مرکز اسناد حقوق بشر ایران
IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS
Documentation Center

Speaking for the Dead:

Survivor Accounts of Iran's 1988 Massacre

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center

The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) believes that the development of an accountability movement and a culture of human rights in Iran are crucial to the long-term peace and security of the country and the Middle East region. As numerous examples have illustrated, the removal of an authoritarian regime does not necessarily lead to an improved human rights situation if institutions and civil society are weak, or if a culture of human rights and democratic governance has not been cultivated. By providing Iranians with comprehensive human rights reports, data about past and present human rights violations, and information about international human rights standards, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the IHRDC programs will strengthen Iranians' ability to demand accountability, reform public institutions, and promote transparency and respect for human rights. Encouraging a culture of human rights within Iranian society as a whole will allow political and legal reforms to have real and lasting weight.

The **IHRDC** seeks to:

- Establish a comprehensive and objective historical record of the human rights situation in Iran since the 1979 revolution, and on the basis of this record, establish responsibility for patterns of human rights abuses;
- Make such record available in an archive that is accessible to the public for research and educational purposes;
- Promote accountability, respect for human rights and the rule of law in Iran; and
- Encourage an informed dialogue on the human rights situation in Iran among scholars and the general public in Iran and abroad.

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Photographs:
The front cover painting is by Kianoosh Majidi, an artist whose brother was executed during the 1988 prison massacre. The portrait is of the current Deputy to the Head of the Judiciary, Ebrahim Raissi, who was a member of the Death Commission in Tehran.

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November 2009
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Introduction

Speaking for the Dead: Survivor Accounts of Iran's 1988 Massacre is a collection of witness statements documenting the experiences of five female prisoners in connection with the Islamic Republic of Iran's summary execution of thousands of political prisoners during the summer of 1988. The statements were prepared from in-person and telephone interviews conducted by the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) during the summer of 2009, twenty-one years after the horrific events of 1988. Along with its companion report, *Deadly Fatwa: Iran's 1988 Prison Massacre*, this report contributes to documenting a national tragedy that has inexplicably received little international attention.

All five witnesses were members of, or had family members affiliated with, leftist groups or parties in Iran. The prisoners had been arrested for minor offenses in the early to mid-1980s, a period during which the fledgling Islamic Republic targeted its political opponents for imprisonment, torture, execution and exile. Most of the prisoners had languished in prison for years on vague political charges (or no charges at all), and endured prolonged interrogations and systematic torture. By 1988, several, known as *mellikesh*, had completed their sentences, but remained in prison because they refused to publically confess to their alleged crimes or denounce their political views.

As early as 1987, prisoners throughout Iran's prisons began noticing changes. Authorities in some prisons handed out questionnaires and conducted interrogations examining the prisoners' religious and ideological views. They often reorganized the prisoners based on their answers, and the nature and length of their sentences. In July 1988, after the Iranian government accepted the United Nations-brokered cease-fire with Iraq, the authorities locked down the prisons. They shuffled prisoners between wards (and other prisons), and summoned many Mojahedin and leftist prisoners. Most of those summoned never returned.

The witnesses presented in this report recount the climate of fear, chaos, and utter confusion that took hold of the prisons. Many did not know what was happening, and, at least initially, were unable to fully grasp the gravity of the circumstances. One witness describes her efforts to obtain information about her imprisoned husband, while the others provide harrowing accounts of events inside the prisons. Several recall prolonged periods of solitary confinement, interrupted by interrogations and continued physical and psychological abuse. Some describe, in vivid detail, their experiences before the Death Commissions that were charged with interrogating prisoners about their political and religious beliefs in order to establish whether they were *murtads*, or apostates. Depending on their answers, the Commissions decided whether prisoners were worthy of being reformed through forced repentance and prayer, or simply deserved to be executed. The price of mercy was high: repeated lashings until the prisoner agreed to pray, or died under torture.

To this day, the Iranian government continues to deny that the massacre ever took place. The government's security forces continue to prevent gatherings and commemoration ceremonies at mass grave sites (known as *khavarans*) scattered throughout Iran, where thousands of the executed are believed to have been secretly buried. The government also strictly monitors journalists, activists, and family members, prohibiting public discussion or coverage of the massacre and ensuring that the veil of secrecy surrounding the events of 1988 remains firmly in place.

In addition to the many prison memoirs, statements, speeches, and conferences commemorating the massacre, these statements reflect the resolve of survivors who struggle to provide a voice to

the thousands who perished, so that the Iranian authorities may be held accountable for their torture and executions. The IHRDC wishes to thank these courageous women who agreed to be interviewed, and who provided their invaluable cooperation and guidance in preparing these statements. For safety and security reasons, the names of some of the witnesses have been altered for this report.

Witness Statement of M.M.

Name: M.M.[1]

Place of Birth:

Date of Birth:

Occupation:

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: May 27, 2009

Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

Witnesses:

This statement was prepared pursuant to an in-person interview with Ms. M.M. The statement consists of 47 paragraphs and 10 pages. The interview was conducted on May 27, 2009. The statement was approved in Persian by M.M. on November 1, 2009.

[1] "M.M." is a pseudonym.

Witness Statement

My Arrest

1. I was arrested in May 1983. I was a first cadre member of the Tudeh Party and had great responsibilities in the city where I lived. I spent the next six-and-a-half years in prison.

2. Many of the leaders of the Tudeh Party were arrested in February of 1983 in a heavily preplanned operation. The arrest of high-ranking members, like me, was the second major blow the Tudeh Party endured. These arrests occurred as a result of information leaked to the regime after the first wave of arrests.

3. They took me to the Revolutionary Guard office, which was a terrifying place. I was blindfolded and forced to wear a *chador* while detained there.

4. While there, I realized that they had also arrested and detained several other members of our Party. We had lost contact with each other during the recent months, so I did not know what had happened to them.

5. They kept me at the Revolutionary Guards facility for nine days. While I was there, they conducted simple and preliminary interrogations. After that, they put me and several other Tudeh members they had arrested on a bus headed toward Gohar Dasht prison. We were first taken to the regional Prosecutor's Office, and then to Gohar Dasht. There were no more than fifteen of us. All of us were from the same city, and had similar case files.

To Gohar Dasht and Back

6. They kept us in solitary confinement for three months in Gohar Dasht. During this time we were continually interrogated, but never tortured. They always questioned me during the day—never at odd hours. They put an organizational chart in front of us that accurately depicted our Party positions and responsibilities at the time. They wanted us to know that they knew who we were and had already gathered lots of information about us. And they did, which is why they did not resort to beating us or putting pressure on us, except for the few times that we did not cooperate with them. Their main goal was to convince us to write a denunciation letter, and pledge that we would not undertake any political activity against the Islamic Republic upon our release. But we refused.

7. I was only confronted by one interrogator. I sensed, however, that there were others behind-the-scenes who were assisting him because I could hear the whispers and low voices during the course of my interrogations. While I was interrogated, I was usually forced to sit cross-legged in the corner of the room. They did this to make the prisoner feel as if the walls were closing in on her. It was a very oppressive and lonely feeling. I had a blindfold on and my head was always down. In prison, I usually tried to keep my head up and walk with a sense of pride. Because of this, the guards usually intimidated and threatened me. They wanted to see nothing but fear and obedience in our eyes.

8. After three months, they transferred us to a public ward in Qezel Hesar prison, which was run by *tavvabs*[2] who were primarily Mojahedin members. After ten months, my trial finally took place. But before hauling me to court, they summoned me and several others to the main hall of Qezel Hesar prison. One of the *tavvabs* in charge ordered four of us to put on blindfolds, wear our *chadors* and stand in one spot. They kept us standing for hours on end. A couple of guards hovered next to us. If we moved even a little bit, they beat us. In the beginning, we had lots of energy and thought we would be able to last. But after several hours, our legs began to swell. I felt as if my body was being cut in two, and a sharp pain started shooting up from my waist. It is as if they were stabbing me in the back with a butcher's knife. After about eight hours, I thought my brain would explode. A few of the others began to hallucinate. They kept us there for forty-eight hours. During this time, they only allowed us to sit down when they brought us food. I was familiar with this method of torture, and knew the best way to resist was to refuse eating. Eating only increased the pressure on our bodies, because we would eventually be forced to go to the bathroom. I tried to inconspicuously tell the others not to eat as well, but the guard found out and hit me hard.

9. After they were done with us, they escorted fifteen or sixteen of us to the Qezel Hesar library, which had been turned into a makeshift courtroom. We were allowed to take off our blindfolds. The presiding judge was Hojjatolislam Soltani. My interrogator, Fatehi, was present, along with a few prison officials. The chief interrogator read a collective indictment and accused all of us of attempting to overthrow the government. I was also charged with refusing to pray during my ten months in detention.

10. I spoke out in my defense, and told them that I had not committed any unlawful acts. I was a member of the Tudeh Party. As a cadre member, I had both ideological and logistical responsibilities. At the time I was working with the Tudeh, the Party had not been declared to be illegal. Then, unexpectedly, the regime declared the Party illegal and we were all caught by surprise. We never intended to overthrow the regime. After the revolution, the Tudeh Party defended the Islamic Republic. So at one point during my defense, I made it clear that I no longer considered myself a member of the Tudeh Party because the Party had defended and supported the Islamic Republic. After my arrest, I came to the realization that this regime was simply not defendable. At the conclusion of my defense, however, I declared that I would not condemn the Party and did not believe that it had had betrayed our nation. In response to my defense, my interrogator requested that the judge also indict me for the things I had just said. Despite this, the judge turned to me and said, "My daughter, repent. Admit that you were mistaken. I have heard that you do not pray. Why don't you pray? Please do so." I responded that I did not believe in prayer.

11. I finished serving my sentence in 1987. But in the Islamic Republic, finishing one's sentence was often not enough to release a political prisoner. In fact, sentences were often meaningless. Prisoners had to accept certain preconditions before they were released. Many prisoners were forced to write a letter denouncing their political beliefs and parties. Or they had to conduct television interviews wherein they would renounce their parties, pledge allegiance to the Islamic Republic, express remorse for their past activities, and agree to act as informants for the regime. I did not accept any of these preconditions for

[2] A *tavvab* is anyone who has engaged in the act of *tawbih*, or penitence. It usually refers to "reformed" political prisoners who agreed to cooperate with the regime while serving out their prison sentences.

release, and thus became a *mellikesh*[3] prisoner. It was very common for prisoners to serve out their sentences and continue to be detained in prison as *mellikesh*.

Gohar Dasht Before Lock-Down

12. We learned about the United Nations-brokered cease-fire with Iraq (UN Resolution 598) through state-run media broadcasts and newspapers such as *Etela'at* and *Kayhan*, which were given to us by the prison administrators. Soon after that, we learned about the Mojahedin's Operation Eternal Light, which was launched from the Iran-Iraq border. We did not receive this news from state-run media. We learned of the attack from family members on the outside. Many of the prisoners inside, as well as some family members outside, mistakenly believed that these events signaled the beginning of the end for the regime.

13. I remember very clearly the prison environment during those days. Many thought that any day, the prison gates would be torn down and we would walk out as heroes. I believe many of the prison authorities were well aware that the prisoners' beliefs were based on false information and assumptions about what was going on, yet they did not feel a need to disavow us of our beliefs. When they took the prisoners in for interrogations, they knew the psychological condition that we were in based on the news we were receiving from our families. They were just playing with us.

14. Later in 1987, a group of us who were transferred to Qezel Hesar and were from the same city had been sent to Gohar Dasht prison. The prison environment between 1986 and 1987 was relatively relaxed. Many of the prisoners engaged in group strikes, and often openly defied prison authorities. In contrast to the early 1980s, the guards did not respond harshly. Around this time, we began to notice that prison officials would often ask prisoners to come talk to them about various political and ideological issues. For example, I remember Sajjadi (who was a prison administrator at Gohar Dasht and lived there with his family) summoned prisoners in our ward on two consecutive nights, from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. He said things like, "Tell me, what do you think of the war with Iraq?" He asked these questions in a way that suggested he was our friend, so he could trap us. The prisoner would think that he is asking these questions out of a position of weakness. They played their roles very well.

15. In the summer of 1987 (I think it was July or August), they took me to a solitary cell and told me to use the time to think about whether or not I wanted to cooperate with them. I had only two weeks left in my sentence. They suggested that I write a letter denouncing the Tudeh Party and expressing remorse for my actions. They also handed me a book entitled *Kaj Raheh* (Crooked Path). The book was written by Ehsan Tabari, a Tudeh founder and theoretician who had repented in prison and thrown his support behind the Islamic Republic after his release. I began to read the book. On the second day, they summoned me and asked me what I thought of it. I told them I thought it was nonsense. They asked if I would give an interview. I refused. They took me to the auxiliary rooms of Gohar Dasht prison. "Auxiliary" was a term used for apartments that had a particular architecture and were located beside the solitary cells. The guards and employees of the prison lived in these apartments. Every apartment had a couple of rooms and a kitchen. They put me in the kitchen of one of the apartments. Aadel and Jaber were the names of

[3] *Mellikesh* is a term used by the prisoners to identify prisoners whose sentences had ended, but continued to endure imprisonment because they were uncompromising in their ideological or political views, or refused to accept the prison authorities' preconditions for release.

two guards who would come for inspection and interrogation at the prison. I had gotten into a fight with them a couple of times. They told me that I was hopeless.

The Executions Begin

16. The calm inside prison in those days was the calm before the storm. Later they instituted very strict laws and the freedoms that existed before were restricted. The first sign of the storm came in late July 1988 with the summoning of Mojahed prisoners from our ward.

17. In July 1988, we were being kept in the auxiliary cells inside Gohar Dasht. In our ward, there were only five or seven leftists. The rest were Mojahed. All of the leftists were uncompromising in their views. Among the Mojahedin, only one held firm on her beliefs. The rest of them were *tavvabs*. The uncompromising prisoner was a dear girl named Roya, who would constantly argue with prison officials. One day, they summoned Roya. It was the last week of July. The ordered her to "come out with her *chador* and blindfold on." She left our ward and was never seen again.

18. Two weeks after Roya was taken, they put pieces of metal on the blinds behind the prison cell windows (which had made it possible for us to send Morse code to the others). We were no longer able to communicate with the other prisoners.

19. The Mojahedin's executions began in late July, but we were not aware of this until the first or second week of August. Around that time, some vague news reached us from the men's wards of Gohar Dasht that they had begun executing male prisoners. This news had, apparently, reached us from the men's ward at Evin prison. Because all the Mojahedin members in our ward were *tavvabs*, we were completely oblivious. When they took the last uncompromising *tavvab* from our ward, we were under the impression that they were taking her to solitary confinement in order to punish her. Later, when I finally realized that they were hanging the Mojahed inmates, I could not believe it! I did not expect this, given the general prison climate in those days. We firmly believed that the situation had changed to our advantage and there was no way they would execute prisoners. I must confess that when I heard the news, I was in complete disbelief.

20. Among the women prisoners from our city (who numbered twenty-five or twenty-six and who were all placed in a small ward in the auxiliary wing of Gohar Dasht), five of us were uncompromising in our views. Around August 15 or 16, they separated the five of us from the rest. They took us to the hallway near the amphitheater (also known as the Husseiniyih)—the place where they hanged the prisoners)—and then transferred us to solitary confinement. They had decided to send us to solitary confinement in order to intimidate and break us.

