



### Witness Statement of Soraya

**Name:** Soraya (Pseudonym)

**Place of Birth:** Ilam, Iran

**Date of Birth:** 1978

**Occupation:** Registered Nurse

---

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

**Date of Interview:** April 12, 2010

**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

---

This statement was prepared pursuant to an in person interview with Soraya. The statement consists of 52 paragraphs and 8 pages. The statement was approved by the witness on April 12, 2010.

### **Witness Statement**

1. My name is Soraya. I am 32 years old. Before leaving Iran I worked as a nurse. I converted to Christianity about 7 years ago. My change of religion made me a target of state authorities. After the June 2009 election, I was threatened with arrest. To avoid detention, I fled Iran in October 2009.
2. After my religious conversion, I was repeatedly dismissed from work and arrested several times. Shortly after I converted to Christianity, I was dismissed from my job. Two years ago. I was arrested for my religious activities and taken to the Ministry of Intelligence for interrogation.
3. Last summer, I attended a seminar on Christianity in Turkey. When I returned to Iran, I was fired yet again, this time from my job at the Social Security Office. Then I received a summons to report to the Ministry of Intelligence. There, I was questioned, threatened and subjected to psychological torture. My interrogators told me to stop going to Church and warned me to not proselytize (talking about the Bible and handing out Christian literature) or else I would be in trouble.
4. A few months later, on October 13, 2009, I received a summons from the Revolutionary Court. Shortly thereafter, a notice came for my husband too. The notice requested that he bring his wife to the Revolutionary Court. The notices were sent to my family's house in Ilam, Iran and instructed me to report to the Ilam branch of the Revolutionary Court.
5. I was scared that if I complied with my summons, the authorities would treat me the same way they did my brother. My brother, who also converted to Christianity, was taken by the authorities many years ago and was never heard from again. When I was brought to the Ministry of Intelligence before I had been threatened a lot. I feared that if I showed up this time, I would be tortured and imprisoned. So instead, I chose to leave Iran for good.
6. Because I did not show up at court, the authorities imprisoned my husband. He is in jail in Iran at the present time.

### **Brother's Arrest and Conversion**

7. My brother converted to Christianity some time in 1990 or 1991. I discovered this years later when I was going through his book collection and found a Bible and other Christian literature.
8. My brother was arrested in 1993 or 1994 but, to this day, my family has never received official word about his arrest or his whereabouts. We do not know whether he is dead or alive.
9. What we do know about his arrest, we heard from eyewitnesses at the scene. My two cousins were with my brother when he was arrested by a patrol from the Revolutionary Committee in front of Tehran's Azad University.

10. After he was arrested, we searched the courts and Evin prison to find my brother. We wrote letters to the President's office and tried everything to find him. But unfortunately, we could not.
11. A couple of years ago, my brother's wife sought a legal separation from him and wanted to surrender custody of his four children to us. The Court ruled that he had been missing since 1997 and issued our family a fake death certificate.
12. I once called someone outside Iran to inquire about my brother's case and see what we could do to find him in Iran. I asked this person to request information about my brother through international organizations. At the time, I did not know that my phone calls were under surveillance. After my phone call, I received a text message warning me that if I continued my involvement with terrorist organizations outside Iran I would be legally liable. I was very afraid.
13. The arrest and disappearance of my brother motivated my decision to convert to Christianity. After I discovered that my brother was a secret Christian, I wanted to learn more about the religion. I spoke to an Assyrian friend about Christianity and started studying the Bible. All my life I had been a devout Muslim. But that all changed and I was officially baptized.

### **Workplace and Societal Pressure**

14. My conversion to Christianity was met with extreme hostility from family and the larger community. My church-going activities were considered indecent – people called me a heretic and said I should be sentenced to death.
15. My in-laws found out that I was a Christian two years after my conversion. They claimed that my mere presence made them feel unclean. My husband did not convert to Christianity at first, but when he did, it increased the tension with his family even more. We were expelled from his family – my daughter has never even met her uncle (my husband's brother).
16. I have two kids, both of whom were born Christian. My daughter had no problems in school but my son was not as lucky. When officials at the school realized my son was a Christian, they suspended him for a whole semester. They demanded a letter from our church stating that my son was born a Christian or else he would not be permitted to return to class. We submitted the paperwork and he was allowed to return. However, they told him that if he did not excel in his religious studies class, he would be expelled from school for good.
17. After his suspension from school, my son became very solitary and withdrawn. The neighborhood kids became suspicious of him and no longer included him in their games.

