



Witness Statement of Omid Reza Pourmohammadali Farashah

Name: Omid Reza Pourmohammadali Farashah
Place of Birth: Yazd, Iran
Date of Birth: 7 August 1986
Occupation: Blogger

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

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Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Omid Reza Pourmohammadali Farashah. It was approved by Omid Reza Pourmohammadali Farashah on September 26, 2013. There are 32 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.

Statement

Background

1. My name is Omid Reza Pourmohammadali Farashah. I was born on August 7, 1986, in Yazd. In Iran I was pursuing my bachelor's degree in accounting at Yazd University. However in 2008 I was expelled from university.
2. After being active in Karoubi's presidential campaign, I was arrested on December 7, 2009, in Yazd. I was transferred to Tehran and held at a cell at ward 2-Alef of Evin prison for 72 days. I was released on 50 million tomans [approximately US \$ 45,000.00 in 2010] bail and on August 30, 2010 Judge Pirabbasi at branch 26 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court found me guilty of insulting the Supreme Leader and acting against national security. He sentenced me to seven months and one day in prison. He also found me guilty of insulting Ahmadinejad and sentenced me to pay a 100,000 toman [approximately US \$ 90.00 in 2010] fine.
3. In 2011, I was pardoned on Eid Fitr¹ and released. I had spent more than two months of my sentence at Evin's ward 350. After I was summoned again by the Revolutionary Guard's intelligence office in Yazd, I fled Iran illegally on December 19, 2011.
4. My political activities began in 2004 after I entered Yazd University. I joined the republican students group in Yazd University². This was a guild organization and completely legal. It was formed by students and had articles of association. When the organization was dismantled³, one by one all the members were expelled from school. I was the last person who was expelled in 2008 during my last semester. Prior to that I had been on probation for two semesters. Generally if a student is on probation for three consecutive terms or four non-consecutive terms, s/he can be expelled.⁴ I was expelled after the third non-consecutive term of probation. Actually the last term I hadn't even been put on probation. I had dropped a four-credit course and at the end of the semester they had counted it as one of my classes. I went to the school board. The head of the university and the head of my division all wrote that I had dropped this class and the course had been counted by mistake. The

¹ "Eid Fitr" is a big feast held at the end of the month of fasting (Ramadan) for Muslims.

² "Republican Students Association in Yazd University" [*Anjoman-i Daneshjouian-i Jomhourikhah-i Daneshgah-i Yazd*] was formed in June 2004 by merging two student reformist groups in Yazd University named the "Islamic Development Association of Students" and "Student Followers of the Imam's Path Association" respectively, for the purposes of solidarity of reformist-minded students in Yazd University. For more information see (in Persian):

<http://www.pyknet.net/1383/page/10khor/p375yazd01.htm>; also: <http://nedayezadi.org/cd/fmi/bayanieh/83/html/1871.htm>

³ "*Talash barai-i monhal nashodan-i anjoman-i jomhourikhah-i daneshjouian-i Yazd*", [Doing effort to not let shutting down the republican association of students in Yazd], ISNA, 5 December 2005, available at (in Persian): <http://isna.ir/fa/news/8409-01350/%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AD%D9%84-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86>

⁴ "*Aeen-nameh Amouzeshti Dorehai-i kardani va karshenasi peivasteh va karshenasi-i napeivasteh mosavab-i jalaseh 399 movarekkeh 1376/2/14*", [Training Regulation of continuous associate & undergraduate and discontinuous undergraduate approved in session No. 399 dated 2 May 1997], Website of Sahand University of Technology, available at (in Persian): <http://www.sut.ac.ir/edu2/downloads/karshansi76-2-14.pdf>

Education Office also confirmed these statements and sent it to the commission for special cases. However they expelled me.

5. I was involved with [Dr. Mostafa] Moin's presidential campaign in 2005.⁵ In 2008 I joined the National Trust Party in Yazd. During the 2009 elections I was in charge of the cyber society in Karroubi's campaign in Yazd. I had a weblog also. Back then my blog was four and a half years old. I would write about issues related to the election on my blog. I had 30,000 visits every month. Until the elections when that major fraud and electoral coup took place; after that my blogs changed from campaigning for Karroubi to supporting the green movement. In the cyber world I was active under the pseudonym *Az Nasle Soukhteh* [From the Burnt Generation of the Revolution].

Arrest

6. On December 7, 2009 I was arrested in the streets of Yazd. They transferred me to Tehran by flight and then to ward 2-Alef of Evin the same night. Initially I didn't know where I was. I was the only person arrested in Yazd who was transferred to Evin. Because the plaintiff in my case was the [Revolutionary] Guards Cyber (Gerdab)⁶ unit they transferred me to Tehran.