I Go Before the Death Commission

21. Toward the end of August, the second wave of executions began. Again, the executions started in Gohar Dasht. In fact, both waves of executions began in Gohar Dasht—both for the Mojahedin and for the leftists. For some reason, there was a bit of a delay in Evin. On August 25, 1988, they began whipping leftist prisoners. I was summoned to go in front of the Death Commission on August 26. On the day they took me there, I had no idea where I was going. I was blindfolded.

22. We were sitting in the hallway for twenty minutes. It was very crowded and chaotic. There was a lot of hustle and bustle. There were lots of prisoners sitting in the hallway and waiting. I think most of them were men. There were only a few female prisoners—most of the rest of the women had been transferred out of Gohar Dasht, and they did not wish to keep us there anymore.

23. Then I entered a room. They told me to remove my blindfold. I saw some people sitting there. I realized that I was inside a courtroom. Four people were sitting behind a big table. Nayyeri, Eshraghi, Naserian[4] (the governor of Gohar Dasht), Lashkari (the head of security at Gohar Dasht), and several other people, guards, and administrators were present in the courtroom. Everything was black, and everyone was seated around the table (except for me). There were lots of files in front of them—files detailing everything about the prisoners who were being summoned. Naserian despised me because I had talked back to him several times. He had slapped me around and made fun of me on several occasions.

24. Nayyeri, the religious judge, picked up a piece of paper and asked me why I had been arrested. I answered him. He asked me if I was firmly holding onto my beliefs. I said I was. Eshraghi, who was the Tehran Prosecutor, attempted to help me out. During the questioning, he often signaled with his eyes in order to guide me toward the correct answer. Despite this, I answered the questions honestly. Next, Nayyeri asked, "Do you not pray?" I said, "No." He asked, "How about your parents?" I said, "My father doesn't pray." Here, Eshraghi again interjected on my behalf and said, "Sir, she is not to blame. Her father does not pray." I still did not understand the consequences of responding to these questions, and did not realize that my response regarding my father not praying would actually help my case. Nayyeri looked at me, gathered the papers and said, "Very well." Then he turned to Naserian and said, "Take her. Until she prays and comes to Islam, whip her fifteen times[5] and give her one date to eat. Then he said, "Also, give her something coarse to wear!" Later, I realized that these instructions were made pursuant to Shari'a law.

25. I just stared at him. I did not plead or cry. I cannot really describe how I felt at the time. I was very confused. I was obviously influenced by my desire to resist them, but I was also scared and shocked. I did not know what to do. In any case, this is how I reacted. I think this bothered Nayyeri. He said, "You will be beaten until you die or turn to Islam." When he said this, Naserian became overjoyed. He kicked me from behind and said, "Get out!" They kicked me out of the room.

26. My court was held in a room located along a long hall. At the end of this hall was the prison's Husseiniyih, or amphitheater, where they were executing many prisoners. When I exited the courtroom, I waited for a couple of minutes in the hallway. The hallway was very crowded. There was a lot of noise and yelling. The guards were very angry, and dragged and stomped their feet on the ground. I think it was at that moment that I finally realized what was happening, but I was still shell-shocked and confused.

[4] Naserian is a pseudonym. I knew the man's real name, but I cannot recall it at the moment.
[5] Female apostates were whipped five times for every prayer session. Since there are five prayer sessions throughout the day, they sustained twenty-five lashings per day.

The Punishment for an Apostate

27. After our court sessions, they took each of us to individual cells. These cells were like dungeons and were located on the lower level of the prison. When it was time for our first prayer session, Naserian (who was a strongly built man) came into my cell along with two other people and took me to the torture chamber for a whipping. The torture chamber was in a secluded place that did not allow sound to reverberate. This room had a special bed. They tied our hands and feet to the bed, threw a blanket on our heads, and shoved a dirty piece of cloth in our mouths. They wanted to shut us up. Then they whipped us. For a while, that dirty rag in my mouth caused me more trouble than the lashings. They beat us very badly. I had been beaten many times before, but this time it was different. They struck with intent to kill. They lashed me for five days, five times a day, eight lashes. They beat us with wire hoses that were filled. They were much heavier than the regular cables with which I had been beaten before. One prisoner's leg broke as a result of the sheer force they applied. Naserian personally whipped us. After the first beating was done and I was untied from the bed, I could not walk. I was crawling on all fours. I remember that Naserian told me: "You wretch! I finally got to see you crawling too!"

28. The next time they beat me, I was wearing a blue skirt. They had tied my hands and placed a blanket over my legs. But when they hit me, I squirmed and struggled. My skirt slipped up and the blanket fell off my legs. Naserian and the soldiers ridiculed and insulted me a lot. The next day when they took me for whipping again, they told some of the guards to bring me a pair of pants so when my legs shot up they would not have to see my underwear.

29. I do not think they wanted others to know what was happening inside the prison. They wanted to conduct their business without anyone noticing. As such, they had taken us two levels down in the basement where no one could hear our screams during the whippings. They carried out their work with the utmost secrecy. Their plan was to kill the prisoners without them knowing what was happening. They wanted the prisoners to trap themselves and march toward their own death. This is why I found what Eshraghi was doing in the death commission interesting. He was the only one among this group of killers who attempted to warn us about the executions.

30. I was always the first one to be taken for whipping. On the fifth day, I could no longer take it. I felt I was close to death. I had noticed blood in my urine during the two previous days. I told Naserian that I can no longer bear the torture. He told me that I had to pray. I had made a promise to myself that I would not pray. So I told him I was on my period and could thus be excused from prayer.[6] After that, they threw me inside an even scarier room. They told me that I could be miserable in this room for a week until my period was over and they would see if I was ready to pray or not.

31. After one week, they came and took me someplace else. It seems that they had forgotten about my situation. After I acknowledged that I can no longer bear torture and implied that I would pray, the other five women prisoners who were whipped along with me also accepted to pray. But I escaped the situation without ever having to pray.

32. Pursuant to Islamic law, the sentence of an apostate woman is not execution. In fact, a woman is not executed because of apostasy under any circumstances. Shari'a law

[6] Women who are menstruating are considered ritually unclean and may not, therefore, participate in prayer.

requires that an apostate woman be whipped until she either dies or accepts Islam. As a result, leftist female prisoners were not executed in 1988. On the other hand, Shari'a law required a different punishment for the Mojahedin, whom the Islamic Republic called *monafeqin*.[7] The Islamic Republic believed that members of the Mojahedin were hypocrites and had created dissent within the Muslim community. Because of the serious nature of their alleged crime, Shari'a punishment does not distinguish between men and women.

33. According to the Shari'a law (as implemented by Twelver Shi'as), punishment of apostate men depends on whether they are *murtad-e melli* (national apostate) or *murtad-e fetri* (innate apostate). The punishment for an innate apostate (one whose parents are Muslim but has chosen to abandon Islam) is execution. A national apostate, on the other hand, is someone whose parents are not Muslim and cannot be blamed for not being Muslim.

34. Even now, after twenty years, there is misunderstanding among people regarding this issue. For example, when you inform people that you were uncompromising in your views, they ask you why you were not executed. They did not kill us because, according to Shari'a law, we were not to be executed.

The Aftermath

35. After a week, they returned us to the first wards that were located in the administrative buildings at Gohar Dasht prison. They no longer tortured us. They were very busy and had to tend to other matters. In addition, I think their real goal was to break us. When we broke, they met their goal. By that time, we were aware of the magnitude of the executions, and we expected that at any moment they would round the remaining prisoners up again and kill them. In our wards, we would simply go to a corner and sit there. We would not talk to each other anymore. We had all turned into ghosts. Every person would pick a spot, sit and go to sleep. That is all we did. It was as if we had gotten into a verbal spat and were no longer speaking to each other. I cried a lot during those days. I could not cry in front of the others, so I would cry out loud when it was time for me to take a shower.

36. They took us in for interrogations two or three more times after that. They asked the same old questions from us. I think they simply wanted to prove to us that they could do whatever they pleased. One time, they took all of us (I do not remember the exact date) and placed us in front of a camera. When they took me, I was completely broken and disheveled. My previous interrogator, Jaber, was also there. He told me to remove my blindfold. When I took it off, he was shocked. I had changed so much he no longer recognized me. He asked me whether I still believed in the Tudeh Party. I said I did not. He was very happy, but I explained to him that the reason I did not believe in the Party was because they had defended the Islamic Republic. He asked if I believed in the Islamic Republic. I said that I did not believe in that either. I had no fear. Even if they had killed me, I would not have been afraid. After that, they videotaped us.

37. I think our depression was the result of the final realization that so many of our friends and cellmates had lost their lives. The day I finally said that I believed in Islam was a very painful day for me. I had lost my pride. If the whippings had continued, I would

[7] *Monafeqin* is the derogatory term used by regime to refer to the Mojahedin. It means 'hypocrites' in Persian.

have surely lost my life. But I did not want to die defeated. I did not want to die like that. My urine was bloody and I was not in good physical condition. I remember when they untied me from my bed. I slowly dragged myself up the stairs and was about to enter my room when Naserian saw me and said, "You poor wretch! You are so stupid. If you had given in on the first day, you wouldn't have to crawl on all fours in front of me!" I can't forget that moment. I was wearing a *chador*. I was blindfolded and gagged. I was teary-eyed and bloody. Fluids were running from my mouth and nose. I was crying. And on the other end, they were laughing and making fun of me.

38. I had become very withdrawn and would always sit in one spot. After a while, they took me in for questioning again one day and asked me to identify what skills I had, what languages I spoke and what year I attended university. I answered all of these questions in writing. Then they ordered me to leave. I imagined that they would surely kill me. Then I thought of my sister and mother. I wondered what would happen to them if they went ahead and executed me.

39. The next day they called me and said "with all your belongings." The phrase "with all your belongings" was a very troubling one. It was usually used in connection with inmates who were going to be executed. My cellmates wanted to hand something to me, but I could not take it. My hands were shaking. I wanted to ask them: "Do you think they are going to kill me?" I then gave them all of my mementos, including some of my writings, and exited the room.

40. They took me to an office and asked me to sign a paper. I signed it. In prison, it was customary to sign paperwork without reading it. So, I signed it without reading it first.

41. I had sewn a pretty dress for myself in prison. I thought to myself that if they wanted to hang me, it might as well be in that dress. I changed into the dress as fast as I could.

My Release

42. This procedure took about forty to forty-five minutes. Then put me inside a car. They took me to the second moat of the prison.[8] The second moat was essentially the open desert. They forced me out of the car and told me not to look back. They told me to keep walking forward until I reached a metal gate, which would open for me. They told me I could look back after I had exited the gate. I asked them where I was to go after that. They said, "After that is freedom. You can go wherever you want to." I could not believe it. They had not signed for my release, but they told me that the next day I was to appear in court and post bail.

43. It was May 2, 1989. I could not believe it. I thought that my whole family and my friends were waiting for me and had come to greet me. The door opened and I walked out. The iron gate of the prison closed, but no one was there waiting for me. All I could see was empty desert before me. (Gohar Dasht prison is located at the foot of the Karaj mountains.) They had not notified my family. I started walking. I walked for 700 or 800 meters. The first thing I did was to take off my chador and put it in my bag. Then I went and stood next to the road. At that location one could usually find taxis who ferried families to and from the prison. One of them had spotted me from the distance. He

[8] Gohar Dasht is at the foot of the Karaj mountains. The prison is surrounded by two exterior walls. The two parallel walls gave the prison the appearance of a castle. We heard from our families that the prison officials referred to the distance between these two walls as "moats."

stopped in front of me and asked where I was going. I gave the address of my house. He asked if I was in prison. I said yes. He asked if I had money. I said no. He was an extremely gracious individual and decided to take me back home nonetheless. He became extremely distraught when he heard my story. We arrived home. I walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell…

44. I was one of the first prisoners to be freed. In their words, "they had already pulled our teeth." After my release, Khomeini died. When mourning period for Khomeini came to an end, they began releasing the rest of the prisoners. At first, we were given three weeks of temporary leave, which turned into five weeks, and finally became five months (after which we were supposed to go back to prison). They had reached the conclusion that the prisoners that survived the massacre were not dangerous and it was not necessary to kill them. They had already killed the ones whom they had wanted to kill. It had become a burden to continue imprisoning the survivors. They did not want to keep them anymore, and eventually released them under the guise of "temporary releases." A couple of my friends are among those who returned to prison after their leaves of absence, but the prison chief had told them to go and not come back.

45. After that, I would go to the Prosecutor's Office once a week. Each time they would ask what I was doing and where I was going. During the first two or three months after release, I went to the Prosecutor's Office once a week. After that, it was once every two weeks. It was very tiresome. Every week I had to be there at a certain time and answer their questions and deal with them. They would argue and tease me and say things like "Why aren't you married—you must be up to something!" They would claim that everyone who had been released from prison would get married soon thereafter. Why hadn't I done the same? They concentrated on the fact that my situation was different than that of others. One day they kept me there until it was late in the day. My dad came after me and said he would no longer allow me to go back there. But I had no choice but to go, because my bail was the deed to my dad's land.

46. These comings and goings continued for four years, until 1993. During this time, I was banned from traveling and did not have permission to leave the country. I had truly become weary from all the trouble they had caused me. I wanted to leave the country, but they would not issue me a passport. I attempted several times to get one, but they reminded me that I was banned from traveling. When they asked me why I wanted to leave the country, I told them I was weary, and wanted to leave the country for a while and visit friends so I could experience a change in my mood and spirit. Which was true—I really did not want to leave the country for good. I wanted to travel. Yet they threatened me so much that I finally decided to leave the country and never go back.

47. They prevented me from leaving the country on three separate occasions. This meant that they physically removed me from the airplane on three separate occasions. They did this even after they had issued me a passport. I think they had agreed to issue me a passport so they could monitor my activities. They wanted to see who I was meeting up with and what I was doing. During this time, they did not inform me that I was still banned from travel. They physically removed me from the airplane twice in September 1994, and they once told me that I was banned from traveling in the passport inspection section of the airport. I was finally allowed to leave the country legally, however.

The end.

Witness Statement of Mahiar

Name: Mahiar Maki

Place of Birth:

Date of Birth:

Occupation:

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: June 12, 2009

Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

Witnesses:

This statement was prepared pursuant to a telephone interview with Ms. Mahiar. The statement consists of 71 paragraphs and 13 pages. The interview was conducted on June 12, 2009. The statement was approved in Persian by Ms. Mahiar on August 20, 2009.

Witness Statement

My Arrest

1. My name is Mahiar and I was accidently arrested in October 1984. I was walking on the street with my friend when three plainclothes officers jumped out of a vehicle and arrested me. Three men got out of a car, came toward us and separated us from each other. They asked my friend for my first and last name, and then asked me to identify him by first and last name. We knew each other's first names, but not the last names. They became suspicious. The person who was arrested along with me used to work with us in the Tudeh Party, but he was not a party member any longer. It had been some time since he had actually been involved with the Party. We had previously agreed that if we were arrested on the street or raised suspicion, we would claim to be engaged. So when they asked us how we were related to each other, we said we were fiancés. But when they asked us the other's last name and we had no response, they became suspicious and arrested us. Our meeting had not been previously disclosed and no one knew about it.

