



Witness Statement of Yaser Goli

Name: Yaser Goli
Date of Birth: October 23, 1983
Place of Birth: Sanandaj, Iran
Occupation: Political Activist

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)
Date of Interview: December 19, 2011
Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to a phone interview with Yaser Goli. The statement was approved by Yaser Goli on May 11, 2012. There are 61 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

Background

1. My name is Yaser Goli. I am 29 years old and I am from the city of Sanandaj in Kurdistan province, Iran. I received my bachelor's degree in civil engineering at Islamic Azad University in Sanandaj.
2. I was arrested and convicted twice as a result of my student activism, once in the summer of 2006 and once in the autumn of 2007. Between arrests, I was admitted to a master's program for architecture but my name was on a student blacklist and consequently I was barred from continuing my education.
3. During my second spell of detention I was held in solitary confinement in the Intelligence Office in Sanandaj for three months and then transferred to Sanandaj Central Prison. A year and four months after my second arrest, I was banished to Baft Prison. At Baft I secured provisional release and escaped to Iraq. My mother and father were also arrested in 2007 for their activism, as was my brother was arrested in 2009.

Activism

4. Around the time of my first arrest in July 2006 a group of students and I created an organization for all Kurdish university students in Iran called the Democratic Union of Kurdish Students in Iranian Universities, also known as the "Kurdish Students' Union." We held a successful founding ceremony in Sanandaj attended by students from 18 universities and 42 organizations from all across Iran. We elected a 15-member central council and I was elected as the union's Secretary General.
5. After [the establishment of the group] a student was killed in Mahabad. We issued a statement condemning this and staged a sit-in in front of the Governor's office. We released an open letter calling for public support. Then we went to Tehran and expanded our activities with the Office to Consolidate Unity [Daftar Tahkim Vahdat]. During that time, the secretary was Mr. Mohammad Hashemi. He came to Sanandaj and we went to Tehran. We developed a good relationship. In order to publish information about its activities, the Union also created a website called KurdishStudents.com, which was similar to AdvarNews.org and staged sit-ins at different universities, especially at Azad University, which did not allow for any student organizations. Subsequently, we founded a political organization called *Howreh*.

The Kurdish Students' Union's Mission

6. Our principal mission was to support civil society and organize Kurdish student events. Political activity was a secondary mission; our primary focus was on human rights and student activities. Kurdish students held functions in all universities separate from other students in Iran. For example, we held commemorations of our lesser-known poets. We organized 16th Azar [Students' Day] ceremonies and arts and literature workshops. We also held memorials for the chemical

bombardment of Halabja.¹ These activities were scattered throughout the universities in Tehran, Esfahan, Tabriz, Sanandaj and Kermanshah. As an initial goal, we wanted to centralize and improve these activities.

7. We also ran several magazines and wanted to polish them into a more detailed product and simultaneously expand our network. We also wanted to promote civil society by educating people about their rights as citizens. These types of activities were prevalent during those last few months of Mr. Khatami's presidency. In fact, the elections took place the following month and became the cause of significant problems [for us].

