with us, after you serve out your two years, we'll fabricate a case for you again."
36. In August 2007, they took me to the Revolutionary Court in Eslamabad-e Gharb, where I was charged with acting against national security and anti-regime propaganda. The judge did not accept these charges against me, but I was not aware of this. Later in prison, I received a notice that I was acquitted of the charges. I thought I'd been acquitted of my two-year prison term. I went to the sentence execution department and they said, "Idiot! This is another set of charges and case they've made against you. The judge didn't accept it and acquitted you of the accusations, but the file will be active for two years."
37. In early November 2007, I was transferred to the Kermanshah Intelligence Bureau detention center again. The first few days, they told me that someone has come from the Intelligence Ministry in Tehran and wanted to interrogate me. After a few days, this person came and began interrogating me. He claimed that he had been following my case since I was first arrested, and had been trying for a year now to have my case reopened, and he had now obtained a permit to do so and wanted me to get the death penalty this time. He pressured me to cooperate with the Intelligence Ministry and threatened to arrest my brother.
38. My brother was an industrial engineering student at Azad University in Esfahan. They said he is politically active. I refused to cooperate. The very next day, all my family except my brother came to visit me. I had grown very thin and unkempt. The intelligence agents told my father, "Tell your son to turn himself in." My father said, "You're killing this one, at least leave my other

son alone.” My father got into an argument with them which led to a scuffle. They said to my father, “You son-of-a-bitch, with you as a father no wonder these two bastards have ended up here. We’ll lock you up too with your sons in two cells down the hallway!”

Suicide attempt

39. After that incident they took me into interrogation. I said, keep me in prison for thirty years or execute me even, but leave my family alone—or I’ll commit suicide and the blood will be on your hands. The interrogator said, “You don’t have the wits for that.” I’ll show you, I said.
40. The ceiling of my cell was about 3 meters high. When I returned to my cell, I stacked up the rugs and a small wastebasket, and climbed on top and pulled the light-bulb cord. The room went completely dark. Then, using a towel, I broke the light-bulb and with the broken pieces began to cut myself. I did that from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Since the room was dark, I couldn’t see anything, but my hand had become wet. When the guard who brought my food came along and saw my cell was dark, he asked if my light bulb had burned out. I said yes. He said, “I’ll bring a new one and change it.” I climbed back onto the stack and caught the light bulb wire. The electricity threw me against the wall, and I crumpled onto the floor.
41. When I regained consciousness, I saw the door open and light spill into my room. The room was full of blood. When the guard saw the blood he said, “You bastard, you want to commit suicide and blame us for it?” He dragged me away and threw me into the showers. He called the head of the Intelligence Bureau detention center to come. This incident occurred in 2007 on what they call “Qadir Night,” the eve of a religious holiday. The detention center head asked why I tried to kill myself? I said, “Let that animal interrogator come and see the blood.” He said, “Your interrogator is a pious man and does not enter the detention center without having done his ablutions.” They didn’t give me medical attention, and took me back to my cell with the same cut-up hand, which I’d only washed with water. They had washed and cleaned my room. They’d put an iron bar in my room which they tied me to until the morning. The next day, [the interrogator] came and said, “See, I told you that you don’t have the wits for suicide.”
42. A week later my interrogator came for me and said, “Come, let’s go on a picnic together. Let’s go to Tagh Park and get an ice-cream cone.” I realized he had some kind of plan in mind. He put me in a car and drove off. On the way he said, “Do you know Farzad Ghobadi?” I said, “Yes, he was from my hometown.” He said, “We’re going now to reunite you guys.” Then they took me to a Coroner’s office. In a room they took out a stretcher and when they pulled back the blanket I saw Farzad Ghobadi’s corpse. At first I thought it was a wax doll. When I got closer I saw it is his corpse. He had been butchered from the stomach downward. There was also a bullet hole on his torso. Then he [the interrogator] told me they’d arrested Farzad along with his family.
43. The night before at 10 p.m. I had heard the voices of women and children in the detention center, making a lot of noise. Then I realized the voices I’d heard last night were Farzad’s family. Later I learned that Farzad had been in a car with his family coming from Kamyaran. Agents had surrounded them and when he tried to run away, they opened fire on him and threw three grenades at him, filling his lower body with shrapnel. Farzad died right there before the eyes of his sister.
44. Three months later, they sent me back to Kermanshah prison. But the prison officials refused to admit me because my physical condition was very bad. The officer on duty told the Intelligence agents that according to the letter they showed him, they were supposed to take me away for a

month, but “you’ve kept him for three months now and not taken him to court during this time.” They called the prison warden, Mr. Farzadeh, and told him, “The Intelligence Bureau has brought a security prisoner but the official on duty won’t admit him. He does not understand that he must not interfere in security matters and his job is only to admit prisoners. It’s not his concern whether we kept [the prisoner] for a month or three months; he must admit the prisoner according to this letter.” Finally, they managed to get me admitted with that letter.

45. Eight or nine months were left of my prison term when they arrested my brother. They initially gave him a seven-year term in exile in Masjid Suleiman. Then the attorney who had defended me, who was a former judge, took up my brother’s case and got his sentence reduced to a one-year sentence and a five-year suspended sentence. My brother was released from prison after one year.

Release from prison

46. I was released from prison on November 7, 2008 after serving my two-year prison term. On Thursday, [November 6, 2008] my case was sent to the guard, [with the note that] my sentence will end the next day. On Friday when I was released, I got a telephone card from one of the prison employees and called my family and told them I’ve been released and am standing outside in the street.
47. After my release, I went to the Intelligence Bureau. There they told me, “You’re a marked man in Kamyaran. Everywhere you go and whatever you do, we’ll get you and put you back in prison. You are banned from any sort of civil, social or political activism. Go and live your life quietly.”
48. I then went to follow up on my university degree, but the university had expelled me due to non-attendance. In town, wherever I went with anyone, after a week that person would be summoned by Intelligence and told they should not be in contact with me. Things got so bad that even my relatives were afraid of me.

Collaboration with Iran Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI)

49. In March 2009, I contacted Farzad Kamangar’s brother, who now lives outside of Iran. He said that Farzad is working from inside prison for a human rights organization called Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI) and really wanted me to work with them too. So in early 2009, I formally began my collaboration with HRAI. But since my conditions were sensitive, I decided to use the pseudonym Hiva Shalmashi.
50. During this period, I was summoned to the Intelligence bureaus in Kamyaran and Sanandaj three times. In Sanandaj, an agent from the Intelligence Ministry in Tehran was there and asked what I was currently doing. I said, “Nothing. You got me expelled from university and no one will hire me.” He said, “We’ve studied your file in Tehran. You are either very stupid or very clever. And right now you’re either keeping to yourself or you’re working clandestinely on something we don’t know about.” I said, “I’m living my life and I’m not involved with anything. After enduring two years of hell and being expelled from university, all I want to do is get on with my life.” He said, “I hope that’s true. But I’ll be monitoring your case.”

Exit from Iran

51. My brother left Iran in autumn 2010 following his dismissal from university and the pressure of the security agents. After releasing his letter outlining his suffering on the internet, the pressure of the intelligence agents on me increased as well.
52. I didn't know what to do. My activism is the most important thing in my life. The torture I suffered in prison left me with a duty; I'd vowed to do what I could to help other prisoners. But I was powerless to do so as I was under surveillance. I was afraid of endangering the lives of people I came into contact with. So in March 2011 I left Iran.