2. This incident happened in Vanak Square in northern Tehran. My friend and I were not really meeting for political reasons. At the time, I was politically involved despite the fact that our party (Tudeh) had been declared illegal five or six months prior to that. As I previously mentioned, it had been a while since my friend had been active. He had, in fact, turned his back on the Party. I wanted to meet him and let him know that the movement was alive and well. I wanted to bring him back into the fold. I contacted him so I could speak about these issues with him. My friend did not know about my intentions, but I was fully aware of what I was doing. Therefore, when I met up with him I told him that if they stopped us, we should tell them that we were engaged, and if they asked where we were coming from, we should tell them that we were coming from "our" home. Of course, he did not know where "our" home was. I had not thought the details through very well.

3. The officers were wearing ordinary street clothes. Around this time, they had begun arresting many politically active leftists. They especially went after leftist women who did not properly wear the *hijab*,[1] or those who wore pants or clothing that was different or out of the ordinary. Most of these individuals had already gone into hiding and were active in underground cells. My friend wore glasses and a moustache—the typical look of a politically active leftist male. I think it is for these reasons that they targeted us. I do not think they arrested us for "moral" reasons. I was neither holding my friend's hand nor did I have on any makeup. I was also not dressed provocatively.

4. They opened my purse and discovered some banned literature. Then they took my friend toward the vehicle and slapped him around so hard that his glasses flew onto the hood of the car. One of them came toward me and asked what my relationship with my friend was. I said we were engaged. He asked me how I could be his fiancé and not know his last name. I did not have an answer. He ordered me to get in the vehicle. They pushed us into the car from two different sides of the vehicle. They blindfolded us with two dirty

[1] *Hijab* refers to the mandatory veiling of women, either in the form of a *chador* (which covers the whole body) or a head scarf.

and bloodied rags. The officers in the front of the car were armed. They took us away and ordered us not to move. We had no idea where they were taking us.

Transfer to a Temporary Detention Facility

5. When they arrested me, they had no information about me. They did not even know what party I belonged to. They took me to a place that was located near a freeway. I knew this because I could hear the roar of the cars speeding past. After we arrived, they threw me inside a small room the size of a telephone booth.

6. The interrogations began after they registered my name at the detention facility. I was wearing an engagement ring at the time. The first question they asked was about my ring and the name of my actual fiancé. I told them I that I did not have a fiancé. They knew that the person I was arrested with was not my real fiancé. They wanted to know my real fiancé's whereabouts. I cried constantly and insisted that I had done nothing illegal. I begged them to set me free, and told them that my family was extremely worried about me. By pleading and crying, I thought I would be able to convince them that I was not politically active. But it did not work, and part of the reason was that ring. As you know, when an Iranian woman wears a ring, it means she is promised to another man. So they kept pursuing the matter.

7. Then one day, they told me that the ring I was wearing was given to me by my fiancé, who was fighting against the regime in Kurdistan. They also alleged that both he and I were Kurds. About three or four days later, the man who was arrested with me confessed that I was a member of the Tudeh Party. After that, I had no choice but to acknowledge that I was a Tudeh member. They informed me that they knew my husband's name and the location of my residence, and that the man who had been arrested with me had given them the relevant information. I continued to deny the fact that I had a fiancé, but they increased the pressure on me.

8. After my persistent denials, they took me to another part of the detention facility and told me to stay quiet and listen. A little while later, they dragged in my friend. They were cursing him and beating him as he came into the room. He was blindfolded like I was. (I could tell this because I could sneak a peak or two from underneath my blindfold.) I was terrified. They ordered me not to make a noise so that he would not know I was also present in the room. We had still not been transferred to a prison, and were being detained in the temporary detention facility next to the freeway.

9. They asked him how he knew me. He told them. They asked him which party I belonged to. He answered: "Tudeh." They asked him what group he belonged to. He said he was part of the Fedaian (Majority). They asked him why he had met up with me yesterday. He answered: "Nothing, we just wanted to see each other." They then asked him if I was politically active, and he said I was. After that they summoned him out of the room.

10. I noticed that my friend was extremely frightened. I was certain that he was being tortured. My friend was a Kurd, but fortunately he was not a member of a Kurdish political party. Otherwise, they may have accused him of collaborating with Kurdish parties in Kurdistan and likely executed him.

11. They took me to a cell, supplied me with a paper and a pen, and instructed me to write about my past. I asked them what they wanted specifically. The guard asked me to explain why I kept denying that I was a Tudeh Party member. I realized that if I continued to deny this fact, they would probably continue to torture my friend. So I began to write. The writing lasted about two days.

12. But the ring continued to cause great suspicion. They spent a lot of time and effort trying to figure out the identity of my fiancé. Then one day, unexpectedly, they came in and told me they had decided to take me home and deliver me to my parents. I was overjoyed. I thought this was their way of admitting they had made a mistake. But when we reached my residence, they ordered me to stay in the car. An armed officer kept watch from the front seat. I asked them whether they would allow me to go inside. They replied that they wanted to ask my parents several questions first, after which they would allow me to go inside. They came back after a short while and informed me that we were heading back. I asked them what had happened, and reminded them that they were supposed to set me free. They told me I was a prisoner and drove me to Evin Prison.

Interrogations at Evin

13. At Evin, they first took me in for questioning. They asked me why I had been arrested and why I had been transferred there. Then they took me to the newly built solitary confinement cells in the sanitarium.

14. The interrogations were fairly uneventful during the first two weeks. They usually woke me up around 4:30 to 5:00 in the morning, and began questioning after breakfast. On busy days, I stayed there from morning until evening. Sometimes they returned me to my cell after everyone had left, without having asked me any questions at all.

15. This lasted for about two weeks. I was never informed of my charges during this time. They simply wanted me to write down everything I knew. After they read my answers, they posed new questions and instructed me to write down the answers again. This process repeated itself over and over. Apparently, they also showed my writings to other individuals whom they interrogated.

16. They had not assigned one interrogator to me. Several people had the responsibility of interrogating me. I do not remember the names of my interrogators. During questioning, I was always blindfolded—I never had a chance to see their faces. Each interrogator had his own style and method of seeking information. Some of them relied on threats, while others were more gentle.

17. After two weeks, they sent me to solitary confinement. They left me there for nine or ten days straight. Before they did that, they told me to spend the time drafting a confession letter. They specifically instructed me to disown the Tudeh Party. I refused. I continued to stay in solitary confinement. I had no idea what would happen to me. After I refused to turn my back on the Tudeh, my interrogator accused me of refusing to cooperate and threatened to make things difficult for me.

18. They sent me back to solitary again. They kept me in solitary confinement for less than two weeks—perhaps for about eight or nine days. I remember this well—I was in solitary during the second week, which was when I was originally scheduled to have a meeting

with one of the leaders of the Tudeh Party. I began to realize that even if I were freed, I would not be able to reestablish contact with the Party again. If we missed one of our meetings, we were supposed to attempt to meet again the week after (at the same time and place). Once we missed our second meeting, the Party leader would reach the conclusion that we had been arrested and we would be cut off in order to guarantee everyone's safety.

19. After the two weeks had passed, I felt both sad and relieved. On the one hand, I was happy that I had resisted naming anyone, and that no one had been sent to prison on my account. On the other, I was saddened by the prospect of having been permanently cut off from the Party.

20. Not long after that, they summoned me for interrogation again. It was early morning. They came to my cell and told me to prepare myself for interrogation. It was still dark. Something did not feel right. I thought that perhaps they had discovered some new information. When I went in for questioning, my interrogator asked me again to identify my fiancé. Again, I told them that I did not have a fiancé.

21. In my life, there was only one man whom I really wanted to marry. His name was Nosrat Darvish. He was later executed. The ring was given to me by him. At the time of my arrest, he was in prison. I did not want him to be identified or connected to me. When they reviewed my file, they somehow realized that I intended to marry someone who was already in prison. When they realized this, they increased the pressure on me.

22. My partner, Nosrat, was very politically active, and had been successful in reviving the organization after its top leadership was arrested. The regime's authorities were thrilled to have finally arrested him. He and I lived together for a while before we decided to get married. The day of our wedding ceremony, he was arrested and our wedding plans fell apart. I waited for him at the wedding reception in a white gown. All the guests were there, along with the individual responsible for marrying us. But our wedding hour came and went and Nosrat never showed up. We waited for a while, but finally all the guests began to leave. They came up to me, gave me a hug and left one by one. Everyone knew what had happened, but no one wanted to say anything.

23. I later found out that a *tavvab*[2] had identified Nosrat on the street and several agents nabbed him right there and took him to prison. I went back to our residence and collected all the Party documents and effects that we had hidden there. I asked my brother to get rid of the rest of our belongings, and told him to notify the landlord that we were no longer interested in staying there. Then I went into hiding. I stayed underground until I was sure that Nosrat would have no idea where I was anymore. I trusted him, but I also knew that anything could happen when one is being tortured. And torture was Nosrat's fate, until he was executed in 1988.

24. Now, back to my interrogation. When the interrogator began questioning me about my fiancé, he did not allow me to sit. Again, he asked who my fiancé was. And again, I said I did not have a fiancé. Then he turned to me and said: "Isn't your fiancé this God forsaken man, Nosrat?" When he said this to me, my legs began to shake and I collapsed. He told me that they knew everything about my life. After that, the interrogator treated me with

[2] A *tavvab* is anyone who has engaged in the act of *tawbih*, or penitence. It usually refers to "reformed" political prisoners who agreed to cooperate with the regime while serving out their prison sentences.

great disrespect and spoke of many personal matters that were truly embarrassing. As you know, our culture does not look favorably upon a man and a woman who live together outside of marriage. This allowed him and the rest of the interrogators to treat me with immense disrespect and contempt.

25. After our session, the interrogator told me to think things over and agree to cooperate. He said resisting was futile because they already knew everything about me. For several weeks, he kept summoning me back and forth between my cell and the interrogation room. I kept refusing to talk. Sometimes they would hold me in the interrogation room until very late at night. Finally, they sent me back to solitary.

My Initial Trial and Sentencing

26. After a while, it became apparent that I was going to stay in prison for some time. For three months, they continued summoning me for interrogations and sending me back to my solitary cell. (By the time I was released, I had spent thirteen full months in a solitary cell.) I had nothing on me during this time—not even a watch or a pair of glasses. I soon realized that the interrogators had also extracted lots of information about me from other prisoners who knew me. But since I refused to give them the information they were seeking, they continued to keep me in solitary confinement. After about five or six months, they summoned me and told me to prepare for my trial. During this time, I had no access to fresh air, nor was I allowed family visits. Every week they would allow me to take one thirty-minute shower.

27. My trial took place inside Evin. They blindfolded me on the way to court. When I reached the courtroom, they told me to take off my blindfold. I took it off. The room was nice. It had a window that allowed natural light to come in. I could see the green grass of the prison yard.

28. There were about four or five men in the room. There was a person seated across from me behind a desk. Several others were seated across from him. I did not recognize them. After I became familiar with the prison system, I became more familiar with them as prison administrators. I was confronted by Mr. Nayyeri. I did not know who he was at the time. Later, my cellmates informed me that it was Ja'far Nayyeri. I described his features to my cellmates and they confirmed that it was Nayyeri.

29. During my trial, they informed me of thirteen charges. I do not remember all of them at the moment. The first one was membership in the treacherous Tudeh Party. The second was providing funds (in the form of membership fees) to the Tudeh Party. The third was cooperating with the Fedaian (Majority). The fourth was spying for the Soviet Union, and the fifth was working to overthrow the Islamic Republic.

30. Before my arrest, I worked at a factory. I was actually working to mobilize the proletariat *in favor* of the regime. So I was shocked when they accused me of infiltrating the Islamic trade unions and attempting to turn the workers against the regime. After they announced the thirteen charges against me, I was simply dumbfounded. Even if I had wanted to defend myself, however, they did not allow me any time to do so. I was terrified. I thought they would take me straight to the gallows after the trial came to an end. Then I heard one of the men, who was seated in the room, laugh and contemptuously say something about the fact that I was no longer a "girl." He was referring to the fact that I

had lived with Nosrat. When I heard this, I shut down. All I could think about was my impending execution, and the words coming out of that man's mouth. They told me to leave the room. I said practically nothing during the whole trial. Nothing.

31. They sent me back to the solitary cell. They sentenced me fifteen months after my arrest (after I had been transferred to the general ward). I felt terrible. Their behavior and my fear of an impending execution completely shattered me. I was broken. When they realized this, they transferred me from Evin to the *Komiteh-yeh Moshtarak* (Committee).[3]

32. I was in Committee from late March until early June. After that, they returned me to Section 225 at Evin. After thirteen months, they transferred me to the general ward. I had no contact with my family during this entire time. They transferred me to Ward 2 or 3 of Evin. My interrogator came in one day and informed me that I had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment. I could not believe it. I was overjoyed. I notified my cellmates of the good news.

33. In court, I was given a three-year sentence, but the six months I had already spent in prison prior to the sentencing did not count toward the total time of imprisonment. The sentence began from the day the verdict was issued and not from the day of arrest. In fact, it turned out that none of this mattered much, as I was kept in prison until 1990.

More Interrogations During the Spring of 1988

34. After spending three-and-a-half-years in prison, they took me in for interrogation again. It was March 1988. During interrogation, they informed me that my sentence had ended, but told me that if I wished to be released I had to give a television interview and write a letter of repentance. I had to condemn both my party and its ideology. I was in the sanatorium, but this time they kept me in the women's ward. I was blindfolded. I think there were one or two interrogators present.

35. One of the interrogators asked: "When were you arrested?" I replied, "1984." They asked me, "When did your sentence end?" I replied that I had a three-year sentence and it had come to an end. He said, "Ok, but you know what the precondition for your release is?" I replied that I did not know. He said, "The precondition is that you must give a television interview and write a letter of repentance. Will you do that?" I said, "No." He replied, "Well, write that down." After three-and-a-half years, there was not any point in debating and arguing. I did not have any significant information. There was no need to debate. He did not really want any information from me. So I wrote that I would not accept the precondition. He then said: "Well then, stay in prison until you rot."

36. From there, they took me to a solitary cell. It was customary to send prisoners to solitary confinement before their sentences ended in order to put pressure on them and force them to repent. I was in solitary confinement for two or three months. I went through this process of interrogation three or four more times. Each time, they asked me to give an interview and write a letter of repentance. Once they were certain that I would not give an interview or write a letter, they took me to the ward of the *mellikesh*. "*Mellikesh*" is a

[3] *Komiteh-yeh Moshtarak*, or "Committee," refers to an infamous detention facility used by the Shah's security and intelligence forces to detain, interrogate and torture political prisoners. After the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic renamed it the "Towhid detention facility," but continued to use the facility as a place to detain and interrogate many of its political opponents.

term used by the prisoners. It meant that that your sentence had ended, but you continued to endure imprisonment on behalf of the nation. At the time, there were maybe forty *mellikesh* in our ward. But our population was steadily increasing. In 1990, when I was released, our numbers had reached fifty-four. All of them were leftists. There were also some Mojahed among the *mellikesh* in Evin prison, but I do not know how many. The door of the *mellikesh* ward was always closed. There were fifteen or twenty prisoners in each room. The guards opened the door when we wanted to go to the washroom. They then locked the doors again. The situation was like this until we were released. This ward was in located front of the asylum.

37. In 1988, the ward was emptied and we were transferred again. All the *mellikesh* prisoners were put inside one ward that contained individual rooms. I was detained with Tudeh and leftist *mellikesh* in this ward.