First Arrest

8. I was arrested in July 2006 during the final exams of my second-to-last semester and unfortunately I was unable to sit for the exams because of my arrest. I was released after 13-14 days, but I subsequently received a four-month prison sentence with a two-year suspension. This was the first time I was detained, in which I spent about eleven days at the Intelligence office and two days in prison.
9. My arrest took place in front of my house at about 7:30 in the morning. I was going to my exam on water and sewage system design. While I was standing in front of the house, someone called my name: "Mr. Goli?" ...I answered in the affirmative. He drew his gun and instructed me to get into the parked car and not to say a word. I got into the car, and someone was sitting on each side of me. I pleaded with them, "Please. I have to take an exam. I'll come with you wherever you want afterwards." They said, "You don't have an exam today. Exams are over."
10. They called an interrogator on the phone, whom I later learned was Mr. Hatefi. Mr. Hatefi instructed the agents to take me behind the university. When we arrived at the university, all the agents disembarked from the car, leaving just Mr. Hatefi and me. He sat next to me and said, "Mr. Goli, do you know why we've arrested you?" I replied, "No, I have no idea." He continued, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes, I have no idea why." "We are arresting you on charges of possession and use of narcotics. Do you accept this charge?" I was incredulous: "What?" He said, "Yes. You have been transporting and using narcotics." I refused to budge. "No, I don't accept this charge." He laughed a bit and said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes." This [use of spurious allegations] is a common trick used of the Intelligence Ministry when they want to scare a suspect. If I had said that I knew they were arresting me because of my political activities they would have considered that an admission that I had done something illegal. He called to the rest of the agents to take me away and to give me "a pair of sunglasses," which meant a blindfold.
11. They handcuffed me, blindfolded me, and forced my head down under the car seat as we were driving to the Intelligence Office. There were two cars total. There were four other plainclothes agents in the dark green Peugeot 405 with me, one on either side of me and two in front, and they were all armed. I asked them if they had a warrant and they snapped back, "Don't talk too much." After they had arrested me, they raided my house and seized my computer, books and articles that I had written. They hadn't even notified my family.

First Interrogation

¹ Thousands of Kurdish Iraqis perished in the chemical weapons attacks on Halabja by Saddam Hussein's military in 1988. It is widely reputed to have been the worst chemical attack in world history. See <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1991/IRAQ913.htm>

12. My interrogator's real name was Mehdi Mollavali, but he went by the pseudonym Mr. Hatefi. He had actually called me once before my detention and come to my family's house. He picked me up in a taxi and warned me not to give any more interviews and not to create a disaster for myself. [Without further ado] he dropped me back off at my house and drove away. I knew him as Mr. Hatefi—he was notorious in Kurdistan as the interrogator of many activists, including Ebrahim Lotfollahi. Later, I found someone in prison who had previously been acquainted with him, and I also communicated with Mr. Hatefi himself without a blindfold. He was an ordinary person, a prison guard. Once as I spoke with him it became clear by the middle of our conversation that Mr. Hatefi was Mehdi Mollavali. His town, Sarishabad, which is near Ghorveh, is a very small town. The people there all know each other.
13. The first time that I was arrested and interrogated, I was face-to-face with Mollavali. He is short. He is about 1.6- 1.65 meters tall [about 5'3"-5'5"]. He has red hair, although he is almost completely bald. He has a round face. He has small but expressive eyes. His facial hair was also red and he always had some stubble on his face.
14. When they took me to the Intelligence Office, I told them that I had no connection whatsoever to narcotics. Then he came closer and said, "Imbecile! The Goli family has nothing to do with narcotics. The Goli family from your father and mother to your brothers and political relatives are all the same. We are asking you seriously, so give us serious answers." They were asking me a series of questions about whom I knew. I simply reiterated my denials and mentioned that I had not yet seen an arrest warrant nor had I been informed of any charges against me besides those dealing with narcotics.
15. After two or three hours, they took me to a cell. My cell was three meters by one-and-a-half meters, had no toilet, and it was completely empty aside from a carpet and two blankets.
16. There were three to four interrogators (one of them was Mr. Hatefi) who asked me about whom I was affiliated with, who the organization's funders were, who had hired the organization, etc. They wanted details, and I actually had no problems answering their questions because [in the Kurdish Students' Union we were of the opinion that] although we were unofficial since we had been unable to obtain a permit, we had never done anything illegal. Thereafter they would ask "why did you form the organization without receiving a permit? You invited people to protest. You staged a sit-in in front of the governor's office and we have photographs of it in this very file."
17. They ended the interrogation by suggesting that I likely had connections with opposition groups that were enemies of the state. This was customary in Kurdistan. Whomever they arrest is always alleged to have some additional motive in an attempt to represent all civic activism in Kurdistan as terrorist activity. None of the charges against me were ever proven.
18. For 11 days I was in my cell at the Intelligence Office. I saw nobody except my interrogator, who would actually allow me to remove my blindfold. He didn't speak to me disrespectfully, nor did he curse or beat me. But there was enormous psychological pressure. They kept me in a room and brought in two people, one at a time, and asked "Do you know this person?" They responded in the negative, and as a consequence, the agents took them to the next room and severely beat them. This put immense emotional stress on me.

