



Witness Statement of Mahdis

Name: Mahdis (pseudonym)

Place of Birth: Tehran, Iran

Date of Birth: August 3, 1975

Occupation: Videographer

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

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Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

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Witness Statement

1. My name is Mahdis. I am 35 years old. My family used to live in Golshahr, which is located in Mehrshahr, near Karaj, Iran. I participated in Student Day demonstrations in 2002. I was studying clinical psychology at Azad University in Roudehen. It was towards the end of my studies when the raid on the University of Tehran's dormitory took place. At that time, the authorities identified me and a number of other students who were attending Roudehen's Azad University.
2. One day before Student Day in 2002, the Interior Ministry announced that President Khatami would be giving a speech at the University of Tehran. I liked Khatami, so I went to hear his speech. Once I reached Enghelab Square, I saw that there was a huge police presence. The crowd was not allowed entry into the University of Tehran compound because we were not students at that university. They only allowed those who carried university ID cards to enter. At that moment, the students who were inside pushed their way outside and were able to join the people who had gathered outside the university. Then, we all marched together in silence. Our only slogan was, "Honorable people, support us please!" Some protesters gave flowers to the police. Meanwhile, I saw a colonel kick an old woman. The kick was so strong that she was thrown across the street into the gutter. When the security forces realized that they could not control the crowd, they closed the street with a pincer movement and started to arrest everyone.

Arrest

3. At about 3:30 p.m. on the day of the demonstration, a red-haired officer attacked me in front of the University of Tehran's main entrance. He struck me in the chest, and I fell to the ground. I kicked his testicles with my knee so that he'd let me go. When the people saw that I had fallen on the ground they tried to help me, but a very tall officer, who did not look Iranian, grabbed me by my neck and threw me into a bus. Police officers were standing in front of the bus door and they wouldn't let anyone escape. Later, a woman was brought into the bus. She had been pepper-sprayed in the face and her face was very red.
4. Eventually, they took us to Police Precinct 147, which is located at the Hafez Bridge. They kept us there until 9 p.m. There were so many of us that we had to sit in the corridors. It was hard to breathe. They interrogated everyone, but our numbers were so great that I was able to evade interrogation. I did that by pretending that I had already been interrogated. Those who were interrogated said that they were asked why they had attended the demonstration, and how they were informed that a demonstration was planned. Then they searched our bags and put us in the precinct prayer room.

Transfer to Vozara Detention Center

5. At 9 p.m., they put us in a number of green buses and transferred us to the Vozara detention center. They put us in cells that were four meters long and three meters wide. They placed ten people in each cell. There was not enough space for us to sit. They first placed us among women who were arrested for prostitution and similar crimes. We protested that we had not committed any crime and were political detainees, and that we shouldn't be kept in the same place as prostitutes and people who committed such vices.

6. Then they took us to a different ward where there were five cells on each side. All the cells were full. They kept us there for three days, and our families did not know where we were. We were not given any food or water. We were only allowed to use the bathroom and that was only possible after we begged, cried or yelled at them. Despite our repeated protests, we were not given any food. We had to drink the tap water when we went to the bathroom. We were all women, ages from seventeen to sixty-five. The guards were female, too. I don't know their names, but later on, when I was in Evin prison, I learned that one of them was named Amiri. After three days, and with much difficulty, I tried to persuade one of the guards to give us some food. She took me to her room in order to speak with me. While in her room, I took a number of sugar cubes from her table when she was not paying attention. I later shared those sugar cubes with the women in my cell.
7. Some of the detainees were well-connected, meaning that their families knew some high-level government officials. These families had found out that their children were being held at the Vozara detention center. At 7 p.m. on the third day, they told us that Revolutionary Court officials were coming to get written promises from us. When the interrogators came, they called us in groups of four or five and asked us why we had participated in the demonstration. Everyone who left her cell returned to the cell after having spoken with the judge. We didn't know what was going on and why our cellmates were returning to their cells. Weren't we supposed to get released after we gave our word? The prisoners who returned after seeing the judge said that they were given a sheet of paper and asked to sign it. The prisoners were not, however, allowed to read what was written on the sheet!
8. When it was my turn, I was able to read what was on that sheet. It said that I had been arrested for acting against national security, participating in an illegal demonstration, uttering slogans against government officials and a number of other crimes. At that point, I realized that this wasn't a written promise. Instead, it was a list of my alleged crimes and I was being asked to admit to them. "What kind of a crime is this?" I asked the judge. "After all, Interior Ministry had declared it a legal protest." I signed it anyway. The judge said, "I will release you if you just say that you like your Supreme Leader." That judge went back and forth with me for half an hour in order to persuade me to write "I like my Supreme Leader," after which I would supposedly be released. I said, "Do you see horns on my head? Do you think I'm an idiot? If I liked the Supreme Leader, then what on earth am I am doing here?" He said, "Ok, so go and rot in prison!" I later realized why he was insisting on this. U.N. representatives were due to visit the prisons, and they were about to investigate how prisoners felt about prison conditions, and whether they liked the Supreme Leader. There were a number of other men in that room, too.
9. The guards made us form a line in the main corridor of the Vozara detention center. They told us to sit down facing the wall and wait for our names to be called. They said that we would be released when our names were called. I remember that it was raining that day. A number of families had come to Vozara, hoping that their children would be released but had realized that they were being transferred to Evin instead. One of the mothers forced her way into the facility, passing through security forces. She begged them to not send her child to Evin. Instead, they arrested her as well. The prison authorities said, "We wanted to release you, but your families came here and created a ruckus. This has made things difficult for you."
10. Finally, they put us in a bus at 10:30 pm. When our families saw that, they lay on the ground and told the authorities that they should first go over their dead bodies before taking their children to prison. Using batons, the security forces started to beat the family members. When we realized we were being taken to Evin prison, we started to shout and were beaten with batons as well.