Prison Lock-Down

38. It was the summer of 1988 when the prison authorities came in and informed us that we would no longer receive newspapers. Before then, we collected articles that seemed interesting. Whenever they raided our cells, they used to take away our articles. But this time they came and said that we should throw out any newspapers we have. This happened around the same time that the regime had launched Operation *Mersad* against the Mojahedin. The Mojahedin prisoners were very excited, and thought this was a sign that the movement was gaining strength. They said that Khomeini had accepted the cease-fire and the regime was on the verge of collapse. We heard the news of the cease-fire through the prison speakers. Khomeini had famously commented that signing the cease-fire was like drinking "bitter poison."

39. We thought we were entering a period of calm. Our mood had improved. We thought things would change for the better. That was not to be the case, however.

40. The same day they cancelled our visitation rights and took away the newspapers, they also transferred the Mojahedin prisoners out of our rooms. The ward had several rooms and each room had its own separate door. The first room was ours. In the upper floor ward, Mojahed and leftist prisoners were detained together. This ward had a hallway into which the doors opened. Those who were housed in the second-story room were serving out their sentences, and those of us who stayed in the lower-level room had already served our sentences. The doors to our rooms were closed and we were *mellikesh*. That day, they called the Mojahed prisoners from all the rooms. Only the leftists remained. We heard this news via Morse code. Each room shared a wall with another room and we used to send Morse messages to each other.

41. They also summoned Mojahedin *mellikesh* members. Their names were announced and their belongings were taken away. I do not exactly remember how many Mojaheds were taken from the *mellikesh* ward, but I am sure that there were at least six or seven of them.

42. All our visitation rights had been cut off. I believe that our visitation rights had already been cancelled before the Operation *Mersad* and Khomeini's announcement of the cease-fire. We thought they would soon resume, however, and so we began preparing for them. Visitations usually began at 8 a.m. on a predetermined day. When that day arrived and we

told them that we were looking forward to our family's visits, they instead informed us that we were not to have any visitors.

43. The guards told us that the interrogators had instructed them not to allow any more visits. We thought that this was because of Operation *Mersad*. The prison atmosphere was suddenly changing again. An atmosphere of fear had taken over everyone.

44. One day, one of the female guards responsible for opening and closing the door to our ward made a comment regarding how she could no longer endure looking at the dead bodies. We were generally on high alert during that time, and paid very close attention to everything that was happening in our ward so we could determine what was going on on the outside. When the female guard made this comment, we became extremely worried. We had heard nothing from the Mojahedin prisoners in a while. We began to realize that they had probably been killed. They had left the ward and gone to their solitary cells with spirits high. They thought that Rajavi would arrive in Tehran and they would all be freed. I do not doubt the fact that at least some of the Mojahedin even went to the gallows elated.

45. Next, it was our turn.

The Leftists are Summoned

46. As I mentioned previously, we did not have Mojahed prisoners in our rooms anymore. When they came for us, they called the names of several people. In total, they summoned seventeen or eighteen people. I think this happened three or four weeks after Mojahedin prisoners were taken away. Those who were taken away did not have high-profile positions in their respective parties (since most high-profile members were already serving much longer sentences). The prisoners they summoned were often young, and their sentences were usually two years or less. I think most were between 22 and 30 years of age. In the *mellikesh* ward, they also summoned a 60-year-old woman. I do not think they had any criteria for summoning people from the first room. They did not even announce their names alphabetically. Only two Tudeh members were called, and the rest were from various other leftist groups. A female guard entered our room, called out the names of several prisoners, and told them to get ready for court. There was no list.

47. We did not hear anything about those leftists who were summoned away, until one night at 12 midnight we heard footsteps and noticed several prisoners entering our ward. Several days prior to this, they had emptied one full room and sent the prisoners to other rooms. They then transferred another group of new prisoners to that empty room. They were there for several days. We did not have any information about them. There was no way for us to see them. My room was beside their room. I sat beside the wall and sent the Morse code for the Tudeh party. A friend of mine, who was a Tudeh member, answered back. I asked what was happening. She said: "We all accepted that we are Muslim and we agreed to write against our former beliefs." I thought I had misunderstood her. I asked her to repeat her answer. Again she tapped: "We all accepted that we are Muslim and we agreed to write against our beliefs. We accepted to pray and become Muslim." I started laughing so hard that my roommates thought I had some good news for them. I told everyone in my room that the rest of the prisoners had agreed to become Muslim and pray. When I think about it now, I know that I reacted that way because I was truly shocked. The thought of all those strong-willed prisoners capitulating after they had

resisted for all these years was unbelievable. I wondered about the torture they must have endured. Later on, other prisoners recounted similar stories and experiences regarding what had happened to them. They had been taken to court and asked if they were Muslim, and if they prayed. Those who resisted prayer were whipped until they agreed to pray.

48. The fact that these prisoners had not been able to endure the regime's pressure generated great fear and anxiety among us. We wondered why these prisoners, who had endured torture for all these years, gave in to the pressure this time around. Then one early morning, several guards came into our room. They summoned me and four others from the other room. They transferred us to solitary cells. Unlike the first group of leftist prisoners that was summoned, it was clear why they called our names. The second and third groups who were taken away belonged to the Tudeh Party and the Fedaian (Majority). I think the reason was that our groups were more organized and united the prison. I believe they summoned us a couple of weeks after they took the first group away. Some of the individuals who were summoned had gone on hunger strikes for fourteen to fifteen straight days. They were taken to solitary cells after they broke fast.

My "Retrial" Before the Death Commission

49. My eyes were closed on the way to court. The court was a five-minute car ride and a five-minute walk away from the prison. The retrial took place inside the prison. There were three people there from the upper ward. I was the only one there from the lower ward. All were Fedaian (Majority) except for me. I think I was the first person who was taken into court. I was told to take off my blindfold inside the courtroom. There were four people there, including the head of Evin prison. I sat in front of the head judge of the court, Nayyeri. Seated beside him were Mojtaba Halvai and several others. I remember the others' faces very well, but I do not remember their names.

50. They were all sitting behind a table. Nayyeri asked: "Ms. Mahiar, what are you accused of?" I said: "I am a member of Tudeh Party." He asked: "Are you still a member?" I remember this part of the questioning very well. I said: "I have been in prison during the past five years and have had no connection with them. I don't know what their position on current issues is. For this reason, I cannot say whether I am or am not a member." He said: "She is still a Tudeh supporter. Are you a Muslim?" I responded: "This information is personal." He again asked: "Do you pray?" I responded: "This information is also personal." He then asked: "What about your father and mother?" I said: "My mother and father are Shi'a and I was born in a Shi'a family." He said: "She does not pray. She is a *murtad.*[4]" He added: "[Particular verses] of the Quran state that an apostate man must be executed. An apostate woman must be whipped until she accepts to say that she is a Muslim or dies. Take her out, brother." The guard came and took the corner of my chador as though he was touching something dirty. They blindfolded me and led me out. The court session felt like a year to me, even though I do not think it lasted more than four or five minutes.

The Whippings Begin…

51. The guard escorted me to a solitary cell. As soon as I entered the cell, it was time for afternoon prayer. The solitary cell was in the sanatorium. He asked me if I was going to pray. I said no. He directed me to a wooden chair and ordered me to lie down. I did. He

[4] A *murtad* is an apostate.

began reciting the call to prayer. Then he began whipping me as he recited verses of the Quran related to treatment of apostate women. Around 4 p.m. or 5 p.m., the guard came back and asked if I would pray again. Again, I said no. And again, he beat me. I had seen him beating others. There was blood streaming from the bodies of some of these women. Others made horrifying sounds. Eighteen days had passed from the day the first group of leftist women had been summoned. They even beat some of the older women who refused to pray.

52. When they whipped us, they spread us out on a wooden bed, but they did not tie us to it. During the earlier rounds, men were charged with whipping us. Later, women guards did the whipping. They beat us five times a day. They summoned us during prayer hours: at 12 a.m., 4 a.m., 2 p.m., and 4 p.m. The last round was sometime in the evening. These intervals did not allow me any time to sleep. Each round included five lashes. In total, we received twenty-five lashes a day.

53. There were two prisoners who managed to resist for twenty-four days. The rest gave up. But these two people endured until the very end. They also went on a hunger strike. I, too, decided to go on a hunger strike. I did not, however, go on an indefinite strike, and I still consumed water. They beat me for five days straight. On the sixth day, I told them that I had begun menstruating.[5] After that, they no longer whipped me. Instead, they gave me three days of rest.

54. By the time my menstruating ended, the whippings also came to an end. I remember one day, the prison warden came to my cell and asked why my food was still sitting behind the door. I said: “Well, you know the story yourself.” He replied, “No we don’t. Why haven’t you eaten your food?” I said, “Because your colleagues are whipping us, and for this reason I am on a hunger strike.” He replied, “Eat.” I said, “What do you mean eat?” He replied, “I mean you will not be whipped anymore.” I asked, “What do you mean? They were beating us until now. What has happened that it has stopped?” He replied, “They no longer whip. It is over.”

After the Massacre

55. The whippings stopped approximately three months after the massacre came to an end. They took me back to my room on the first floor where *mellikesh* prisoners were being detained. We were welcomed back into the ward as heroes because of the resistance we put up.

56. After one week, the family visitations resumed. Until then, we did not fully know what had happened inside the prisons. We knew something horrible had gone on, but we did not know the true nature and extent of it.

57. Many of us were informed by our family members about what had really happened. Some of the parents fainted during visitation when they were informed of their children’s execution. During one of these visits, my father informed me that Nosrat had also been executed.

58. They never allowed me to visit Nosrat. After I acknowledged our relationship, I repeatedly asked the authorities to allow me to visit him. I told them that Nosrat and I

[5] Women who are menstruating are considered ritually unclean and may not, therefore, participate in prayer.

lived together for many months and were planning to get married, but they did not allow us to see each other.

59. As far as I know, Nosrat was never informed of his sentence. From 1983 to 1988, he never received a sentence. Regardless, he knew that he was going to be executed.

60. After three months, they took those of us who were *mellikesh* in for interrogation again. (Of course, we never again saw any of the *mellikesh* Mojahed members of our ward. I believe they were all executed without exception.) They ordered us to write repentance letters. I remember one of them saying: "Don't be a fool. You witnessed the fate of those who acted foolishly." They repeatedly threatened us so we would write the letters. Some of them even admitted to killing the prisoners, and expressed their pride at having participated in their deaths.

61. These interrogations were very different from the previous ones. They told us to pack our belongings. Prisoners housed in the ward above us thought that they were going to execute us. Many of us thought this as well. We were moved from one place to another. In total, there were fifty-four of us and all were *mellikesh*. In their view, those of us who had served out our sentences and continued to resist provided inspiration and support to those who were still serving their sentences.

62. Finally, they transferred our group to Gohar Dasht prison. Most of the prisoners had already been executed there. I remember seeing a pile of prisoners' exercise clothes from the windows in the hallway. I believe that they actually wanted us to see that horrific scene so we would ultimately break and agree to write our repentance letters.

63. We were at Gohar Dasht for about a week. The first night, someone came in and wrote down the names of twenty people who were situated close to the door. I was one of them. They summoned us. It was around 10 p.m. We thought they were going to execute us. We hugged each other and said goodbye. We were all quiet. They took us one by one into a room.

64. There was a man sitting there. I did not see anyone else there because I was blindfolded. I could hear only the voice of one person. He asked, "When did you get here?" I replied, "Today." He asked, "What is your name?" I said, "Mahiar." He asked, "What is your sentence?" I said, "I was a member of the Tudeh Party." He asked, "How many years have you been in prison?" I said, "Five." He asked, "Do you know why they have brought you here?" I said, "No, I don't know." He said, "Will you write a letter of repentance against the traitorous Tudeh Party?" I said, "No." He said, "I will put you in a solitary cell until you rot." This was, of course, good news given that I expected to be executed.

65. Fortunately, everyone else had also resisted and said they would not write letters of repentance. Their threats did not work. After about a week of solitary confinement, they eventually transferred us back to Evin. When the prisoners on the second floor found out that we returned safely, they realized that the executions had finally come to an end.

66. After a while, they transferred us to an ordinary ward full of non-political prisoners. They continued to pressure us into writing letters of repentance. They called my family, and tried to get them to persuade me to write a letter. I urged my family not to put me under

any pressure and to respect my decision. The prison authorities put pressure on all of the prisoners' families. They even asked my family to come and talk to me several times.

67. Finally, my brother, sister, nephew, mother and father came for a visit. When they came, the guard came and said, "Your family has come for you. Get up and leave." They did not allow me to take my belongings with me. They asked me to report back to prison in one week. When I went home, I found out that my other friends had refused to go back to prison. I, too, decided not to report back. But my family had posted bail, and I still had not received my release order.

68. Up until around February 11, 1990, I suspected that my phone was being tapped and they were monitoring my activities. Finally, I went back to prison and requested that they return my personal belongings. They told me that they would not return them until I signed my repentance letter. I refused. My sister began to cry. They were going to send me back to solitary, so I decided to write that I no longer believed in the Tudeh Party and I would not engage in political activities. After I agreed to do this, I found out that many of my friends had continued to resist without any repercussions. I regretted my action. They wanted to release us, but they also wanted to get something in return so they could feel that their efforts were not in vain. For them, anything we wrote was a kind of victory.

69. I was finally released in August 1990. Many of those who refused to write or sign anything continued to be monitored even after their release from prison. They left me alone because I did not get involved in any political activities.

70. After about two years, I attempted to exit the country legally. I was able to get a passport, but at the border the guards told me that I had been banned from exiting the country. My name was apparently on a list of individuals barred from leaving the country. They suggested that I talk to the Prosecutor's Office regarding my traveling restrictions, and confiscated my passport. I went to the Prosecutor's Office and asked why I had been barred from leaving the country. They told me that I had been short-listed because of my history of political activity.

71. Finally, they issued me a passport after two years and I was able to leave the country legally.

Witness Statement of Shokoufeh Sakhi

Name: Shokoufeh Sakhi

Place of Birth: Tehran / Iran

Date of Birth: May 16, 1964

Occupation: Graduate Student

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: September 9, 2009

Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

Witnesses:

This statement was prepared pursuant to an in-person interview with Ms. Shokoufeh Sakhi. The statement consists of 54 paragraphs and 17 pages. The interview was conducted on September 9, 2009. The statement was approved by Ms. Sakhi on November 4, 2009.

Witness Statement

My Arrest and Initial Trial

1. My name is Shokoufeh Sakhi. I was arrested on August 12, 1982 as a supporter of Razmandegan (M.L.),[1] a leftist group. I was a student at that time. My brother and his wife had been arrested five days prior to my arrest on August 7. My husband had been arrested a few months before on February 1982.

2. I was arrested by the security forces linked to the *Komiteh-eh Moshtarak* [2] (or Committee). The Committee detention facility was then located on Naser Khosrow Street and was under the jurisdiction of the Revolutionary Guards. Because there were too many prisoners and not enough solitary cells, I spent the first two weeks in the corridor blindfolded. As far as I know, most of the prisoners there were leftists, with a small number of royalists (including those who had been arrested in connection with the Nojeh coup[3] plot) among them. After the first two weeks, I was put in a cell with five or six other prisoners.

3. My trial was conducted at the Committee detention facility in October or November of 1982. I was blindfolded when I entered the room. After I entered, I was told to remove my blindfold after I sat down. The room was small and had a desk. Judge Mobasheri was sitting behind the desk, and my interrogator stood behind me. There were a couple of other men in the room who constantly harassed me during the course of the trial and tried to convince Mobasheri to issue a severe sentence. I had not anticipated a trial at that time. Before being summoned, my interrogator had told me that I was simply going to make a pretrial court appearance. On the way back to my cell, however, my interrogator revealed that I was actually tried.