Prison and Announcement of Charges

19. The next day they called me and said “Mr. Goli, we’re going to court.” They blindfolded me. They took me to court and formally informed me of charges against me. They never showed me any official documents. I requested an attorney but they laughed at me and told me to keep quiet. I wasn’t even informed as to why we were going to court. I did not understand the nature of the legal process: it was my first time being arrested. I was in a terrible state, psychologically.
20. When I arrived before Judge Babaei in Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court, he announced the charges against me. He said, “You are charged with anti-regime propaganda. What is your defense?” I asked, “What examples do you have [of such transgressions]?” He said, “You orchestrated strikes at the university, conducted interviews with the media, and we find it likely that you are connected to political parties.” I asked whether he had any evidence for this and he told me to stop talking and to write [my confession]. I told him that I refused to accept any of the charges and that I was not engaged in illegal activity; the strike was on university property and [therefore] it was not outside of the framework of university activism.
21. There was no mention of the initial narcotics charges. This is a trick that the intelligence agents use when they want a detainee to simply confess to political activity. If I had been scared into making such a confession it would have made the rest of my interrogation very easy for them.
22. Thereafter I was taken to prison for two days, then released on a bail of 20 million Tomans [USD \$20,000]. After I left the intelligence and prison, I was able to hire Mr. Saleh Nikbakht from Tehran as my attorney. He also served as defense counsel in the [high-profile] cases of Adnan Hassanpour, Habibollah Latifi, Saeed Hajjarian, Hashem Aghajari and Akbar Ganji.

Trial, Sentencing and Return to Activism

23. Several months later my official trial took place and my lawyer presented a capable defense seeking full acquittal. Judge Babaei sentenced me to a four-month suspended prison term to be served in the form of two years of probation. At the time they issued my sentence (October/November), I was a senior at Islamic Azad University in Sanandaj and I was studying for my Master’s entrance exam and was engaged in student activism.
24. Around this time, the university also announced the segregation of campus entrances by gender. We protested this. They also refused to give permits to student organizations. At that time I had resigned from the position of secretary general of the Union. I partly resigned due to pressure directed at forcing the dissolution of the organization and the discontinuation of its activities and especially mine. I chose to step down from my post to save the union to save the organization. However, I did remain as the secretary of the human rights section of the union.
25. Some time after my release that Fall, we finally succeeded in obtaining a permit to establish a political organization *Howreh* for the first time in the history of Azad University. Howreh means “together” in Kurdish. We put out a magazine and began legal activities including pursuing student demands before the university administration. We held a legally sanctioned 16th Azar commemoration.
26. During the winter of 2006, about four months after my release, we called for a general strike that shut down Azad University. I actually had an interview with Radio Farda just before to promote the strike. When the university was shut down during our strike, they summoned us to the

university's *herasat*. I only had to complete three two-credit classes in order to graduate—the same classes that I was unable to take exams for because I had been arrested. The *herasat* put me on probation for a semester and sent my friends to other universities. We'd given many interviews, and the university had been forced to put us on probation.