Transfer to Evin

11. In the bus, the guards made us lower our heads so we wouldn't be able to see. They told us that they were taking us to the Revolutionary Court, where we would give our written promises. Once I raised my head, I saw Evin's sign and noticed that we were entering Evin prison. The guards in Evin swore at us and treated us very badly. We had to wait a few minutes so the Evin prison officials could count us. Then, they put us on a prison minibus. The minibus went uphill for ten minutes, after which we reached the women's ward. All the cells in this ward were solitary cells. There was a corridor with sixty cells. There were fifty of us, all arrested during the Student Day demonstration.
12. A prison official came into the ward. He had a repulsive appearance. He said, "Make no mistake; this is not Vozara where you could kick the doors. If you raise your voices here, we will kill you." I'll never forget a seventeen year old girl who threw herself at his feet. She licked his shoe and said, "Please don't throw me in a solitary cell! I'm scared of being alone!" She begged until they placed her and a sixty-three year old woman in the same cell. They put the rest of us in solitary cells. We were hungry, stressed and sleep-deprived.
13. I was taken to a solitary cell that had a small window in the door. The window's handle was on the other side of the door. The guards opened the window for only half an hour each day so that we could have a change of air. There was also a small window at the bottom of the door through which they gave us food. There was a small carpet and a blanket on the floor. It was December and the weather was cold and I developed strep throat. My tonsils were swollen and I could not breathe. There was also a toilet in the solitary cell, which resembled a metal bucket with a hole at the bottom. That's what we had to use for all of our needs.
14. At three in the morning that first night, I heard two or three men scream. I wondered what was being done to them that they were screaming like that. I shivered at the sound of those screams. The noise died down around 4:00 in the morning. There were ten to twenty minutes of absolute silence. Then, I heard the sound of boots passing by my cell. I wondered who was next and when my turn would come. I had heard about rape in prisons and was very scared.
15. The next day, they made us wear chadors and took us in groups of five to be issued prison IDs. They photographed and fingerprinted us. On the third day at Evin, we were finally given food. The food was awful, but I was so hungry that I ate it all. We were given three meals a day for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Breakfast was given at six in the morning. It consisted of a piece of bread and some cheese. But I was so tired and sleep-deprived that I preferred to sleep.
16. I remember that one day, on the fourth or fifth day after my arrest, they opened the doors of a number of cells, including mine at Evin. This was before the interrogations and tortures began. I saw three or four men standing outside my cell. They told me to get out of the cell. When I went out, they said, "Walk...sit...stand up...walk again!" They wanted to see whether we were healthy and able to walk or not. Back in Vozara, one of the detained women who was a lawyer had told us that U.N. officials were scheduled to investigate prison conditions.
17. One day they released some kind of gas into the ward – I think it was paint thinner gas. We all got sick. Everyone banged on the doors with their hands and feet, asking prison guards to open the windows. I opened the window used for giving food and breathed through its opening. After an hour, they opened the cell windows.