4. Mobasheri read the indictment and all the counts, which included: financial contribution to several leftist groups, supporting and membership in several leftist groups, participation in a march against the regime, distribution of flyers and party propaganda, and non-cooperation with the authorities (i.e., obstruction of justice). I rejected all of these charges and defended myself. I argued that all of my activities with these groups were legal prior to Khomeini's decrees, and that it did not make sense to accuse a high school student of committing so many "illegal" acts simply because she had become politically active. Mobasheri also

[1] This was a Marxist-Leninist group that distinguished itself from the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party, on the one hand, and the pro-guerilla resistance Fedaian, on the other. Razmandegan was firmly committed to the importance of understanding (and applying) Marxist-Leninist theory within the context of grass-roots organizing.

[2] *Komiteh-yeh Moshtarak*, or "Committee," refers to an infamous detention facility used by the Shah's security and intelligence forces to detain, interrogate and torture political prisoners. After the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic renamed it the "Towhid detention facility," but continued to use the facility as a place to detain and interrogate many of its political opponents.

[3] The Nojeh plot, which took place on July 11, 1980, was a failed attempt by pro-royalist military servicemen to overthrow the newly established Islamic Republic.

asked about my marriage, at which point I responded that my personal life was not their concern and had nothing to do with my political charges. He asked about my religion. I told him I was not religious. He asked about my family's beliefs, and I said they were Shi'as. Finally, Mobasheri asked if I was prepared to repent. I replied that I had not committed any crime, so there was no need to repent. The whole trial lasted no more than a few minutes. In November or December of that year, I was transferred to Evin. At first, they issued a sentence of life imprisonment (along with lashes for being an apostate), but my sentence was later reduced to five years.

5. I would spend the next several years in all three of Tehran's major prisons. I was first transferred to Evin. Subsequently I was transferred from Evin to Qezel Hesar and then to Gohar Dasht prison.

Transfer to Evin after Serving My Sentence

6. In the summer of 1987, my prison term ended in Gohar Dasht. Once again, I was transferred—with two Mojaheds whose prison terms had also ended—to Evin prison. We spent some time in the solitary confinement cells of Section 209, and later in the solitary cells in Section 325.

7. All three of us cellmates were retried in another trial. At that time, whenever an individual's sentence was up, she would be summoned to court again. I was blindfolded. When I entered the court, I was asked to remove my blindfold. Judge Mobasheri reviewed my file again. He then asked me whether I was ready to accept the conditions of my release, which included conducting a videotaped interview, submitting a letter of repentance, and denouncing my former activities and the political party with which I was affiliated. I did not accept these conditions, and he announced that I would not be freed until I had done so. He sent me back to solitary confinement in Section 325.

8. I spent some time in Section 325 before I was eventually transferred, along with my two other cellmates, to solitary cells located in Ward 1 of the sanatorium. The sanatorium is a three-story building with several hundred solitary cells. The first floor, which was called Ward 1, was reserved for women, and the other two floors were occupied by male prisoners. I do not remember exactly how long I was detained there, but I do remember that they transferred me from one cell to another several times. The weather had turned cold. They only gave us three thin blankets, which we could use both as covers and mattresses. The cell's cold cement floor was covered by a tattered and damp carpet. The three of us placed two of the blankets underneath, and used the third as a cover for all of us. In reality, it was our body heat that kept us warm throughout the night. We took turns switching positions, just like those penguins that constantly change positions in the South Pole so the ones who are originally on the outside also have a huddle up in the center of the group and keep warm.

Prison Life in an Evin *Mellikesh* Ward

9. I think it must have been late autumn or early winter of 1987 when we were transferred from the cells in the sanatorium to the closed-door rooms in Ward 1 of the rehabilitation[4] building. The rehabilitation building was previously occupied by male prisoners. However, at the time that I was transferred there, they had allocated Wards 1, 2, and 3 to female detainees, while Wards 4, 5, and 6 still housed male prisoners. Ward 1 consisted of six closed-door rooms. This meant that the prisoners who were detained in the six-cell ward did not have regular any access to the hallway, toilet and shower located on that floor. Any form of talking or communication between the prisoners in this ward was prohibited. Female prisoners who had served out their sentences but were unwilling to accept the regime's conditions for release (i.e., conducting videotaped interviews, or writing repentance letters) were detained in three rooms: Room 1, Room 2, and Room 6. These prisoners were generally referred to as *mellikesh*.[5] I lived in Room 1, with anywhere from twenty to thirty other inmates. Ward 2 housed a portion of the Mojahed and leftist *tavvab*[6] prisoners, who had decided to cooperate with prison authorities, prisoners who simply regretted their former activities and were close to finishing their sentences, or any other prisoners whom the authorities decided to separate out. Uncompromising[7] Mojahed and leftist prisoners who had not yet finished serving their sentences were detained in Ward 3 of the rehabilitation building. As such, there were no *tavvabs* among those of us who were *mellikesh* and were detained in Wards 1 and 3. (Of course, it must also be mentioned that from 1984 when those of us who were imprisoned in Qezel Hesar were subjected to the infamous torture methods imposed by Haj Davood,[8] prison authorities stopped housing us with *tavvabs* and officially accepted us as legitimate political prisoners opposed to the Islamic Republic). In addition, we mainly dealt with female prison guards.

10. During this time the prisoners took nothing for granted. Every once in a while they allowed those of us who were detained in closed-door rooms access to fresh air for about an hour. We used this time to exercise, take walks, and gather anything we could—from small rocks to coins (or even the pits of fruits)—so we could make handicrafts. For example, I would inconspicuously gather onion peels, grass, or even petals of flowers every time I was sent for interrogations or visitation, extract the colors, and secretly sneak them out to my friend who was a painter. We also read books. Most of the books that we had brought over from

[4] In Persian, the building is referred to as the *Amoozesh-gah* (literally, a 'teaching institution' or 'academy').

[5] *Mellikesh* is a term used by the prisoners to identify prisoners whose sentences had ended, but continued to endure imprisonment because they were uncompromising in their ideological or political views, or refused to accept the prison authorities' preconditions for release. Mellikesh were also referred to as *Azadi-ha*.

[6] A *tavvab* is anyone who has engaged in the act of *tawbih*, or penitence. It usually refers to "reformed" political prisoners who agreed to cooperate with the regime while serving out their prison sentences.

[7] These prisoners were often referred to as *sarmo'zeh*.

[8] Haj Davood was the infamous head of Qezel Hesar prison, located in the Tehran metropolitan area. He was known to institute various experimental torture techniques in Qezel Hesar prison, which focused (among other things) on sensory deprivation. By November 1986, Qezel Hesar prison was emptied of its political prisoners, who were transferred to Evin and Gohar Dasht.

Qezel Hesar to Evin had already been confiscated. Nonetheless, we used different methods to gather prohibited books, copy the contents of the books by hand (in very small handwriting), prepare several manuscripts in small notebooks, and distribute them in different rooms so everyone could read them. If we were caught doing these things, we were severely punished.

11. Since 1983, the leftist women in Evin and Ghezel Hesar prisons started to adopt a certain form of political resistance. Initially a group of us in early 1983 questioned the prisoners participating or giving audience to the degrading ceremonies of tortured confessions and public denunciations often put on by prison administrators. We decided to resist this tradition and refuse to become a public spectator during such ceremonies, which often took place inside Evin's huge amphitheater. At the same time, we explicitly refused to participate in mass prayer ceremonies, which at that time were conducted two nights a week. I say "explicitly" because before this, prisoners who were not really *tavvab* but did not wish to anger prison authorities would often avoid participating in these ceremonies by pretending to be sick. In addition, we thought it was ridiculous that those whose sentences were finished or had been acquitted but not released (because they had not agreed to denounce their past or political affiliation, or pledged loyalty to the regime), were asked to sign a paper indicating they approved of their continued imprisonment until they could prove that they had truly repented. In 1984 we decided to refuse signing such papers. Over time, this line of resistance evolved into a refusal to respond to any ideological or political questions. The goal was to take back our identity as political prisoners and force the prison to recognize us as such. By 1988, we had achieved our goal.

12. Of course, we were continuously intimidated, and there was always the possibility of being beaten. Regardless, most of us chose to answer questions such as "Are you a Muslim or not?" or "Do you accept the Islamic Republic or not?" with "We refuse to answer." We maintained that these questions concerned our personal opinions and we choose not to answer them. We were repeatedly asked the same question, since the interrogations were ongoing and we were often taken in for questioning. They asked us about our charges, religious beliefs, court orders, and whether or not we would provide them with written recantations. Beatings took place, but not as an ordinary course of business. The prisoners were sent to solitary confinement under various pretexts, but the "coffin" or "doomsday" torture tactics used in Qezel Hesar were no longer used. These years were much easier on us than the early 1980s, even though the fact that we were generally kept separate from the rest of the inmates and housed in closed-door rooms amounted to a different kind of psychological torture.

13. In 1987, we were taken to a building adjacent to the sanatorium (which was under the authority of the Ministry of Intelligence) on several occasions. Most of the interrogations that took place there targeted our political and ideological beliefs. For example, they asked us to share our views about the Soviet Union, Khomeini

and the concept of the *Velayat-e Faqih*,[9] Khomeini's letter to Gorbachev, the government's economic plans, or the war with Iraq. They asked these questions in the form of a written questionnaire.

14. We generally refrained from answering these types of questions. We claimed that these types of questions infringed on our personal beliefs and principles, and as political prisoners we were not obligated to answer them. Of course, some of the inmates chose to answer the questions, but we stuck to our plans. All these questions were compiled in booklet form. We were instructed to sit in the corridor on lecture-type chairs and answer the questions. Whenever we refrained from answering, they insulted and intimidated us.

15. Once I was summoned to the interrogation room around sunset. The interrogation took place in Section 209. I was surprised that they had summoned me for interrogation at that specific time and place. The interrogator asked me if I still remained firm on my political beliefs. I told him that I would not answer the question. I cannot recall the exact questions he asked me, but I do remember that he ridiculed the fact that my father was an army officer and alleged that my bold answers had something to do with the fact that I was raised an "army brat." (My father was in the army during the Shah's regime). Then he threatened, said I would be sent to the torture chamber again, and warned that I would be retried.

16. In early 1988, those of us who were *mellikesh* were summoned for interrogation yet again. This time, we were photographed and fingerprinted before being interrogated. We were asked the same questions regarding our belief in Islam, loyalty to the regime, and respect toward the Supreme Leader. The interrogator told us not to answer based on fear. He wanted us to answer the questions honestly, and reiterated that no duress would be involved. The interrogations were short and conducted orally. Of course, the interrogator had a paper and a pen and recorded our answers. The environment was neither harsh nor terrifying. Again, the interrogator said, "Don't worry, just answer. If you don't agree, say I don't agree. We are just classifying [the prisoners]. These questions will not affect your case one way or the other."

17. In 1986-87, when the regime's pressure on political prisoners somewhat decreased and conditions relaxed a bit, the Mojahed inmates began conducting group exercises. These group exercises were conducted both in Evin and in Gohar Dasht. This was very surprising for us. Until then, those who had been arrested for allegedly having links with the Mojahedin (even the uncompromising ones) were generally very cautious. For instance, when asked by prison authorities to state their affiliation, they never referred to themselves as members or supporters of the "Mojahedin," preferring instead to use the derogatory term imposed on

[9] *Velayat-e Faqih* means 'guardianship of the jurist' in Persian. It refers to the institution of the Supreme Leader in Iran, which concentrates political, judicial and military power in the hands of a high-ranking member of the clerical establishment.

them by the regime: "Monafeqin."[10] When they were asked by the guards what their charge/crime was, they would say: "Monafeqin [hypocrites]." Sometime during 1986-87, however, they began showing signs of change. Some of them boldly introduced themselves as "Mojahedin" or *Sazeman*[11], while others did so with much hesitation and trepidation. Use of the term "*Sazeman*" was tactical, since it did not require the inmates to use either "Mojahedin" or "Monafeqin" as a way to identify themselves. Many preferred this method, since they preferred to limit the possibility of confrontation with prison guards and interrogators. This change of attitude among the Mojahedin members was very obvious until the day before the prison went into high alert and lock-down mode.

Evin Goes into Lock-Down

18. On July 18, 1988, the regime accepted the United Nations cease-fire with Iraq. The news was announced from the loudspeakers in the prison. A few days later, on July 26 (a Tuesday), we heard announcements coming through the loudspeakers which bragged about the regime's victory over the *Monafeqin*. Later that day, we met with our families. Our families confirmed that the cease-fire agreement had been signed, and believed that we would soon be pardoned and released.

19. Friday came, and the Friday prayer was broadcast through the prison's loudspeakers. It was July 29. I remember this well—there was a television series that immediately followed the Friday prayer which we liked to watch. This coincided with the time allotted to us to wash our dishes and use the facilities. As soon as we went out to wash up, a guard came and took away our television set without providing any explanation. They also took our ration of state-run newspapers, cut off all family visits and communication with the outside world, and forbid anyone from going to the prison clinic.

20. The next day, the guard knocked at the door and asked us to put on our *chadors*. A high-ranking official wanted to come in for a visit. I believe he was referring to Seyyed Hossein Mortazavi, the head of Evin prison. Mortazavi and several prison guards entered and asked us to indentify ourselves and reveal our charges. This was not new to us as we were asked these types of questions on an almost daily basis. The Mojahedin inmates sat on the right side of the room, and we occupied the left side. On that day, all the Mojahedin inmates introduced themselves as either "Mojahed" or "*Sazeman*." At the end of the session, Mortazavi turned to us and with derision in his voice said, "The period of fun and relaxation is over. We are going back to 1981."[12] Unlike the male prisoners who interpreted the end of the war and the Mojahedin's military incursion from Iraq as signs that the regime

[10] *Monafeqin* is the derogatory term used by regime to refer to the Mojahedin. It means 'hypocrites' in Persian.
[11] *Sazeman* means 'organization' in Persian. Mojahedin members often referred to themselves as members of the *Sazeman*.
[12] In the early 1980s, particularly 1981, the regime conducted a mass wave of executions targeting political prisoners and opposition members. Most of those executed were Mojahedin.

was weakening, prison conditions were about to improve, and that they would soon be released after going before the amnesty committee,[13] there was little doubt in our minds that the "good times" had come to an end and we were about to enter a very difficult period.

21. After Mortazavi made his comment, the Mojahed inmates were ordered to exit the room. Two leftist inmates were also taken at random. They ordered us to gather their belongings and place them outside the cell. I believe this incident took place on July 30. I cannot now remember whether they transferred the Mojahedin inmates to the room next door or to another location. I think they were first moved to the empty room adjacent to ours. The door to our room was closed and we could not see what was going on. We could only hear sounds.

22. Subsequent to this incident, we were completely cut off from the outside world. We did not receive any newspapers, or gain access to the medical clinic. There were no more family visits. We could not communicate with any of the prisoners in the other rooms to find out what was happening to them. Prison conditions became suffocating. Eventually, we managed to make contact with inmates on the upper floors using Morse code. We found out that their televisions sets had also been removed and their Mojahedin cellmates had been summoned away as well.