Denial of Further Education

27. Around this time I sat for an entrance exam for a master's program in architecture and I was sure that I would receive high marks because I had studied extensively and worked with several firms in Tehran. [I felt like] I had a 100% chance of being admitted to Tehran University's architecture program, but when I entered my name and code on their online admissions results page to view the results, it said to refer to Tehran University's *herasat*.
28. Coincidentally, when the results were released, I was at Tehran University for an international conference on architecture and engineering so I went to the *herasat* office forthwith. Mr. Nourbakhsh was the *herasat* officer in the entrance exam department. He was a reformist. There were seven of us in his office. He said, "I don't want to keep you in the dark so I'll be very frank with you. The Intelligence Ministry won't allow you to study. That's it. Now please don't ask me any more questions."
29. At that moment, I didn't care that I hadn't gotten into the program. I said that I just wanted to know my score. I had studied 17 hours a day to get a good score on that exam. At first he told us that they didn't even grade our exam, but then after pressing him on details, he disclosed to us that we had all received high scores and would have been accepted to Tehran University, but that we were prohibited from being accepted into the program. By way of example, he finally showed us a directive from the Intelligence Ministry of the Islamic Republic written to the Ministry of Science and Technology, stating that according to certain laws, this specific student [one of those present] lacks the general criteria for continuing their education. The directive bore the signature of an official in the Intelligence Ministry. Mr. Nourbakhsh said it was out of his control and told us not to leak the information, but to contact the information department [of the Ministry of Intelligence].
30. When I did go to the information department in Sanandaj the official there initially claimed that they had nothing to do with university entrance matters, but finally admitted that they felt I didn't merit the benevolence of the Islamic Republic for the continuation of my education and that they didn't want [ideologically] unsound engineers. "Go get your master's degree from the foreigners you work for," he added.

Second Arrest

31. I had taken the Azad University entrance exam as well and two months after my return home I received notice that I had been admitted for a master's in architecture at the central branch of Azad University in Tehran. I had achieved a rank of 56.²
32. It was also the second year after Hashemi's loss to Ahmadinejad in the 2005 elections, so out of spite they said they'd enroll me.³ On October 10, 2007 I went to the university to register. I

² At the time, the Intelligence Ministry had not yet started to pressure the Islamic Azad University system (which is organized differently than the public university system) to expel or bar entrance for students designated as problematic.

turned in my documents and they said that I must deposit 2 million Tomans [USD \$2,000] and submit my final degree. I went to Sanandaj to retrieve my final degree. At 2:30 am, the office clerk said that if I came back in a few hours that my affairs would be in order. I decided to take a walk on campus and buy a newspaper. As I came up the stairs, I saw Mr. Hatefi.

33. Hatefi came forward and said, “Hello Yaser. What are you doing here?” Those were his first words. I said, “This is my university. Where else am I supposed to go?” Two big men appeared on each side of me and gripped my arms tightly. He said, “Come with me Yaser dear, I need to speak with you for 15 minutes. A few simple questions.” I said, “I can come myself.” He said, “No, let’s go together.” As soon as he said that, I noticed that there were at least four cars on both sides of the street. Two people grabbed me and pushed my head down into the car. They teased me. “So you’re the Yaser Goli they talk about.” They blindfolded me and pushed my head under the car seat. I asked, “Why are you arresting me?”