18. In the cell directly in front of mine, there was a woman named Mahnaz. She had a master's degree in Persian literature. She had breast cancer. In the prison, her breast had swollen a lot due to stress. But she was not given access to a doctor or medical care.
19. I remember that five solitary cells were kept empty to be used for women arrested for social vices. When prisoners in general wards got involved in a fight, they were brought to these solitary cells as a form of punishment. One night, the guards brought a number of vulgar women. At first I thought they were men but later found out they were arrested for social vices and had been brought to the solitary ward because they had been involved in a prison brawl. At three or four in the morning, one of them was screaming in a manner that even scared the guards. She was yelling and asking for diazepam.¹ Mahnaz, who had cancer, suffered a seizure from hearing that woman's vulgar insults. We later found out that the woman had been imprisoned in Evin for a year and had become addicted to heroin while in prison. She needed her fix that night. I suddenly heard the sound of breaking glass. We realized she had broken the window in her cell and slit her wrists. She did this in order to be taken to the prison medical facility. Also, the woman who was in the cell adjacent to mine had a psychological illness. Once she bought two cigarettes and a lighter from a guard for 50,000 tomans. This was in 2002.

Interrogation

20. After five days, the guards started to call us in groups of five. They blindfolded and handcuffed us with our hands crossed, and put us in a Peykan.² An elderly man who had a white beard told us that if we raised our heads we would be shot in the head. Then we were taken to be interrogated. When we got out of the car, they made us form a line and told us to put our hands on the shoulder of the person in front of us. The guards pulled the chador of the first person in the line, and the rest of us were pulled along with her. We were taken to another building and were put in solitary cells. I was under a lot of stress. I was sitting on a chair facing the wall. I was told to sit like that and not turn around.
21. The torture chamber of Evin prison is located three stories below ground level. It is an acoustic chamber. However, the room in which I was tortured was not soundproof and had green or blue tiles. There is another place where they torture prisoners so much that no one gets out without sustaining a major injury. It is a red building and is fully soundproof.
22. I sat in the torture room for about an hour. Then a female interrogator entered and sat behind me. She told me not to turn my head. I later realized this was done so that we couldn't identify the interrogators on the street. I heard this from people who had been imprisoned before. I could see their shoes and realized that they were all wearing the same kind of shoes. That woman told me that I should answer every question she asked me. She put a sheet of paper in front of me and told me to write down my answers. She asked me how I had found out that there was going to be a demonstration. She told me that I could lift my blindfold a bit so that I could see what I was writing. Once I accidentally turned my face and saw that she was holding an A4 sheet in front of her face. "Turn around!" she scolded. One of her questions was what I thought about Zia Atabay. (Zia Atabay had a TV show on the Turkish Satellite channel NITV). Then she asked me why I had gone to the demonstration and what I wanted to achieve by attending that demonstration. At that point, the interrogator repeated what I was previously said. She said, "Write that you like the

¹ Diazepam is an anti-anxiety medication and is used to assist with withdrawal from certain drugs.

² Peykan is an Iranian car.

Supreme Leader.” I realized that they wanted to fill a questionnaire and show it to the U.N. My first interrogation was four hours long. That woman was the only person present.

23. She asked, “Have any of your relatives been arrested before?” I believed that they had all the information about me and I worried that if I lied, they would find out. So I told them that my uncle had joined the Mojahedin-e Khalq. He was sentenced to death when I was seven years old, but my father and other relatives were able to get his sentence reduced to four years. I told her these things and I was returned to my cell. But telling them this resulted in me being called for another interrogation in two days. This time, the interrogation involved beating, torture and rape.