### **First Summons**

18. Unfortunately, in addition to causing social problems, my conversion also caused legal problems.

19. I was first summoned to the Intelligence Headquarters a day before Christmas two years ago. A man called from the Public Information Office (*Daftar-e Setad-e Khabari*) and instructed me to report there by 10 a.m. I was too scared to think, so I just quickly answered that I would go. I lived in Ahvaz, Iran at the time and the Public Information Office was in Ilam, Iran so I could not make it there until the following day.
20. When I arrived in Ilam the next day, I went straight to the Public Information Office in Imam Square. A man handed me a form requesting biographical information about my family and myself. He began asking questions about my relationship to my Assyrian friend. He wanted to know the reason for my frequent visits to her. When I told him that she was just my friend who I liked to spend time with, the man reacted violently, banged his hand on the table and yelled “don’t lie.” From his reaction, I knew that the Public Information Office had information about my travels, phone calls and friends. After he yelled at me, I was very frightened and did not deny any of the accusations my interrogators made against me.
21. The man complained that my friends and I did not adhere to the Islamic dress code. He called me a whore and said that my friends were loose women. I had heard stories about interrogators insulting women and even sexually assaulting them. Out of fear, I simply kept my head down and nodded yes to everything he said.
22. The room was very cold and measured about three by four meters. It was on the first floor and had only one chair and a desk. I was sitting in the chair. Soon after, another man came to question me. I could not see his face because I was ordered to face the wall. Then a third person came into the room. I realized he was superior in rank to the other two because of the way they addressed one another. When he came in the room, the others called him “Haj Agha”<sup>1</sup>.
23. The senior interrogator told me that in the future I could dress however I want and wear as much makeup as I like but that I should not go to church anymore. The comparison made between church going and ways of dress insulted me so deeply that I broke my silence. I screamed at the senior interrogator and loudly demanded to know since when going to church was equated with lewdness. He told me to shut up, and said that the members of the church have sex together at Sunday service. When I told him that this is not true, he again told me to shut up and said his “guys” had been there. I did not know if he was lying but I knew that Iranian intelligence spies are everywhere—I was not even comfortable in the privacy of my own home for fear of infiltrators.
24. They interrogated me for over two hours. I was threatened, intimidated and silenced. Once I assured the interrogators that I would no longer attend church, I was permitted to leave.
25. I had initially entered through the main gate, but on the way out I was made to exit through the back door. Only my husband knew where I was. The interrogators warned me not to tell anyone where I had gone. They cautioned me that my phone lines were under surveillance so they would know if I told anyone.
26. After this incident, I kept my distance from the church for a while. In Ahvaz, there is no formal church for my community, instead we gathered for religious services in people’s homes. After staying away from church for a month after my interrogation, I could not bear it anymore and started to go secretly. When the pastor at the church found out about my interrogation, he

---

<sup>1</sup> A salutation of respect, literally translates as an address to someone who has taken the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

implored my husband to have me stay away for fear that my presence would endanger the church by tipping off the authorities.

27. I did not want to endanger the church. So I stopped going. Other church members who had been arrested stopped going too. After a while a pastor came from Karaj and I started holding church meetings at my home. A few other families joined us and we held bi-weekly Church meetings for the next six to seven months.