Second Interrogation & Torture

34. I was arrested at 10 AM on October 10, 2007, the same day that the government executed two Kurdish youths named Kiumars and Nader Ahmadi in Sanandaj at 9:30 AM. That very day they took me to the Intelligence Office, and all three interrogators beat me while yelling the nastiest curses. I remember Mr. Hatefi saying, “Last year you wiggled your tail and slipped away from us. But this year we’ve caught your tail and you can’t get away. You’ll be our guest this year.”
35. They took me back to the detention center of the Sanandaj Intelligence Office and led me underground, where they began interrogating me. But this time the interrogations were much more severe. My interrogations began at 9 AM and lasted non-stop until 4 PM without any lunch. They found a letter that I wrote to a friend of mine, who lived in the United States, wherein I stated that I wanted to stay in Iran to continue my political activism rather than going to America. They printed all of my blog entries and often focused on them when interrogating me. Two or three interrogators were always present, but Mr. Hatefi was the head interrogator, and he was the one who wrote down questions for me.
36. They also asked if I knew someone they named, and whether he was my relative or friend. So I signed a piece of paper saying that I knew someone by that name and that he was my friend. As soon as my interrogator saw the paper he began beating me and yelled, “You have continued your activities. Your charges have increased. You’ve given interviews.” I didn’t say anything. He was referring to an interview I gave with Radio Farda discussing the fact that I was barred from my education. Radio Farda had a specific program. In an interview [on that program] I spoke harshly against Ahmadinejad. I was very angry and unrestrained. I spoke another time with Radio Farda about the university strike, and with ILNA about being a blacklisted student, and with a few other media outlets, such as Rooz Online, about the student movement.⁴
37. I remember one interrogation in particular. One night around 7pm they escorted me downstairs to an interrogation room. When I arrived downstairs, two men began beating me severely. I had actually had orthodontic work done and my teeth were straight, but they damaged my lower jaw. They said they would beat me until my teeth fall out, and then I could talk. At times I was thrown

³ Former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was among the founders of the Islamic Azad University system and still plays a significant role in its administration. He was recently appointed as head of the Board of Trustees of the University:

<http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=1490136> [in Persian] See also:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/07/a-schooling-in-power-politics.html>

⁴ http://www.radiofarda.com/content/o2_student_kurd_azad/370911.html

between both men. They took turns assaulting me. At one point, they forced me to do 200 squats while holding a chair and told me, “When you’re ready to confess, you can sit down in that chair and talk.” This was the routine for the first month of my detention.

38. I refused to confess that I was not responsible for any of the crimes with which I was accused. I likewise stressed that I didn’t have any involvement with any political party- therefore I had no confession to make. I said only that I am a journalist, a human rights activist and a student activist. One day, as he was returning me to my cell, he gave me a [strange] look and said my name. I said, “What are you trying to say?” He urged me to just confess to the charges and claimed that he would fix everything later. I refused, because I knew of no crimes. He reiterated his suggestion, saying that they would make me miserable, but again I refused.
39. I was repeatedly interrogated for 85 days. After about a month and a half the accusations and questions asked of me were completely changed. I was asked if I had any relations to the Office to Consolidate Unity. They also wanted to know how I came to know that friend of mine in the US and if I had any contacts in the States. After 85 days, they fabricated a new charge: that I had left the country during Norouz [Iranian New Year]. I told them that I had never left the country and that I have witnesses who can testify that I was with them that day inside Iran. During those two days they beat me so savagely that I had to be taken to the infirmary in the middle of my interrogation. When they brought me back my interrogator told me, “You’re such an idiot. I’m going to lock you up somewhere that will make you scream. For now, you are our guest.”
40. I had a short court hearing two days into my detention. They announced the charges against me: “acts against national security and propaganda against the regime.”

Parents’ Arrests

41. About 23 days after my arrest, I was in the interrogation room when I heard a familiar ringtone. They pulled out a cell phone and put it on speakerphone. It was my mother’s voice asking Saleh, my father, for his whereabouts. They hung up the phone immediately. I immediately realized that it was my father’s phone and that they had arrested him and were interrogating him in the room next door. My father had sent an open letter to prosecutor stating that my arrest was unlawful and that he wasn’t permitted any visitation rights. It was a very simple letter. For about six or seven days, my father with was with me. He is a bit hot-tempered, and he was loudly answering the interrogators’ questions in the next room. I think he was answering them loudly with the hope that I could hear his voice. I could also hear the interrogators verbally abusing him. After six or seven days, they transferred my father to prison, where he was released with bail of about 10 or 15 million Tomans [USD \$10,000 or \$15,000].
42. Two days after I arrived in prison, the officers called my mother, Fatemeh Goftari, and asked her to bring my belongings to the Intelligence Office. She went with my youngest brother Ammar Goli and they immediately arrested her. She was an activist and had founded the Mothers of Reconciliation, which supported those affected by conflict in the Kurdish region, whether they were IRGC soldiers, police officers of members of PJAK, PKK, Komala, etc. The organization’s members would visit victims’ families and console them. My mother often traveled from city to city for the organization. She received a lot of media coverage for her activities, and she and my father had interviewed with Radio Farda, VOA and other Kurdish channels when I was arrested. During those interviews my father often spoke passionately. She was also a member of Azarmehr Women’s Society, an NGO that they founded in Sanandaj. All these things were added to their charges.