Rape and Torture

24. My second interrogation was conducted in a different place and I was interrogated by two men. Even though I was blindfolded, they covered their faces. I was able to see them once when I raised my head. I was not able to see their faces or identify them but I saw that they were wearing similar white slippers. They wanted me to confess that I was linked to the Mojahedin, that I had insulted the government officials and that I had acted against national security.
25. When I did not confess, the two interrogators put me under a barrage of punches and kicks. They hanged me from the ceiling and beat me with batons. They wanted to teach me a lesson.
26. Following my second interrogation, I was raped for three days. I was bleeding, but they did not even give me a pad. They raped me in a violent manner. The two men never said their names. They called each other “Seyyed” or “Haji.” The first time, I begged them not to rape me and I told them that I was a virgin. But they calmly said, “You haven’t tasted it? Now taste it!” The interrogators cut my clothes with scissors so that they could take them off. My arm was wounded by the scissors. They told me that if I said a thing, they would kill my entire family. I was really injured.
27. Before beating me or raping me they said things like, “So you chant slogans and attend demonstrations? Now we will show you how it is!” I was bleeding a lot. I was in really bad shape. Once they beat me in the head with a hard object so that they could keep me quiet while raping me. They broke my head. I was not given any medicine, and therefore, the wound became infected. It itched a lot. I scratched it so much that it bled.
28. I didn’t have a watch, so I was not able to know what time of day it was. My two interrogators seemed to be colleagues. Neither was superior to the other. The manner in which they talked to each other indicated this sort of a relationship. For example, one would say to the other, “Haji, let’s show her what it means to go to a demonstration,” and the other one would agree. There was one interrogation session per day. I didn’t have a watch so I couldn’t tell how long an interrogation lasted. But I think they did not always take the same amount of time. First, they beat me and then I had to write whatever they told me. I also had to sign and put my fingerprint on what I wrote. After a while, they stopped because they had reached their goal. I was in solitary confinement in Evin for twenty days.
29. They continued to torture me every day. They punched and kicked me. They wanted me to confess that I had a problem with the government and I wanted to overthrow it and that I was linked to the Mojahedin. They wanted these confessions so that they could hand down a stiff sentence if they arrested someone for a second time. They also wanted to establish a crime so that they could claim the person they had arrested was not innocent.

30. While being tortured, I repeatedly told them that I was only seven years old when my uncle was imprisoned. How was it possible for me to be influenced by him? They said, "How can we know that you are not influenced by the Mojahedin right now?" There was no reasoning with them. Even if I accepted that I was a linked to the Mojahedin, I would have been beaten because I sympathized with them!

Contact with Family

31. My family did not know of my whereabouts for ten days. We were not allowed to contact our families. After ten days, the woman who had interrogated me the first time handed me her personal cell phone and told me to call my family and let them know that I was in Evin prison. That woman had treated me respectfully during my interrogation, but I had been disrespectful to her. At Evin prison, there are many people who hold key positions and are not able to leave their jobs. Maybe she was one of them. I called home. My brother picked up the phone. I told him that I was alive, that I was doing ok, and that I was at Evin prison. That's all I said.
32. My brother immediately started calling everyone telling them where I was. In just ten minutes he received a call from the authorities. The person on the phone said, "What are you doing? Why are you telling the whole world about your sister?" This meant that our home phone was bugged. Before that day, my family had gone to police stations, courthouses and even Evin prison to look for me. On each occasion, they were told that no one with my name was held there! After I told them that I was in Evin, they came there every day to find out when I would be released. During those days, my mother met a woman in front of the prison gate. She told my mother that her daughter had been arrested in Haft-e Tir Square for distributing a political flyer. She said her daughter was arrested seven months ago and was held at Evin, and that she was five months pregnant. Her daughter did not know who the father was.
33. My mom told me that one day they called our house at 5 am and told my family to come to Evin the following day at 5 am with one million tomans. They called for two days. My mom had not understood what this meant but a friend of mine who had been previously imprisoned said that this meant that they wanted to execute a prisoner and were asking for the cost of bullets. If my mom knew this, she would have suffered a heart attack. That is how they harassed my family.

Physiological Pressure after Release

34. I was released on bail after twenty days of solitary confinement in Evin. My family took me to Razi hospital and a physician treated the wound on my head from the base. No hair grows from the place of that wound. There is also a wound on my arm from the scissors. I did not give the details of what had happened to me to my mother or my family. She's a mother and although she did not know what had happened to me, she suffered stomach and intestinal diseases. I had to lie to her to keep her from knowing the truth.
35. After I was released, I was unstable psychologically. I don't remember much from those days. For one week, I did not know how I could tell others that I was no longer a virgin. So one night I slit my wrist to end my misery. Three days later, I realized that I had been admitted to a mental hospital the night of my attempted suicide. My mother said that she heard a voice calling her in the middle of the night. She came to my room and saw that I had placed newspapers on the

ground around me and had slit my wrist. She screamed and took me to a hospital. I don't remember any of this. I was in the hospital for a month and took pills for a year. Later on, things changed but I didn't want to get married because I was afraid of telling my family that I was not a virgin. Nobody knew what had happened to me until I was in Turkey. My family only found out about what happened to me when they came to visit me in Turkey.