## Second Summons

28. In August 2009, I traveled to Turkey for a several weeks long religious seminar. Three or four days after I returned to Iran, the authorities came to my house unannounced. I was not home, but my youngest child looked out the upstairs window and saw ten plainclothes officers and a white Hyundai Pride car. One of the officers rang the bell and left a note stating that I was to report to the Ilam Public Information Office (*Daftar-e Setad-e Khabari*) two days later on Tuesday.
29. I obeyed the summons and traveled to Ilam. My husband came with me and waited outside the Office from a distance. For my visit, I dressed in strict Islamic *hijab*.<sup>2</sup> This time, I was not given a form to fill out. The same man who was at the Office the first time I was there met me, guided me into a room and sat me down. I could not see anything because I was facing the wall, however at some point I heard two people walk in.
30. This time, they did not ask me about Christianity. Instead, the interrogators started cursing at me immediately. They wanted to know why I went to Turkey after the elections and where was my honor? They said they were loyal soldiers of the Supreme Leader and that it was their duty to find out which group I worked for. They did not mention the religious seminar. Instead they alleged that I was spying for Turkey and belonged to a group working against Iran's Supreme Leader.
31. I denied all the accusations. I explained that I went to Turkey as a tourist to have a change of scenery. My interrogator demanded that I tell him the name of the hotel I stayed at in Turkey. I was so nervous and frightened that my mind blanked on the name. To my surprise, before I could recall the name, my interrogator supplied the name for me. He knew where I had stayed, he knew who I had met while in Turkey and he knew why I had gone there. Yet, he persisted in telling me that I had gone to Turkey to attend a training course for spies to work against Iran's government.
32. His accusations were wholly untrue. I was not involved in any political activities. I did attend one protest in Fatemi Square on July 9, 2009 and *Basijis* beat me with batons but otherwise I was not involved in the Green Movement at all.
33. Their treatment of me this time was worse than the first time. They insulted Christ and my religion. My interrogator said my actions had shamed my religious and noble family but then he switched tactics and began insulting my brother and my husband. His remarks made me really emotional. He slapped me and spit on me and said that my crime was heresy.

---

<sup>2</sup> Proper Islamic dress mandated by Iranian law.

34. I was so scared that I was shivering, even though it was in the middle of summer. The door to the room opened and closed; I thought my interrogators had left. Then, to my dismay, I felt someone caress my head and pull my head covering up. He said: “what a nice neck you have! It is good for the priests! You are available for them but not for us? You are of the group that has to be sodomized until you die!” He kissed the back of my neck and I pushed him away. He slapped me so hard that I screamed and fell to the ground.
35. Another man came in and said: “Haj Agha! Make her know that she is a spy! And that she is betraying the Supreme Leader and *Velayat-e Faghih*. We are the soldiers of the Hidden Imam and we are not scared of anything. We have nothing against anyone. We have nothing to do with the president. We are only the soldiers of the Leader. We are the red line!” His words conveyed a message of absolute power and impunity. I feared that they would take whatever liberties they wanted with me. I was terrified by the thought of them raping me. My only strength came from knowing that my husband was just outside the building waiting for me and would know where I was if I did not return.
36. So many thoughts raced through my head. I wondered what would happen to my kids if something happened to me. I was so lost in my own fears that I no longer heard what he was saying to me. But then he kicked the chair, I snapped to attention. He cursed at me and said “Idiot! Whore!”
37. After all this abuse, my interrogator said I should write a consent letter stating that I had not been treated badly. I felt I had no choice, so I did as he said and signed the letter. Then the man who had kissed my neck asked for my telephone number. He said “My name is Hossein and when I call and say I am Haj Agha Hossein you answer me!” Then he said, “We have so much power that we can call the judge right here, right now and ask him to issue your sentence. So when you leave here, you cannot say a word about all this to anyone!” I accepted. I just wanted to be free.
38. Then my interrogator called his colleague. When they were both inside the room he said “don’t think you can go just like that. We can do you right here. We can do you right in front of the eyes of your husband and brother.” I didn’t understand what he was saying! Then the other one said, “No Haji! They are the whores of the Church and they would enjoy such a thing! We have to use a glass bottle!” I felt so terrible that I threw up blood. My nose started bleeding and my abuser threw a tissue at me. Then, he brought me water to wash my face. They let me leave through the back door. But before I could leave, Hossein warned me that when he called I must answer the phone.
39. After I found my husband waiting outside, he brought me to the hospital. I stayed there for three days. I could not sleep at night and woke up to the sound of my own screams. I could not muster enough courage to tell my husband what they had done to me in the interrogation room. My husband had not approved of my trip to Turkey and if he knew that I was in this mess because of it, he would have gotten upset.
40. Also I said nothing of Hossein’s forced kiss. My husband is extremely proud and I was worried about how he would react. I just told him that someone with the name “Hossein” will call but I omitted all other details. My husband said that the phone call was no cause for concern – the authorities simply wanted to check on my whereabouts and make sure that I had not left the country.