43. My mother and father were both interrogated by Mr. Hatefi. My family members all have had experiences with Mr. Hatefi. About a week or ten days after her arrest, they brought my mother to the same prison as mine, but she was held in another ward. She was sentenced to six years for being involved in demonstrations and six months for organizing a hunger strike and protesting in prison. They exiled her to Birjand for some time on account of a hunger strike she had staged.

Ebrahim Lotfollahi

44. During my last interrogation, my interrogator grabbed me by the ear and warned me that if I were ever to return to the Intelligence Office, I would be coming back under “special conditions.” He then blindfolded me and took me to the quarantine in Sanandaj Central Prison. I went there, and when I awoke the next morning, on January 8, 2008 another prisoner greeted me--it was Ebrahim Lotfollahi. He told me that they arrested him two days ago and took him to the Intelligence Office in Sanandaj Prison because there was no room for him in the Intelligence Office, as all the cells were very crowded. I had seen Ebrahim Lotfollahi at student functions like poetry readings and Students’ Day commemorations at Payam Nour University, where he studied. I was acquainted with him, but we weren’t close. He told me that government agents took him to court to inform him of his charges, but that he didn’t sign any documents because he didn’t accept these charges. They transferred him four days later, and two days after the transfer, Ebrahim Lotfollahi died.
45. Lotfollahi’s former fellow prisoner [after his transfer] was a man named Shores Moradkhani, who was later executed in June/July of 2009. Moradkhani told me that one afternoon they came for Lotfollahi and took him away. Later, they dragged him back to the cell and closed the door. A couple hours later, they opened the cell door and called some other people. Several people came and took his body away.
46. Lotfollahi was known to be hotheaded. He was very stubborn. They saw his resistance; he wouldn’t sign in court when being informed of charges against him. This resistance in prison can have an impact. In all probability, they beat Ebrahim Lotfollahi by pushing him from one side to another between two people. I’ve seen guards do this: one guy beats the prisoner and shoves him toward the other guy who also beats him and shoves him back. Meanwhile, the interrogation room is all stone, marble and sharp edges. He probably struck his head against a sharp edge and sustained a head injury.
47. After the death of Ebrahim Lotfollahi, it became clear to us that Hatefi had been his interrogator and had tortured him. I am almost certain that they didn’t intend to beat Lotfollahi to death, because his charges were not that severe. At most he would have gotten a one-year sentence, and maybe even that would have been a suspended sentence.
48. They took Lotfollahi to Mohammadi cemetery in Sanandaj that night and buried him. They never showed his corpse to his family. They poured concrete over his grave so that a tombstone could not be placed over it. My brother Ammar hired Mr. Nikbakht to be the Lotfollahi family’s attorney. Officially, the case was closed, but I am 100% certain that Mr. Hatefi was responsible. Lotfollahi’s interrogations were contemporaneous with mine, and at that time Hatefi was in charge of all of the interrogations, especially for students. The intelligence agents told Lotfollahi’s parents that he had hung himself in his cell. Ammar investigated Lotfollahi’s death. He spoke to Lotfollahi’s family and the family told my brother “they killed him, we can’t talk about it.”