Ward 2-Alef of Evin

7. After I was moved to ward 2-Alef on December 8, 2009, I was held in a solitary cell, which was about 1.8 by two meters long, for six days. The cell had no bathroom and was carpeted. Half of the walls were covered with stones and there were no windows. It had two fans—one was for ventilation and would suck the air and the other one would release air. There were two blankets, one clay prayer tablet, one Quran, and one Mafatih [book of prayers] in the room.
8. During these six days I was not interrogated. They would only allow me to go out at prayer time so I could prepare for prayers and also use the bathroom. If you had to use the bathroom before or after that, you would be forced to [relieve yourself] in your pants because they wouldn't allow you out. In wards 209 and 240 there is a light switch that is used to call the guard. However in ward 2-Alef there is nothing. You could only put a paper outside, from the opening below the door so if a guard was around he could see the paper, and if he felt like it, would come and ask what you need. The food at 2-Alef was good. They catered from outside. However, the portions were extremely small. I really suffered from hunger when I was there.
9. From a security standpoint, you could say ward 2-Alef is the most secretive section of Iranian prisons. There is a lot of psychological pressures on the prisoner. Those who are held at 2-Alef are not even listed on the official list of prisoners. Those who are held at wards 209, or 240 or 350 or in Quarantine 7 or anywhere else are on the official list. Ward 2-Alef is in Evin but it is run separately. This ward is completely under the Revolutionary Guards.

⁵ For more information see: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jun/15/iran.robertait>

⁶ "Gerdab" is the official website of the study center for organized crimes which is one of the related centers to the Revolution Guard Cyber Defense Command (RCDC). According to their declaration in their website their obligation is monitoring and checking the terrorist, espionage, economic, and social organized crimes in cyberspace. For more information see (in Persian): <http://www.gerdab.ir/fa/about>

10. For the first 16 days I was held in a cell that was a few steps above ground. I could see from under my blindfold that there were only a few cells there. They were numbered 200, 202, 204 and so forth. I was kept in cell number 200. In ward 2-Alef they did not call us by our names but rather by numbers. My number was 8556 and they called me 56. When I was in cell 200, the cell that was on the higher level and my situation was better. A number of times when I needed to use the bathroom I would knock on the door, they would open the door and allow me to use the restroom.
11. Sixteen days after my arrest, I was the only person left at the cells that were located at the upper level of ward 2-Alef. Later they transferred me to the lower level and I found out that the upper level was like heaven compared to the lower level cells. At the lower level all the guards were really bad. There was only one nice guard who was called Amoo [Uncle] Hassan. When he opened the opening on the door, he wouldn't ask me to look the other way. He even showed his face. A few times when I was hungry I got a few [pieces] of bread from him.
12. Once I had to use the bathroom during the night. My stomach was hurting really bad. I put a note behind the door. I could hear the guard walking by, but he wouldn't open the door. I couldn't take it anymore; I knocked. The guard came and said, "Idiot! Why are you knocking? Do you think this is a hotel!" I said, "I put a note half an hour ago but no one opened the door." He said, "Get lost," and shut the door and left. I had to use my water cup to do my business [to go to the bathroom]. The water they gave us there was from a well and was really bad. The guards would drink mineral water and give us their bottles. We would get tap water, which was from a well, and drink it in our cell.
13. In the mornings, at eight in the morning, they would give us a small cup of tea and three or four sugar cubes. For breakfast they would give us lavash bread and some cheese. Sometimes they would give us some butter and jam instead. At ten o'clock they would take me for five minutes of fresh air while I was blindfolded. I had to walk in a straight line. When you are in 2-Alef, you are only allowed to take the blindfold off when you are in your cell; when you go out to use the bathroom or to get some fresh air you have to put them back on. From the footsteps that I heard I could tell 20 meters away, there was another prisoner walking. We would both stamp our feet hard on the ground to encourage each other. After lunch, for the second time during the day, we were allowed to get fresh air for another five minutes.
14. Every three months I had a really bad migraine headache; to the point that I needed to be taken to a doctor and get morphine shots or painkillers. Once, when I was in 2-Alef, I got a very bad headache to the point that I was hitting my head on the ground and my eyes were watering. They didn't take me to the doctor until the next day when that guard, Amoo Hassan, took me to the doctor. The doctor gave me two shots so I could sleep for half a day.
15. When I was in ward 2-Alef they changed my cell five or six times. At the upper level I was at cell 200. Then they brought me down and put me in a cell where [Mohammad Ali] Abtahi⁷ had been held.