23. After some time, we realized that the Mojahedin prisoners who were being kept in the adjacent room were being summoned out and returned to the room after several hours. We guessed that they were being taken in for interrogations. A little later, however, we noticed that there were no more sounds coming from the adjacent room. A few days later, we determined that they had transferred all the Mojahedin prisoners to solitary cells in the sanatorium, because none of them ever returned. Every once in a while, we caught glimpses through the small gap between the door and the frame and saw black-clad prisoners with blindfolds being shuffled around in groups. These moments were fleeting—there was no opportunity to talk to them or make contact. The prisoners remained silent. I do not think they had any indication as to what was going on.

24. The room next to ours (Room 2) was being used as a transit room. After removing the first group of Mojahedin prisoners from the adjacent room, they brought in another Mojahedin group. One of the Mojahedin inmates, who had moved away from the Organization and accepted leftist ideology, contacted me and another one of my cellmates via Morse code. She tapped: "A special council is retrying all of those arrested in relation to the Mojahedin … They are going to kill us all … What should I do?" We advised her, via Morse, to acknowledge that she no longer believed in the Mojahedin and is not a member of the Organization. In response, she informed us that it was not as simple as whether or not one is a Mojahed. She said they required the prisoners to prove their commitment by cooperating with the regime, and said she was not willing to cooperate. Her last words were: "[I]t's

[13] Some prison authorities throughout the country deceptively told prisoners that the Death Commissions they would face were actually amnesty commissions sent to determine which prisoners should be freed.

a pity that I'm going under for what I no longer believe." Right at that moment, the door opened and the communication came to an abrupt end. They took all of them. We had no idea what was going on at that time. We still did not really know what was going on. She never mentioned anything about a Death Commission.

25. Not too long after that, we witnessed one of the female guards running toward the bathroom at the end of the hallway. She was holding on to her stomach and throwing up. An older female guard comes to her aid. She tells the older guard that she can no longer bear it. The older guard scolds her and says: "Haven't you heard [the warden] say that *everyone* has to be present? Everyone must participate." Then one of the guards realizes that we have been watching the whole thing. She snaps back at us: "What are you looking at? You'll be dangling soon yourself!"

The Leftists Are Summoned

26. Once the Mojahedin were dealt with, it was the leftists' turn. I think it was around September 1988. Just like the previous time, they summoned a number of inmates from each room—this time all leftists—to go in for interrogation. Then the prison authorities came for the prisoners' bags and belongings. Three individuals were removed from our room. They took a number of inmates from every room. The largest number of inmates was taken from the third floor. I believe they took prisoners from the third floor in two rounds. Two or three weeks passed before the first group of leftists returned. Up until then, we had no clue as to what was happening to them. After three weeks, they were brought back and placed in the adjacent room (Room 2).

27. For the first time, we heard about the Death Commission from this group (via Morse code, of course). The news was horrifying. They explained that a special commission—which was later dubbed the Death or Inquisition Commission—had come to the prisons. In addition to being asked to identify themselves and explain their charges, they were also asked whether they prayed or considered themselves Muslims. If the inmates responded with a "No" or refused to answer the question altogether, the Death Commission concluded that they were *murtads*[14] and issued the appropriate punishment. According to Shari'a law, the punishment for a female apostate was five sets of lashes within twenty-four hours (corresponding to the five daily prayer sessions), each set containing five lashes. The prisoner would be lashed until she agreed to pray, or died. As such, the prisoners had been systematically lashed until they consented to pray. After they had been forced to acknowledge that they were Muslims, a guard had forced them to perform their obligatory prayers three times a day before her. The prisoners then acknowledged that they were in bad shape and their spirits had been completely crushed.

28. At first, we found it strange that they had transferred this group of leftists to the room adjacent to ours. In the past, they had done everything to prevent us from

[14] A *murtad* is an 'apostate.'

contacting others for information. They were, of course, well aware that we communicated through Morse code. Later on, we realized that they had done this on purpose. They wanted those who had gone before the Death Commission and suffered through the systematic whippings to share their horrific experiences with the rest of us. They wanted us to know what was waiting for us on the other side if we chose to continue resisting.

29. We then asked them whether they had seen the female Mojahedin inmates in the sanatorium's solitary confinement cells. They informed us that the Mojahedin prisoners were no longer in the solitary cells. It was difficult, if not impossible, for us to accept the fact that all of the Mojahedin prisoners had been killed. Ultimately, we found out that they had executed almost all of the female Mojahedin inmates who were *mellikesh*. It is possible that one or two of the uncompromising inmates who were being detained in Ward 3 survived. They even executed some of the prisoners that were detained in Ward 2, which contained a mix of *tavvabs* and regretful Mojahedin inmates.

30. Next, they informed us that most of them had endured fourteen days of lashings before they broke down and were returned to Room 2. They had seriously contemplated committing group suicide, but finally decided to agree to prayer. Of the Ward 3 leftists that were convicted of apostasy and whipped, one prisoner had actually committed suicide in her solitary cell and a few others had gone on a hunger strike. Only Fatemeh Modaressi (Fardin), who was a member of the Tudeh Party, was executed. Modaressi had actually been sentenced to death during her initial trial, but her death sentence had been set aside on appeal. She was not given a sentence after this. The Prosecutor's Office often placed prisoners in legal limbo like this in order to put pressure on them and execute them when it was convenient to do so.

31. It was late September or October. They summoned one of our cellmates. Unlike previous occasions, they did not ask for her belongings. Our cellmate returned after a few hours. She said she had just come from an in-person visit with her brother, who was a leftist prisoner in Gohar Dasht prison. Her brother had survived and been transferred from Gohar Dasht to Evin. Her brother described, in vivid detail, the widespread massacre of prisoners in Gohar Dasht, the lashing of prisoners who had acknowledged they were Muslim but refused to pray, and the broken spirits of those who had survived the ordeal. He warned that our fate would be the same if we continued to deny we were Muslims, or refused to pray. He had tried to convince his sister that this time around, resistance would be futile.

32. During this period, each time one of the guards passed by our ward she would suggest that our time was coming. On October 19, the door opened and a guard distributed some forms to us. She instructed us to write letters to our families and inform them to come for a visit on Tuesday, November 8th. I have a copy of that letter with me. Despite the fact that the guard's words signaled a possible end to the killings and torture, the atmosphere of the prison was still horrifying and

oppressive. We knew that nothing was a certainty in the Islamic Republic's prison system. On that same day (or a day after), they supplied us with our first batch of newspapers since the start of the lock-down period.

33. My group was not taken before the Death Commission, but we were constantly summoned for interrogations by prison officials such as Haddad, Halvai, and the others. They continuously threatened us and reminded us that if we did not change our positions, our fate would be similar to that of the leftist men.

Transfer Back to Gohar Dasht

34. Around January 1989, they transferred me and the rest of the leftist *mellikesh* prisoners to Gohar Dasht. They detained us in one of the general wards that was previously occupied by male inmates. There were pieces of clothing, bags, slippers and other articles that belonged to the male prisoners strewn everywhere. From the very beginning, they were intent on intimidating us into submission. Davood Lashkari, the head of security at Gohar Dasht, constantly reminded us that our fate was to hang in the gallows. One time he said: "This is where we hanged all of your 'jewels.'[15] This is where it all began, and it is where it will all end." It was a strange time. We lived in a ward in which all of its former occupants had been executed.

35. One day, they summoned all of us, blindfolded us and sent us for interrogation. They had managed to create an environment full of fear and instability. We felt that any of us could be summoned away and executed at any moment. We had prepared ourselves for the eventual confrontation with the Death Commission. We did not know it at the time, but the Death Commission was no longer active. They line us up with our backs against the wall in the main corridor. I sneak a peek underneath my blindfold. I see a steady stream of inmates enter and leaving the interrogation room after a short while. None of the ones who leave the room flash the usual signals—four fingers for execution by hanging, one finger wagging for solitary confinement.

36. One by one, they took us into a room. Lashkari and two others were waiting inside. They interrogated us. (By that time, the Death Commission had already been disbanded.) After a few questions, Lashkari asked us whether we were ready to beg for amnesty or not. He warned us that those prisoners who had come in for interrogation and refused to repent had already been executed by hanging. We, too, would be sent to the gallows if we followed the same path. I do not think any of us requested amnesty, but it is possible that several agreed to provide interviews. In the end, they returned all of us to the ward. We were still detained in Gohar Dasht when the prison loudspeakers announced a decision by Khomeini to pardon political prisoners on the occasion of the founding of the Islamic Republic (February 11). It was like a cruel joke. We were being detained in a ward that had been emptied and its occupants massacred. We had sustained

[15] This is a sarcastic reference to prisoners executed in Gohar Dasht. *Gohar* means 'jewels' in Persian.

months of physical and psychological torture—and *now* Khomeini was ready to provide amnesty?!

Our Final Return to Evin

37. Before the February 11 demonstrations in which they paraded a group of political prisoners in the streets, in front of the United Nations building and before the Majlis (prior to granting them amnesty), they loaded us onto buses and transferred us back to our closed-door Evin wards. Several days later, it was around sunset when they summoned all of us *mellikesh* inmates from the three closed-door rooms in Ward 1 of the rehabilitation building. They forced us to wear our *chadors* and put on our blindfolds before lining us up and marching us to the central office for interrogation. En route, I peeked from underneath my blindfold and noticed several buses parked next to the central office. I also noticed another line of blindfolded female prisoners. I thought that they had brought them into Evin from another location, and were possibly preparing to take them to the February 11 demonstrations. When we entered the office hallway, they ordered all of us to line up facing the wall. There was a lot of activity inside the building. We stood there for a while, facing the wall with our blindfolds on.

38. Then a man came and said those of us who wished to be released tomorrow should walk over to the other wall. I do not think any of us walked over to the other side. Again, he repeated that those of us who wished to participate in tomorrow's demonstrations and be freed should walk over to the other side. Again, no one moved. This time, he said that we could either participate in the demonstrations, or be executed. Once again, there was no reaction. He sent us back to the ward and reminded us that we would soon be executed.

39. During the next several days, they released some of the prisoners who participated in the demonstrations. The "Freedom Caravans," they called it. The rest of the prisoners were returned to prison and slowly released over the course of several weeks. In addition to the *tavvabs*, many of those who had been broken pursuant to the torture and whippings they received participated in the demonstrations. Later, I heard from my friends that less than twenty of the uncompromising male leftist prisoners had resisted and not participated in the demonstrations. It must be remembered that the possibility of torture and death cast a long and dark shadow over the prisoners during those days. The male prisoners' spirits had been almost completely shattered. There were, of course, also female leftists who had been whipped and had finally agreed to pray. We tried our best to take care of them and provide comfort. I remember one of my friends—she had succumbed to the pressure and torture and agreed to submit to prayer. She felt she had been defeated and was in horrible shape. I and another friend of mine kept an eye out on her to make sure she did not attempt to take her own life. Sometimes we stayed up the whole night, or took turns to stay awake and make sure she was OK. Our sense of unity and community was a source of frustration for the prison authorities.

Prison Life after the Summer Massacres

40. The next year and a half (until I left prison) were very difficult for us. The atmosphere imposed upon us by the regime was one of insecurity and uncertainty. We could not count on anything. We lived between life and death; between resistance and surrender. We tried to preserve our identity. We continued to be detained in closed-door rooms. The guards took every opportunity and excuse to confront and punish us. I think they reacted to us this way because they expected that all of us would also be executed. They could not stand the fact that we were still alive. I remember overhearing one of the female guards complain to a high-ranking official and ask him why they had not executed us along with the rest. She told the official that it would not make any difference to anyone if a few additional prisoners were executed.

41. Family visits had resumed during this period. Our family members were always worried that this would be the last time they would see us. Many of the family members constantly pressured their loved ones to accept the prison authorities' conditions for release so we could be freed. Most of us continued to resist. My mother, father and son came to visit me on several occasions. When I was arrested, my son was a year old. He was now (in 1989) eight years of age.

42. By 1989, the regime had essentially annihilated a whole generation of revolutionaries who fought for freedom. Revolutionaries who weathered the social turbulence of the 1979 revolution, and had grown and matured after spending years in the regime's prisons. The regime no longer knew what to do with these prisoners—prisoners who had endured endless torture, sleep deprivation, whippings, sensory deprivation, and threats, and continued to show signs of resistance. Each one of these prisoners had gained a lifetime of valuable experience. In reality, the regime could see no solution but to kill all of them.

43. The 1988 massacre was the regime's "final solution" to the problem of political prisoners who had survived the turbulence of the 1979 revolution and continued to oppose the Islamic Republic. The regime's actions were no different than the Nazi regime's "final solution" in connection with the "Jewish problem." By annihilating these political prisoners, the Iranian regime rid itself of a generation of political activists that opposed every aspect of its right to rule. The Islamic Republic wished to neutralize this generation in any manner possible, and it did so. After the 1988 massacre, government officials realized that they had successfully uprooted any serious opposition against the regime. Opposition leaders had been massacred and the revolutionary leaders of a generation perished.

44. In 1989, they returned some of us to the solitary confinement cells in the sanatorium. The interrogations continued, and the interrogators constantly pressured us to as for amnesty. One day they transferred all of the prisoners who were in solitary cells to the general ward. This time, they did not take us to Ward 1 of the rehabilitation building, but to the upper level of Ward 1 in Section 216. I

remember standing in the hallway of the sanatorium next to my bag of personal belongings, peeking underneath my blindfold, and seeing my cellmates secretly talking to each other. I was happy that we were all going back to the general ward. At the time, we did not know why they had decided to transfer us out of the solitary cells. From there, we went to Room 6 of Ward 1 in Section 216. I think all of the *mellikesh* prisoners were in one room. They also transferred the rest of the uncompromising leftists who were serving out their sentences from the rehabilitation building to this ward. The doors to the rooms were closed here, and living conditions were harsh.

45. In the winter of 1989, we read in the newspapers about the arrival of Galindo Pohl and the possibility that he and a team of human rights inspectors from the United Nations would visit Iran. I remember that there was a lot of discussion amongst us about whether we should meet with representatives of the United Nations. Around the same time, one of our cellmates left our room for medical reasons and returned with some disturbing news. She reported that our ward, the only ward that included uncompromising and non-*tavvab* inmates, had been separated from the other wards via the construction of a wall. This meant that they had essentially hidden our ward behind a wall. It was as if we no longer existed inside the prison. Even if Galindo Pohl and his special committee were allowed to roam freely inside the prison, they would never have found us. This is the reason they had transferred all of us from the solitary cells to this ward. When we realized this, some of us began to joke that the prison officials had resolved our problem regarding whether to meet with the United Nations representatives or not. After the United Nations representatives visited the prison, the guards continued sending inmates to solitary confinement as before. In March 1990, I was also sent to a solitary cell in the sanatorium.

46. By 1990, there were seventy or eighty of female prisoners remaining. All of us were leftists. As far as I know, leftist male prisoners who had agreed to pray had already been released. While in the sanatorium, I noticed that a couple of inmates whose sentences were about to run out any day were transferred to solitary confinement and then taken in for interrogation a little while later. Several hours after that, guards would come, collect their belongings and leave again. I was in contact with other cells via Morse code, but none of us could figure out where they were taking these prisoners. During one of my visits with family, they informed me that those prisoners had been released. In 1990, prison authorities were instructed to send prisoners who had just recently completed their sentences to solitary confinement. After that they were ordered to release them. They did not impose any preconditions for release, probably because they had come to the conclusion that doing so would simply cause them more hassle since most prisoners would not accept any preconditions and would remain in prison. We had become a thorn in their sides, and they were being pressured both by the families and by the international community. They had lost their opportunity to kill us and it was no longer possible to commit another massacre without “proper justification.” The prison authorities and guards had all grown tired of dealing with us.