Habibollah Latifi

49. Habibollah Latifi was arrested 13 days after me, around October 23, 2007. We had been classmates for a year in high school, but we lost contact until he became my cellmate. I realized that Latifi had been arrested when they were exterminating our cells with chemical materials, and every prisoner was transferred to new cell on a temporary basis. When I inquired as to why he was there, Latifi told me that he had received a phone call that his computer was repaired and ready for pick up. When he arrived at the computer shop, they arrested him. They beat him severely from the first day and he lost a great amount of blood, but he did not receive any medical attention. They accused him of being in contact with political parties and engaging in illegal activities. He didn't accept the charges and they tortured him more. A few days after I was transferred to prison, they transferred Latifi there as well.
50. Habib Latifi was charged with acts against national security, which included a bombing. He was also charged with propaganda against the regime, being in contact with Kurdish opposition and political activism at his university. Latifi denied these charges. I was there that day, and they had put him into the cell next to me, which made it easier for us to communicate. He confided in me: "Yaser, they pressured me greatly saying if I don't accept the charges they'll involve my family members in my case." This was about 15 days after his arrest, around November 6, 2007. They told Latifi that they had a photograph in his file, which was a lie. They were just saying that to intimidate him.

Adnan Hassanpour

51. While in prison, I was held in the quarantine ward. There was also a ward for political prisoners called "Pak 2." They sent me to ward 4 because I have respiratory problems. It was crowded because it was a general ward and the conditions were terrible. After ten days or so, they transferred me to the Pak 1 ward, where prisoners were prohibited from receiving visitors. There was only one political prisoner there: Adnan Hassanpour.
52. After a while, as I mentioned, they brought Habib Latifi into my cell. For about a month, it Habib, Adnan and myself, all in one cell. The prison management came and spoke to us and said Latifi and I must leave the ward. This time they sent me to Ward Pak 2 with all the political prisoners.

Subsequent Trials & Exile

53. Later, on charges of sending news out from prison, they took me to the security office to meet with the prosecutor two or three times. The prosecutor warned me that I was "talking too much" and subsequently I was put on trial on charges of activism within a prison.
54. Dr. Nemat Ahmadi was my lawyer the second time. He was present at the trial. He spoke to me several times at the trial and assured me there was nothing in my file, but that they may give me a one-year prison sentence out of spite. The court gave me a sentence of fifteen years and exiled me to Baft, southwest of Kerman. The appeals court confirmed this sentence and I was not allowed to appeal it to the Supreme Court. I was given leave to visit my mother in the women's ward before leaving. When I arrived there, though, they put shackles on my legs and hands and told the guards

to take me to Baft. I wasn't allowed to gather my belongings or say goodbye to anyone. They sent me away just like that. It took two days to travel to Baft. At 11 pm on Friday, February 19, 2009, I arrived at Baft Prison in Kerman province. After about an hour and a half, I was able to obtain a leave from prison with 150 million Tomans' [USD \$150,000] bail.

Fleeing Iran

55. Thereafter I went to the Iran-Iraq border, near Marivan. There were smugglers there. I gave them about \$200 to transport me for two or three hours so that I would be over the border where I could register with the UN (UNHCR). On the other side, I had an acquaintance who picked me up and took me to Suleymaniyah. After my escape, they attempted to arrest my mother again, but she was helped by some people on the street where they [the authorities] were trying to arrest her, and she was able to escape from them before being taken away.
56. My mother came to Iraq as well. My father also decided to come due to his previous troubles with the authorities. At the same time, we succeeded in getting my little brother, Amer out of prison by paying 30 million Tomans [USD\$30,000]. He came to Iraq too. Due to involvement in a sit-in in front of Sanandaj University for political prisoners, [Amer] was under pursuit and he fled the house in the middle of the night and came to Iraq. [At one point] Amer went back and was arrested a second time for attending demonstrations regarding Ehsan Fattahian's death sentence in Sanandaj. That time, upon his arrest at the demonstrations, they savagely beat my brother. After about a month he got out with a bail of \$30,000 and he fled and joined us in Iraq [again]. He [Amer] was first arrested in 2005 for protesting the murder of Showaneh Seyed Ghaderi by the agents of the Intelligence Ministry.