⁷ For more information see: "My Autobiography for Internet Users", Abtahi's official website, *available at*: <http://www.webneveshteha.com/en/about.asp>; also see: "Former vice president of Iran sentenced over election protests" Guardian, November 29, 2009, *available at*: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/22/mohammad-ali-abtahi-iran-protests-jailed>

At the time I didn't know that used to be Abtahi's cell. When I moved to the cell directly across, a guy named Ariya had written on the wall that the cell across was Abtahi's. The cell where Abtahi was kept was small and dark, even worse than the cell I was held, on the upper level. For two or three days I was held in a cell that had a bathroom and it felt like heaven. At the end I was held with four other people at a cell where Hossein Derakhshan⁸ was formerly held. In that cell, there was a note on the wall written by Derakhshan that said a year ago he was with his girlfriend going to Marseille [in France] and how he wished he could have some beef stroganoff. Or another example of what he had written was that he had a note that said he had wanted to serve his country but he was arrested, and yet on the other hand the opposition considers him a traitor. "I don't belong anywhere."

16. This was a 10-11 meter cell. There was a power plug there but when we were there they had removed it. However it was obvious that before there had been a power plug. This cell had no bathroom. The floors were carpeted. It looked like other cells at 2-Alef but only bigger.

Interrogations

17. My first interrogation was six days after my arrest. The interrogator put a piece of paper in front of me and accused me of spreading false information, inciting the masses, acting against the regime, insulting the Supreme Leader and insulting the president. He put the paper in front of me and told me to sign it. I told him, "You said, these are the charges against me. What do you want me to confess to?" Then as I was reading the paper he put the phone next to his ear and as if he was talking to someone on the other side said, "Doesn't he confess? Hang him upside down, he will confess." He was trying to scare me.
18. During the interrogations they put me on one of those student chairs that has a writing board. They faced me towards the wall and blindfolded me. They moved my blindfold just a bit, just about a centimeter so I could see the paper. I wrote that I had not committed any of those crimes. Then he called the guard and told me to leave. This session was only to tell me what I had been accused of.
19. It was after this that they let me call home. They only allowed me to say hello to my family and tell them that I'm doing well. I said in a hurry, "Hi. I'm doing well and I'm in Tehran." The guard hit me on my hand meaning, "Don't say anything more." And after that he hung up the phone. That's when my family found out that I was in Tehran.
20. After that they began interrogating me. They brought the materials and articles I had published in my blog. I denied and said I had not written them and that I had only copied and pasted them [in my blog]. They showed me statements by [Mirhossein] Mousavi, [Mehdi] Karroubi and [the late Ayatollah] Montazeri and I told them, "You can find those statements on websites and those sites are not filtered. Plus Montazeri is a grand religious authority. Even the letter that [Ghasem] Shole-Sadi had written to Khamenei was among them. The letter in which he had asked Khamenei how could he become an Ayatollah in only a few months?⁹ I think if I'm not mistaken the letter was written in

⁸ For more information see: "Iran's 'blogfather' sentenced to almost 20 years in prison", CNN, September 29, 2010, *available at*: <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/09/29/iran.blogger.sentenced/index.html>

⁹ "Letter from former parliament member from Shiraz Ghassem Sholeh Sadi to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic" Iranian, December 7, 2002, *available at*: <http://iranian.com/Opinion/2002/December/Sadi/index2.html> ; see

2002. They had printed out everything I had posted on my blog and put them in front of me. On the papers I had to write, "I reviewed these, I confirm they are for me." I had to sign them and give my fingerprint.

21. Once, during the interrogations, they showed me the movie the Intelligence Ministry had made about Neda [Agha Soltan].¹⁰ They had it on a laptop and told me, "Watch this, Monafeqin (MEK) killed her." When they put the laptop in front of me I could see my interrogator's face reflected on the screen. My interrogator had a very thuggish manner of speaking. Later I found out that apparently he was one of the interrogators who had questioned Abtahi. He was very rude. The other interrogators I could hear in the room were much more polite. [My interrogator] had small eyes and wore glasses. He didn't have hair in the middle of his head and covered it with a comb-over. He shaved his beard and wore a jacket like the ones Ahmadinejad wears. When he walked next to me I could see his shoes. He wore boots that steel workers wear and the tip was metal. He wore khaki pants.
22. Ten days after my arrest they took me to the Revolutionary Court. To get to court, they put me in a van with two other prisoners. There were a few plainclothes armed agents with us also. The other prisoners were two Kurdish brothers. One of the brothers was released after court. They told the other brother that he would be released before Saturday. I think we went to court on a Wednesday.
23. My family would go to court every day and I could see them there. In court they took me to a prosecutor named Beygi. He was a disgusting guy and lacked any dignity. He was even worse than my interrogator. After him they brought Kiamanesh. In court, the dishonorable Beygi put two pieces of paper in front of me and said, "If you sign these, you will be released by Saturday." I said, "Excuse me, can I see what they say?" He said, "I told you to sign it, idiot. Don't you want to be released by Saturday?! Get lost! I don't want you to sign it anymore!" These were the conditions under which I signed the papers.
24. I was not beaten during the interrogations. They swore at me and called me names though. The psychological pressure that I was subjected to in ward 2-Alef was horrible. A few times they threatened me that I will be executed. To be honest, I didn't really believe this threat but it would scare me nonetheless. During the interrogations I would keep my head low.
25. One day my interrogator put a piece of paper in front of me. On top of the paper it read, "From the burnt generation (Persia)." That is my name on Facebook. They showed me the paper really quickly and that is all I saw. I asked, "What was that? That's my name on Facebook." He said, "No. We found this in your email." (When someone sends you a request on Facebook, you get a copy of that request in your email also. But the interrogator didn't know this.) He slowly moved next to me and whispered in my ear, "What is your Swiss account number?" I said, "I swear I only have one bank account in Yazd and that has no money in it. I even wanted to get a loan and because I didn't have savings I couldn't get it." Then they asked, "Why did you open this email." I said, "I haven't. I'll check and will get back to you about it next time." Three or four days later he came, calling me