47. Next, it was their turn to deal with the *mellikesh* inmates who were in solitary confinement. Haddad, and even Mortazavi (who was the head of Evin prison), visited these cells every now and again. They asked each and every one of us whether we were ready to be released on temporary leave or not. As far as I know, none of us accepted their offer. This was the first time they asked these questions of us. They asked me the same question, and I also refused. I told them that it had been three years since the end of my sentence. I should be completely free—it did not make sense for me to request a temporary leave of absence. After they realized they were getting nowhere with us, they decided to approach our families. They asked the families to request temporary leaves of absence on behalf of the prisoners. They required the families to provide personal and financial guarantees, and requested that they convince us to write repentance letters. They forced the family members to acknowledge that if they failed, they were personally held responsible and would be required to escort their children, brothers or sisters back to prison.

48. July 2, 1990 was my mother's birthday. I was summoned for interrogation from my solitary cell. In the central office, they placed an order for a temporary leave of absence in front of me and instructed me to sign it. The order called for a leave of one week, and required that I return to prison after that. I refused to sign it. Again, I reminded them that my sentence had ended three years ago, and they were required to set me free. I told them I would never request a leave of absence, and if they kicked me out of prison I would not return. They then informed me that my family had requested the leave, and I was required to sign the order. After keeping me in that room for several hours, they told me to sign another document indicating that I refused to sign the leave of absence order and told me to go back to my cell. Apparently, they did not think that I would actually do this, because when I wrote that I was a *mellikesh*, that I refused to go on a temporary leave, and that I would not return if they sent me away, they acted very surprised and began insulting me. I wanted to return to the ward and inform the others (via Morse) about what had just happened to me. I wanted to let them know that the prison's policies had changed and that they now wanted to put pressure on us to accept temporary leaves of absence by using our families. At the time, we had no idea what was happening to the prisoners who were sent to interrogation and never returned, so it was important to let the others know. Of course, they refused to allow me to return to the ward. I asked why. They said because my family had guaranteed my leave.

My Release

49. It was afternoon when a guard escorted me out of the room. I thought he would return me to my ward. Suddenly, a man lifted me up from behind. I was in shock and began to yell when I heard my uncle's voice. He was carrying me toward the prison entrance, and was full of joy and excitement. He finally put me down and told me to take off my blindfold. I took it off. It was so surreal. I was still inside Evin, but my uncle was standing in front of me. He had aged, but he had a big smile on his face. He told me that the entire family had been waiting in front of

the prison gates since morning, but the prison authorities had informed them that I was not ready to leave and kept telling them that I wanted to return to my ward. We walked toward the prison gates. I looked back at the prison buildings and wards—toward my friends who were still inside the cells and closed-door rooms. We went through a small exit. I saw my cousin waiting outside. A little further, I saw my father who was getting out of a car parked in the street. He began walking toward me.

50. One week passed and my temporary leave came to an end. I did not write a denunciation recantation. My family called the prison officials and informed them that I had not agreed to write the letter. The prison officials extended my leave for another week. My family put a lot of pressure on me to write the letter, but I continued to resist. It was very difficult for me to deal with the immense pressure on my family and my young son. My husband came and took my son away and said that I could not see him until I wrote the letter. Again, I refused. After the prison authorities extended my leave three times, the prison officials asked my father (during a phone conversation) to take me back to prison. I gathered my belongings so I could go back to Luna Park, accompanied by my mother, father and son. I will never forget what my son said to me as he was putting on his socks to get ready: "Tell me, does a deer just give itself up to the lion so the lion could eat it?" When we reached Evin, my father and son went inside the Luna Park office and notified the authorities that I was ready to return to prison and that I would not write a denunciation letter. They extended my leave for another week.

51. They did this in order to psychologically torture us. After this incident, I was able to convince my family not to call the prison office and request any more extensions. I told them that this time I would only go back to prison if they came and arrested me. I would no longer surrender myself. I consulted with some of my other cellmates who were in the same situation, and we all came to the same conclusion. All of our families agreed not to contact the prison office anymore. The prison officials never came after me or my friends. We were effectively free, but none of us had actually received a release order. As a result, we could not live our lives freely—we could not work or pursue a college education if we wished.

52. After about two years, I decided to leave the country in 1992. My sister and brothers lived in the United States at the time. They had immigrated to the United States while I was imprisoned in Iran. From the very beginning, my parents encouraged me to leave the country, but I did not want to leave Iran and resisted their pressure for a while.

53. After I left prison, I was in contact with some of my fellow inmates who had also been released. We earnestly tried to carve out some space for ourselves and reintegrate ourselves into society. But it was difficult to negotiate family and societal expectations with the need to preserve our identity. Some time after my release, I received news that two of my ward mates had committed suicide. Prison had dramatically changed all of us. Many of us were under the age of twenty when we were arrested and sent to prison. When we were released, many of us

were close to our thirties. It was difficult to live with our families. They had expectations and wishes for us that we could not (and often, did not want) to fulfill. Even before my arrest, I had planned to separate from my husband, but my husband had taken my son away and used him to force me to stay in the marriage. These are some of the reasons why I decided it was best to leave Iran.

54. In 1992, my son and I left the country via the Iran-Turkey border with the help of a smuggler.

The end.

Witness Statement of Sepideh

Name: Sepideh[1]

Place of Birth: Tehran, Iran

Date of Birth:

Occupation:

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: May 28, 2009

Interviewer: IHRDC Staff

Witnesses:

This statement was prepared pursuant to a telephone interview with Ms. Sepideh. The statement consists of 43 paragraphs and 9 pages. The interview was conducted on May 28, 2009. The statement was approved in Persian by Sepideh on August 9, 2009.

[1] "Sepideh" is a pseudonym.

Witness Statement

My Husband and I Are Arrested

1. In 1986, there was a massive wave of arrests. Some of those arrested were married couples. After a while, many of the married women received suspended sentences or were set free, but their husbands remained in prison.

2. My husband and I were arrested on September 5, 1986. My husband was arrested outside our home, and my son and I were arrested at our place of residence after midnight. They entered through the main door and showed us the arrest warrant. It had been issued by the *Komiteh-yeh Moshtarak* (Committee)[2] at the Towhid detention facility. My two-year-old son and I were taken to the Committee and we spent the night in a cell.

3. During that period, the prison atmosphere had changed. My husband and I were not tortured in each other's presence. On the first day of interrogation, they confronted me with my husband. I was blindfolded and could not see him, but I could sense that there was a large table between us. He was seated at the other end of it. His voice was very weak. It was obvious that he had been tortured. Our son was beside me the whole time and was constantly crying. Later during our visits, my husband confirmed that he had been severely tortured.

4. My son and I were kept in a small solitary cell. They took me in for interrogation every morning and afternoon. The interrogations lasted about three weeks. After that, they did not occur as often. At the time, I did not occupy any important political posts and did not have any critical information. As a result, I was neither tortured nor harshly interrogated. However, I had been expelled from law school because of my previous political activities.

Conditions inside the Committee Detention Facility

5. Usually around sunset, my son would constantly cry and beg to see his father. One day one of the guards got fed up and yelled at him. He was terrified. He went silent and never begged for anything again. After about two weeks, they transferred the two of us to a closed-door public ward.

6. In the closed public ward, there were about eleven adults and seven children. The doors to the cells were closed. There were no accommodations in the cells. Because there were quite a few children, they supplied us with two red plastic cans without lids. We placed these cans in the corner of the cell and used them when the children needed to go to the bathroom. Inmates who had kidney problems were also forced to use these cans. When it was time for someone to go to the bathroom, the others in the room would turn around so the inmate would have some privacy. Everyone in that room got sick after a while. We complained. One time they brought in a doctor who was accompanied by a female guard. The guard felt our hands, and without the use of a thermometer determined whether we were running a fever or not. When the doctor saw my son, he strongly suggested that he be transferred out of the cell. Nothing could be done at the time, but I later mentioned the

[2] *Komiteh-yeh Moshtarak*, or "Committee," refers to an infamous detention facility used by the Shah's security and intelligence forces to detain, interrogate and torture political prisoners. After the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic renamed it the "Towhid detention facility," but continued to use the facility as a place to detain and interrogate many of its political opponents.

doctor's suggestion during one of my interrogations. The authorities contacted my husband's family and they came and took my son away. He had developed a bad infection. I was later informed that he had run a fever and had the chills for almost four weeks, during which time he was on antibiotics. There was another child who had developed terrible diarrhea, but he was not allowed to leave prison because the authorities did not want to alert the inmate's family that she had been arrested. The poor child could not hold anything down. As soon as he ate his food, his mother and the others would sit him on the red plastic can they had supplied us.

My Trial and Detention in Evin

7. I was detained in Committee for about a month and a half. I spent the next two months in Evin. During the first month, I was held in solitary confinement. The next month, I was transferred to a public ward. Then I was tried and sentenced. My trial lasted four to five minutes. I was able to take my blindfold off in court. A court secretary asked me several questions, including information about me and my activities. That was it. No lawyer, no opportunity to present a defense. Then the judge came, and within minutes the whole thing was over. This, despite the fact that I had not been involved in any particular activity and had done nothing illegal. About a week later they took me to an office and officially informed me of my charges and released me. They sentenced me to a three-year suspended sentence, but I was required to either report to Evin, the investigations office on Saba Street, or my local Committee for a period of seven years. In the beginning, I was required to report every week, but later they changed it to every two weeks. After that, it was every forty-five days.

8. Before I was transferred to Evin from Committee, I was able to meet my husband once. The meeting took place in the presence of a guard, and lasted about two to three minutes.

My Release and My Husband's Transfer to Evin

9. After my release, the first meeting between me, my husband and his family took place around December 1986. This meeting took place approximately four months after his arrest. At the time, he was still being detained in Committee. We met in person. Prisoners who were detained in Committee and were allowed to meet family were usually temporarily transferred to the Evin prison facility in Luna Park. They were taken to two small rooms in which the family members of two or three other prisoners were also present. The prisoners were seated close to their family members, with several guards and interrogators surrounding them. The meetings usually lasted around twenty to thirty minutes. After that, there were no meetings until my husband was permanently transferred to Evin.

10. My husband was transferred to Evin in February 1987. At the time of his transfer to Evin from Committee, he had been detained for six or seven months.

11. He was in solitary confinement during his first month at Evin. After that, we had visits every two weeks. If the scheduled meeting fell on a holiday or was cancelled, we would not be allowed to make up for time lost. During one of these visits, my husband told me that he had received a two-year sentence. He told me this in early 1987. He also told me that this was the information they had given him, but he was not sure whether it was really true or not.

Prison Conditions Begin to Change

12. By early 1986, Asadollah Lajevardi's[3] harsh system of prison administration no longer existed. The prisoners became emboldened and took part in a series of collective actions intended to resist the authorities inside the prisons. These actions resembled organized strikes. One time, after my husband received his sentence, several of the prisoners inside his ward engaged in one of these strikes. My husband was sent off to solitary confinement. When I went to visit him, they told me I could not do so. They did not give a reason. I had to wait two weeks before I could see him again.

13. But immediately prior to 1988, we (the victims' family members) witnessed troubling signs suggesting a return to the pre-1986 conditions. The prison authorities began taking actions that we assumed were being taken because of their lack of experience, or because they wanted to put pressure on the prisoners and their families. We never imagined that they had bigger plans in mind. We began to hear that prisoners were being taken to solitary cells for various reasons, and that the relaxed prison environment was coming to an end.

14. We witnessed some of these changes in late 1987 and early 1988. At Evin, visiting families were instructed to go to an area called Luna Park. Luna Park was an amusement park for children. However, the authorities had built a building at the end of this park, which we called "Luna Park" because it was next to the amusement facilities. Prison authorities conducted most of the administrative work in connection with preparing prisoners for visitation and delivering goods from the families to the prisoners from Luna Park. The families usually went there to find out information about their loved ones.

15. On visitation days, we went to the front of the Luna Park building and stood in line. When it was our turn, we handed our identification cards to a guard who was seated behind a glass window inside a small room in order to request a meeting with our loved ones. (Only close family members, such as fathers, mothers, children, spouses and siblings who were over thirty years of age were allowed to go in for regular visits. Siblings who were under eighteen years of age were only allowed visits once a year.) Everyone was required to show identification. The authorities then handed us a piece of paper and told us to wait in line again until we were summoned into the prison complex. There were separate entries for men and women. They conducted body searches and looked through our bags before a special prison minibus picked us up (there was quite a distance between the Luna Park complex and Evin prison itself) and dropped us off in front of Evin.

16. After arriving, the families were corralled into a covered hallway that led into a two-story building. We were taken to the second level and instructed to wait until our names were called. After our names were called, we went through a door and entered another room where we met our loved ones. The room was filled with small cubicles. The cubicles were separated from each other with waist-high walls in order to create a sense of privacy. A glass window allowed family members to see the prisoners on the other side. Family members and prisoners talked to each other through a phone receiver. The authorities could disconnect the phones whenever they wished. Families were summoned

[3] Prior to 1988, Asadollah Lajevardi was the notorious Governor of Evin Prison. He was known as the "Butcher of Evin" due to his harsh interrogation and torture techniques against political prisoners. Lajevardi returned to his position as Governor of Evin immediately after the 1988 summer massacres (during which time he was the Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran). He was assassinated in 1998.

in the room according to the number of cubicles (and prisoners) that were available. We were instructed to sit in the cubicle that matched the number we had been provided before entering, and were strictly forbidden from going to other cubicles. The meetings were supposed to last fifteen minutes, but were usually cut short after about ten minutes. It was a very stressful environment, and most of our discussion time with the prisoners was spent talking about random matters. Children under four or five years of age were allowed, after a body search, to cross over to the other side of the cubicle in order to spend five or six minutes with their mothers or fathers. This occurred after the meeting between the adults had come to an end, and we were instructed to leave the room.

17. During one of these otherwise "normal" visitation days, I remember the authorities returning some of the books the prisoners had been given and telling us that they (the prisoners) no longer needed them. This was around three or four months prior to the start of the executions. When I visited my husband, I asked him what the issue was. He said the authorities had raided their cells and confiscated all the books. At the time, we thought nothing of this move.

No More Family Visits

18. Around mid-July 1988, all visits came to an end. We went to Luna Park several times. Each time, the authorities informed us that there were no visits. We asked why, but they did not provide us with any explanations. Many of the families continued to go to Luna Park every fifteen days and demanded that the authorities allow us visits. But they would not give us any information. One time I remember the authorities informed us that there would be no visits because the Mojahedin had attacked Iran's borders. They said that some of the prison guards had gone to the front to fight against the Mojahedin.

19. The prohibition on family visits continued and the guards continued to evade our questions whenever we went to Luna Park. I remember that some of the family members threatened to go visit Ayatollah Montazari and seek his assistance, but their bus was stopped on its way there and the passengers were detained and interrogated for several hours. After that, the families went to the Ministry of Justice office and sought help from members of the *Majlis*. I and several other family members informed the Ministry of Justice authorities that we had not received a letter from our loved ones in weeks, and that we knew nothing of their whereabouts. Then on August 3, 1988, many of the families received letters from their loved ones. I, too, received a letter. I believe that many of the families whose loved ones were executed during the summer of 1988 received these letters on that day.