Prison Conditions

57. Prisons in Kurdistan province are like isolated islands. They are very different from other prisons in Iran. I can speak from experience because I've been held at both Baft and Sanandaj prisons. Sanandaj prison is in a provincial capital, with 800 or 900 prisoners. The food was poor- we were never served a hot meal, just rice, a bowl of beans and dry bread. [The food was so little that] you could count the beans in the bowl. They used to also give us 50 grams of yogurt and a cucumber, but they cut even that off. We weren't allowed to cook. In my ward, there were 42 beds, but 110 prisoners. Everyone was crammed next to someone else. They let us use the telephone for 10 or 15 minutes a week every other week. They gave me visitation time once every two weeks. When my mother came to prison, we were allowed weekly visitation inside our wards.
58. Baft prison was greatly different from Sanandaj prison. Baft is a small town with a population of 60,000 people. It is a large prison on vast grounds with three separate wards: a general ward, a revolutionary ward and a women's ward. I was put in the revolutionary ward, which had about 90 prisoners, most of them Afghans and Baluchis. There were few non-Kermanis among them. For these 90 people, there were 110 clean beds, even though the ward was quite small. We had permission to cook. We had videos and CDs in the ward. We could request films to be brought in from the outside; things that one could only dream of in Sanandaj prison. The food there was excellent, totally incomparable with food at Sanandaj Prison. All the convicts were there on drug charges and many of them were sentenced to life imprisonment or the death penalty. Most drug charges were dropped after two to three years. Usually, their sentences would eventually be dropped and they'd be released. It couldn't even be compared with Sanandaj Central Prison.

Interrogators

59. After this Ebrahim Lotfollahi incident, Mehdi Mollavali's name was all over the news in media outlets based outside the country. Later, I got the aforementioned person whom I'd met in prison to tell me that [Mollavali] had gone to Tehran. My father [also] saw Mollavali's wife in Sanandaj and spoke with her. She said, "We are waiting for your son, [we can reduce his sentence] from 15 years to 15 months. All he has to do is take a step forward, and we'll help him. He just has to express remorse, admit to the charges against him, and we'll let him out." We realized that [Mollavali] would return to Sanandaj for important cases. In the past two years, when I've spoken to friends inside [Iran] who've been arrested, they say that Hatefi is no longer there and doesn't conduct interrogations anymore. He's evidently gone from Sanandaj, except when he returns for special cases.
60. Mr. Mehdi Mollavali's assistant was Mr. Sarshari. He had a thick Turkish accent and was from Tabriz. This Sarshari would sit in the room while Hatefi interrogated me. He would tell me that I had to answer questions quickly. When Hatefi would ask a question, Sarshari would immediately ask me another question to confuse me. Then he would stand up to beat me. But it was mostly Hatefi who used a great deal of profanity and the filthiest language. In fact at one point, Hatefi asked me, "Yaser, these things I say about your family that would mash a potato [from shame]! Why don't you show any reaction? Have some family honor." I responded that these profanities did not affect me and that I didn't give any weight to what he was saying.

Khatami and Ahmadinejad

61. It makes no difference in Kurdistan whether we are under Khatami or Ahmadinejad. There were many arrests under both presidents. During the Khatami period, we had Habibollah Takaiyan, who was a Kurdish activist and an ordinary citizen. He was my close relative. They took him to the Intelligence Office and a few days later delivered his corpse and claimed he'd committed suicide in his cell. When we saw his body, there were wire marks around his neck and bruises dotting his body. It was clear that he had been subjected to electric shocks. His neck was cut into with something like a wire, rather than a carpet, although they claimed that he had hanged himself using a carpet. This was under Khatami. In another famous case during his administration, Sassan Alekanan was also executed in Sanandaj. However, the crackdowns are harsher under Ahmadinejad. For example, I was arrested twice under Ahmadinejad's government.