also: "3.5 years in prison for "insulting Supreme Leader"", Iranian, January 15, 2012, *available at*:

<http://iranian.com/main/2012/jan/ghasem-sholeh-saadi-prisoner-day.html>

¹⁰ "In a Death Seen Around the World, a Symbol of Iranian Protests", New York Times, June 22, 2009, *available at*:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/world/middleeast/23neda.html?ref=middleeast&_r=0

names and said, "You had opened that email!" I said, "You've printed the page. You had to open it to print it! Otherwise it was not opened before that."

26. The agents had called my family and told them that I had been sentenced to death. My mother had a heart attack upon hearing this news and my family had a very difficult time. After a few days they called my family and told them that my death sentence had been overturned. Another time, they called my sister and told her, "There are three bodies here. You should come to Tehran and identify your brother's body." My sister really freaked out. The same night, the agents allowed me to call my family. I found out these things after I was released. I have three siblings, two brothers and one sister. I'm the youngest one. My father is a retired staff employee from the Education Ministry.

Release

27. After 75 days and after paying a 50 million tomans [approximately US \$ 45,000.00 in 2010] bail, I was released on August 30, 2010. My dad put down the deed to our house to pay for the bail. One afternoon they said, "56, put your blindfold on. We are going to open the door." I put the blindfold on. They took me out of the cell. Normally, when they wanted to interrogate me they would turn right. But this time when they took me, we turned left. They took me to the phone, dialed a number and gave me the phone. I heard the prosecutor on the other line. He spoke very nicely and said, "Omid, sweetheart, how are you doing? Please forgive us. You will be released today. But don't tell any of your cellmates that you are being released today." Then the guard told me, "Go back to your cell. I'm going to come and call 56 again. We will tell you to take all your stuff with you because we are changing your cell." I said, okay. I took all my stuff, my toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, towel, underwear and two blankets. I quietly told my cellmates that I'm being released but don't say anything because it might cause trouble. Then I gave them my phone number and left.
28. While my eyes were blindfolded they put me in a Daewoo Cielo car [which I could see from under the blindfold]. Then they took me behind the prison where there was a river that had run dry. There were also a few auto repair shops there. They told me to close my eyes and not to turn my head for 30 seconds. I waited 30 seconds. They put the car in reverse and drove off.
29. After I was released from prison I went back to Yazd. Because my case was at branch 26 of Tehran Revolutionary Court, which was headed by Judge Pirabbasi, I constantly went back and forth to Tehran. Pirabbasi was much better than the two other judges (Salavati and Moghiseh) and acted pleasantly. In my trial, which was held in August 30, 2010, he sentenced me to [seven months and one day in prison](#). He found me not guilty of publishing falsehood. I got 91 days for insulting the Supreme Leader. If I had received 90 days I could have paid a penalty instead. That's why he gave me 91 days. I got four months for acting against the government and a [100,000 toman fine](#) [approximately US \$ 90.00 in 2010] for insulting Ahmadinejad.
30. My sentence began on June 18, 2011. Twenty days prior to that I received a notice and turned myself in on time. They took me to ward 350 of Evin. In this ward we talked a lot and held discussions. I learned a lot from intellectual prisoners. Ward 350 is really like a university. The average education level [of prisoners] there is a master's degree.

31. I was at ward 350 for more than two months. On August 31, 2011, which was Eid Fitr, I was pardoned along with more than 60 other people. I had not asked for a pardon.

32. After I was released I would come to Tehran, from Yazd, at least every two weeks and visit family members of political prisoners. I would ask them how my friends were doing. Until they called my father from the Revolutionary Guards in Yazd and said I should go there to explain some things. At that time I had an Irancell phone line that wasn't in my name. My father had told them that I was not [in Yazd] and they had said that I should go there in the next 48 hours. As I was not able to bear any more pressure on my family and as my re-arrest could bother them a lot, I left Iran illegally on December 19, 2011.