Court Summons

36. I was summoned to court in June 2003 by a phone call. I did not go. They called me again and told me that a new trial date was set in July, and that I would be arrested if I did not show up for my trial. My trial was on July 1, 2003. I received a one-year imprisonment sentence. But the judge used his discretion to reduce my sentence to a four-year suspended sentence. For four years, I was supposed to go to the 26th Branch of the Revolutionary Court every twenty days in order to sign in. I was not prohibited from leaving the country, however. I even traveled to Dubai twice during that period. My case was scheduled to close on August 10, 2007.
37. I was tried in the 26th Branch of the Revolutionary Court. My trial judge was Haddad. He is a prosecutor now. His clerk was referred to as Seyyed Majid and I had seen him in Vozara. A very well-dressed man was there as well that I couldn't believe worked for the Ministry of Intelligence. I don't know his name.
38. At that time, my occupation was filming private ceremonies. I also taught Arabic at the Ebtekar-e Novin Institute. I was also a tour leader for Kish Island tours. Meanwhile, I was involved in social movements. In those days, I tried to help troubled families. I accidentally met a drug addict named Ali through his cousin. I found out that he was having problems with his mentor at NA³, and he had lost his self-confidence. He needed help. Without realizing it, I became his mentor. He was clean for a year and a half, and did not relapse. Through him, I got to know the NA organization. I also met Fathollah Aramesh who publishes and distributes NA books in Iran. I told him that I was interested in helping people who recognized their mistakes. I got involved in NA only because I was interested in their work. From 2005 when I first heard about them, I worked with them for two years.

Second Summons to Court

39. In February 2007, I was introduced to Ayatollah Boroujerdi through a friend. I started going to his home. I knew of him previously but didn't know him personally. After learning about his views, going to his home regularly, and attending his lectures, I started to promote his ideas. He was a cleric whose interpretation of Islam was different. My main reason for doing this was that I noticed people were converting from Islam without knowing the truth about it. My father is a religious scholar and researched different religions for thirty years. When I saw that people considered Islam to be responsible for the crimes of this government, I decided to introduce people to other interpretations of Islam so that even if they wanted to convert to another religion, they would do it in an informed manner.
40. My goal in promoting Ayatollah Boroujerdi's ideas was to let people know that he speaks about the true nature of Islam, kindness of Islam, respect for others' rights and the value of humans in

³ Narcotics Anonymous.

Islam. The government did not represent these concepts. The actions of this government have led people to think that Islam is a very violent and cruel religion. I wanted to increase people's knowledge.

41. I was a member of a women's charitable organization of Karaj. I played Daf⁴ and I distributed Ayatollah Boroujerdi's books at religious ceremonies, as well as fundraisers for orphans and gatherings at which we helped collect dowries for brides from underprivileged families. Some women portrayed God in a horrifying way. I told them to read Ayatollah Boroujerdi's books so that they could see what Islam really teaches, and that what was being done in Islam's name was not right.
42. Two books by Ayatollah Boroujerdi were published at this time. One was "Rain in a Scorched Desert" and the other one was "Sayings of the Wise Man." Sales of both books, however, were banned. As a result, Ayatollah Boroujerdi gave the books to those close to him and we were responsible for distributing them. On July 18, 2007, someone called our house from the Revolutionary Court and informed me that I had to appear in court on July 21, which was a Saturday. At that time I was involved in distributing Ayatollah Boroujerdi's books. While on the phone, I asked, "How can I be sure that this is not a prank call? I have not received any written summons."

Leaving Iran

43. I did not go to my trial this time. Instead, I purchased a ticket and escaped to Turkey on August 23, 2007. At that time, I believed that anyone who was summoned to court was arrested on the spot without being arraigned.
44. I have gone through a lot. My life changed forever. I could not get married in Iran, because I was worried that any person whom I would marry might turn out to be a bad person and might tell my family that I had been raped. Therefore, I did not think about marriage. But I got engaged in Turkey and have told my fiancé everything. Having sex is difficult for me. I don't enjoy it. I am forced to fake it, and I dread it whenever my fiancé wants to have sex with me. During sex, I remember being raped, and I hit and bite my fiancé. I often have nightmares and am miserable for days. I am condemned to this life because I can never forget those memories.

⁴ Daf is a Persian drum.