41. Two or three days after my release, I felt better and returned to work. I had a job at a social security office at the time. When I got to work, I was instructed to report to the security office. I did as I was told but received a rude surprise - I was fired. The person who delivered the bad news said "you are a great worker, so please do not ask me the reason for your expulsion. I am really sorry for doing this but I am only an agent and have limits." Since my dismissal was not based on poor work performance, I suspected that my recent interrogation was the cause of my dismissal.
42. About a week after my interrogation, Hossein, my abusive interrogator, called and warmly asked me how I was doing. He spoke to me in Kurdish and said that he was sorry for his behavior the other day. He said he was forced to act that way towards me and that if it were not for the fact that he liked me, I probably would have been executed by now. I was shocked. I asked him on what basis I would have been executed. He told me that I would have been charged with heresy for changing my religion, and sentenced to death. He also said that the Ministry of Intelligence had evidence that I was [sexually] involved with a priest.
43. Then Hossein started insulting my husband. He said that my husband did not deserve me because he was a lewd man who did not care for me. Hossein said that he had information that my husband had relationships with women in other cities.
44. At the end of the call, Hossein told me to meet him at Keshvary Square in Ilam. I reminded him that I do not live in Ilam but he persisted. In an effort to get out of this meeting, I told him that I would need to inform my husband that I was being called in for interrogation again. Hossein said: "No! There is no reason to tell your husband. You can come under the pretense of following up on your case but you must come and see me." At that point, there was nothing more I could do. I think our conversation lasted twenty minutes.
45. I had a Christian friend to whom I was very close and she was a very pious woman. I called her to come to my house. After she came, I cried a lot and told her that I had a secret that I needed to tell her. Then I told her what had happened. She said that if I did not show up they might call me in for interrogation again and sentence me, but that if I did go meet Hossein, the consequences might be even worse since I did not know who would be waiting. I decided not to go and turned off my phone.
46. A day or two after I received the phone call from Hossein, a summons came to my father's house in Ilam that ordered me to report to the Revolutionary Court in Ilam in three days. I believe this came because I did not cooperate with Hossein and turned off my phone. At this point, I realized I could not stay in Iran.

### **Exit from Iran**

47. After receiving the summons, I took my kids to my sister's house in Tehran. My husband was away for work and could not meet us. I booked a Sunday flight to Turkey. But before I could get on the flight, I was stopped at the security desk of the airport. The staff asked questions: Why did you go to Turkey before? Who are you going with this time? Why are you going? How long are you staying? They asked me so many questions that my flight left before I could board the plane. But, fortunately the authorities still did not discover the real reason I was traveling to Turkey.

48. I bought another ticket before the authorities could realize what was really going on and flew to Turkey. Shortly thereafter I made contact with aid agencies and began seeing a psychologist to treat my emotional issues. My money ran out quickly because I had to stay in hotels with my children. I called my sister to ask for money and she told me that an arrest warrant had been sent to me.

### **My Husband's Arrest**

49. Unfortunately after I left Iran, my husband was arrested. I found out the story of his arrest from my sister when she came to visit me and the children. Apparently, he was arrested as a way to get to me. He was brought to the Public Information Office and interrogated. His interrogators told him that I was corrupt and going to dance clubs. They said I was having improper relationships with other Christian men who they named. They told my husband he had no honor.
50. The authorities told him that if he convinced me to return to Iran, they would release him. Apparently, in a court session the judge decreed that my husband's freedom was contingent on my return to Iran. They promised him that if I returned, my husband and I would be given jobs by the government and our outstanding debt would be forgiven.
51. My husband called me about two weeks ago. He told me to come back to Iran because it is my country and conditions are good. He said that we were lucky to have a wonderful Supreme Leader, Islamic government and security. I was very surprised and angry. I was not yet aware that he was being forced to say these things. He told me that the authorities knew my address in Turkey and had information on my acquaintances. He said they told him they could arrest me in Turkey if they wanted to.
52. I later realized that his request was bogus when my sister told me he was in prison. When my sister visited my husband in jail, he told her that I should not pay attention to the request he made over the phone. He said that if I returned to Iran, my life would surely be in danger.