20. The letters caused great concern and anxiety. In my letter, my husband had written: "[M]y memories with you are drawn on my mind and they are like an eternal stone tablet that will never be destroyed … A long time has passed since our last visit … I hope you are well. Take care of our son. I cannot speak much to our son during these short visits. Talk to our son on my behalf. Ask him what he likes … You can write letters on my behalf and read them to him."

21. The tone and content of this letter was noticeably different from the previous ones. I became extremely worried. I was not alone. Other families were in similar circumstances.

22. From late July to around November 1988, we went to Luna Park every two weeks and demanded visitation rights. Each time, they told us that there were no more visits, but

23. The prisoners' families often interacted with the State Prison Organization[4] (SPO) when it came to administrative matters dealing with family-prisoner relations. Family members registered their names with the SPO in order to receive information and assistance. Each of us had identification cards that we needed to produce every time we dealt with the SPO. Around October or November of 1988, after months of trying to find out information regarding the status and whereabouts of our loved ones, one of the family members informed us that the SPO had closed her husband's file. In November, I went to the SPO to find out what was going on. I, too, was told that my husband's file had been closed. I asked them what the reason was, hoping that he had been released. In response, the SPO authorities informed me that they had received a list from the Prosecutor's Office stating that certain people were to be prepared for release. We assumed that the authorities probably wanted to give them amnesty, so we began collecting money to post bail. We were in the process of preparing for my husband's release from prison when we heard the news.

Receiving the News…

24. The last time we went to Luna Park to demand visitation rights was sometime in November. As usual, we pressed them for answers and they referred us to the Assistant Prosecutor's Office for more information. So we went over there. If I am not mistaken, it was either November 17 or 18. When we arrived at the office, we noticed that the waiting room was filled with families seeking information regarding their loved ones.

25. The authorities recorded our telephone number and addresses and told us they would contact us shortly. As we were waiting, we listened to the stories of other families who had been summoned. Some of them claimed that their sons had been executed, and that authorities had returned their belongings to them.

26. That same day, representatives from the Prosecutor's Office contacted several families and gave them the locations of the Committees they should visit in order to get more specific information about the prisoners. It was a Wednesday when they called my father-in-law's house and asked him to go and meet them. I think it was November 23, 1988.

27. On Thursday, November 24, I went to Evin. I told them that we had received a telephone call instructing us to go to Committee. I asked what was going on. Again, they referred me to the Assistant Prosecutor's Office. I went there. There were many families waiting. The person I spoke to directed me to the Karim Abad Committee office, which was located close to Khavaran cemetery. When I asked him why I should go there, he said I could return the next day and ask the Assistant Prosecutor why they had summoned me there.

28. On Friday, November 25, I went to the Karim Abad Committee with my father- and sister-in-law. Many families were waiting in line. The guards separated the families from each other and informed us that only one family member was allowed to go inside. My

[4] The State Prison Organization is responsible for monitoring prisons and detention facilities in Iran.

father-in-law wanted to go in, but I told him I wanted to go instead. I went and stood in line. There were three families ahead of me.

29. Once I was allowed inside, I noticed two people sitting in the room. There was another person who went in and out. When I entered, one of them turned to me and said: "It seems that you know why you are here?" I said: "No. My husband's term ends in two months and [he] may be released. We don't know what's happening. We were told to come here and here we are." He said: "Your husband has been executed. Take his belongings and leave." He handed over some of my husband's belongings, including his watch. The watch was no longer working. He took it, changed the time, and handed it back to me.

30. I started to argue with him. I yelled: "What is the meaning of this? My husband went to court and was sentenced to two years. He was to be released in two months, and in any case, he was not a Mojahed and he's done nothing. These things have nothing to do with him." The official replied: "We only know that you should think about yourself and your kid. He did not think of his wife and child." I said, "Yes, his heart was … far greater than that."

31. I asked the official about my husband's will and the location of where he had been buried. He began to yell and said: "He did not have a will, and it is not clear where his place is. You should go to the Prosecutor's Office if you have any questions." He was trying to end the conversation quickly so he could get rid of me. Before I left, the official warned me and the rest of the families that we were not allowed to hold memorial ceremonies for our loved ones. The official personally threatened me and reminded me that I had a history and that they could reopen my case file if I caused any trouble. They wanted to silence me and the rest of the family members.

32. This was the method used to inform families regarding what had happened with their loved ones. At the Karim Abad Committee (where they handed us our loved ones' belongings), the authorities offered to reimburse us for the money we had been paying them for months if we able to provide a receipt. I had my receipt. I showed it to them and received the money.

33. We tried not to cry in front of them. Our crying began when we arrived home. We held a small ceremony with our family members. Our relatives, close friends and those who had suffered the same loss attended the ceremony. We held it at the house of my father- and mother-in-law. Their house was not raided, but I know of some families who were attacked and prevented from holding ceremonies.

The Families Visit Khavaran

34. Until this point, we did know anything about Khavaran—the final resting place for many of those executed in and around Tehran. After we received the news regarding our loved ones, however, we became very familiar with this place. The families gathered at Khavaran every Friday. I went to Khavaran the Friday after the authorities gave me my husband's belongings. Khavaran is essentially a deserted field. Next to Khavaran is the burial place for the Baha'is. On the other side, many of the political prisoners who had been executed during the early 1980s are buried. Before carrying out the 1988 massacres, the government had dug two large canals at Kahvaran.

35. When we arrived there, both canals had been filled. The ground was left uneven and rippled. You could still see pieces of clothes, slippers and combs on the ground. We were not allowed to touch the dirt or sit down on the soil. There were lots of families there, and all were ordered to stand on their feet. Security forces were everywhere, and I could see several Revolutionary Guard vehicles parked outside. We could smell the stench of the dead. I remember one time one of the kids stepped into a mound and his foot sank in. He was terrified. The soil was still soft.

36. I do not know the dimensions of Khavaran, but a series of the canals followed a vertical line to a high wall that separated our section from the Armenian section, and another series followed a horizontal line to the center of the cemetery.

37. As I said previously, the families visited Khavaran every Friday. The women intentionally wore colorful scarves and tried not to wear black. We wanted to let them know that they could not break us. We also took lots of colorful flowers and picture frames containing images of our children, spouses and siblings. During the course of the ceremonies, the authorities often destroyed or confiscated the picture frames. Uniformed or plainclothes security agents were always present during these visits, and often threatened people to leave the premises. We did not have permission to sit down or touch the dirt, and were forced to stand the whole time we were there. This was very difficult for many of the older women who were there. Most of those who were buried there were from leftist groups or factions.

38. These days, victims' families usually visit Khavaran once every month. Yet they always try to go there on the last Friday of the year, and on the start of the New Year.

The Aftermath

39. One and a half years after our first visit to Khavaran, we received a call informing us that the authorities would issue a death certificate for our loved ones if we wished to receive one. It was important to have a death certificate for administration reasons, so I took my husband's identification booklet and applied to receive one. The authorities told me that the documents would be ready in two weeks. Two weeks later, I went to get the certificate. Again, I asked them about my husband's will and his exact place of burial. The authority replied: "[Your husband] was a communist. He did not have a will. He was an atheist so he does not have a burial spot." I told him that I did not accept his answer. I added that even if my husband were not religious, he still had to be buried somewhere. I then asked him to produce a handwritten note from my husband indicating that he did not wish to write a will. The officer responded: "What do these people know about the importance of burial? It means nothing to them."

40. I was then directed to the Assistant Prosecutor's Office in order to receive my husband's death certificate. I was handed a document that stated my husband's place of birth, his background, and the cause of death. For the cause of death, they had written: "Death by natural causes." I could not believe it. I asked the official: "Death by natural causes?" He said: "It would have been difficult for you had we written execution." I responded: "It would not have been more difficult than his absence." This angered him. He began yelling at me, took the certificate, and wrote the word "Execution" next to the cause of death. As I was leaving the room, he threatened me and said that I had caused unnecessary trouble for myself. When I asked him what he meant, he replied: "You will see."

41. I had not reached home yet when someone had called my family and informed them that I had to introduce myself to the *Saba* Investigative Committee the next morning. (The *Saba* Investigative Committee was used to summon prisoners who had suspended sentences but had to periodically turn themselves in and provide reports regarding their recent activities. I had gone there several times myself because I, too, had a suspended sentence.)

42. I went there the next morning. They blindfolded me and took me to a room. For hours they interrogated me. The interrogations consisted of a written portion and an oral question and answer session. I believe they recorded my answers. The interrogation lasted until late in the evening, after which I was released. This all happened merely a day after I received my husband's death certificate.

43. After this incident, I was forced to report to the Committee several other times. My suspended sentence was for three years, but I was forced to report to Committee for seven straight years.

The end.

Witness Statement of Shahla Azad

Name: Shahla Azad[1]

Place of Birth: Tehran, Iran

Date of Birth:

Occupation:

Interviewing Organization: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Date of Interview: March 15, 2009

Interviewer:

Witnesses:

This statement was prepared pursuant to a telephone interview with Ms. Shahla Azad. The statement consists of 89 paragraphs and 17 pages. The interview was conducted on March 15, 2009. The statement was approved in English by Ms. Azad on October 12, 2009.

[1] "Shahla Azad" is a pseudonym.

Witness Statement

1. I was arrested in early 1983. I was raised in a large but modest family in Tehran. My family was well-known in our neighborhood because many of my relatives were intellectuals and some, like me, had been arrested during the Shah's regime.

2. Since 1981, the Islamic Republic had suppressed and targeted members of opposition groups, particularly the Mojahedin-e Khalq. Anyone who had connections with the Mojahedin, leftist or other opposition groups was targeted. Many of my friends were arrested in 1981. My siblings and I were forced to leave our home in Tehran and go elsewhere.

3. I lived a very difficult and transient life from 1981 to 1983. During this period, we were constantly moving from one location to another. There were times when we had no place of residence. We rode the bus from early in the morning until late at night, all the way to the end of the line and back. Sometimes we changed our routes and took a different bus for fear of being followed and arrested by regime authorities.

4. By 1983, we had practically no contact with each other as members of the organization; our ties had been severed since 1982. Some of my friends who had been arrested were executed and others left Iran. But there were some, including me, who decided to stay. Those who remained believed that if everyone decided to leave, the resistance would eventually die out. I must admit that I also did not have the financial means to leave the country. Regardless, the real reason for my decision to stay had to do with the responsibility I and others felt toward the movement.

5. In 1983, my husband and I lived in a neighborhood in the southern part of Tehran. At the time, we did not have any political or organizational ties. We occasionally met with friends, exchanged books and read *samizdat*[2] pamphlets together. We could not keep a large number of books in one place, so as soon we got hold of a book, we read it and passed it on to other friends. From 1981, many political activists actually burned, buried or threw their books (or music cassettes) away because the mere possession of these books was considered a crime.

6. My husband and I lost quite a bit of weight during that time because we did not live on a healthy diet and we were under a lot of stress. One day I remember telling my husband that he had become so skinny that he ran the risk of being arrested on the streets as a drug addict. We joked and laughed about it. The day after I made that comment, he left home to meet with someone. My husband always showed up to meetings early so he could scope out the area and monitor the situation. Many of those arrested by the regime often confessed under torture regarding their future meetings. Security agents would then take advantage of this situation. They would take the detainee to their scheduled meeting place, keep them in the car, and ask them to positively identify the person they were supposed to meet. The positively identified individual would then immediately be arrested. This is why my husband always went to our meetings early. The day of my husband's meeting I had to stay home to take care of my niece.

[2] *Samizdat* refers to the reproduction and dissemination of censored or illegal publications by dissidents. It refers to a form of grassroots resistance that was popularized by political dissidents active in the Soviet-bloc countries in the 1980s.

My Husband and I are Arrested

7. When my husband arrived, he sensed that something was wrong, but unfortunately he did not take it too seriously. We usually arranged to meet in the southern neighborhoods of Tehran both because we lived there at the time, and because there was a lot of hustle and bustle on the streets. We also dressed in a manner that allowed us to blend in with the people from the neighborhood. Later he informed me that just before he arrived at his meeting place, he spotted a parked car with someone inside who looked very familiar. He could not, however, get a good look at the individual and could not positively identify him.

8. They made no mention of my husband's political activities when they arrested him. This was done on purpose. He was told instead that someone had accused him of being involved in drug dealing. My husband dismissed this allegation as utterly baseless. He did not even smoke cigarettes, let alone use or deal drugs! But the security agents continued the charade. They took him to a store where he was confronted with the alleged accuser, who confirmed that my husband had in fact sold him drugs. My husband fiercely objected to the allegations, at which point the accuser took back his words and said that the dealer was actually another person who was taller than my husband. They pretended it was all a mistake. My husband asked if he could leave now that everything had been cleared up. But he was told that because someone had accused him there was still a need to search his home in order to fully comply with professional requirements. They placed him in their car and drove him to our home.

9. I became alarmed when my husband knocked on the door. He used the secret code we had previously agreed to, but I suspected something was wrong. I was holding my ten-month-old niece in my arms when I opened the door. Four men entered our home. My husband said, "These brothers have arrested me and accused me of being a drug addict—really!" He told me this so I would not mention anything about our political activities. I was wearing a colorful veil similar to the ones generally worn by woman in southern Tehran. The four men started searching our home. They seized our birth certificates and other documents, pretending it was all part of a routine search to clear up the misunderstanding. Suddenly, one of them asked me to get ready and accompany them to *Komiteh*[3] to answer some questions. My husband and I were shocked. One of the officers asked where my *mallat*[4] was. I did not understand why he asked this at that moment, but I realized later that "*mallat"* was code used by Mojahedin members to refer to banned publications, such as books and pamphlets. I thought he was asking me what I had cooked, so I told him that I had not cooked any meat stew.

10. Finally, one of them told us to get out. As I was putting my shoes on, one of the officers called my husband with the pseudonym he used with his political friends. Then he said, "Now you know what's going on." I realized that I could not take my niece with me. This matter was going to take longer than I originally anticipated. I was trying to figure out what to do with my niece when the landlord's seven-year-old daughter came down to see what was going on. I quickly handed my niece to her, but I was worried that she would not be able to handle her because she was so young. I had bought a new pair of shoes that day. I took them off and put the old pair on, with the thought that I would eventually be

[3] *Komiteh* refers to the Islamic Revolutionary Committees which developed in 1978. Initially informal grassroots organizations, they later achieved formal status by Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian *Majlis*. The *Komitehs* effectively served as a type of police force designed to combat moral vice and dissident political activity.
[4] *Mallat* is phrase that is often used to refer to the mixture of ingredients used in cooking (particularly in cooking meat stew).

executed. I had a strange feeling. All kinds of thoughts entered my mind, but I was the most worried about my niece and my sister who could have also been arrested when she came to pick up the baby.

Transfer to Evin

11. We were put in the car and told to lower our heads. My husband apologized to me for having been fooled and not having taken them more seriously. He was such a gentle soul—I always felt like nothing could happen to me as long as I was with him.

12. After a while, we reached Evin prison. One of the officers asked if I knew where we were. I said, "No." "This is 'Repentance Road,'" he said. One of them contacted the headquarters with his wireless. I realized from their conversation that we were among the second group of individuals arrested on that day. They had arrested another group before us.

13. We were blindfolded as soon as we arrived at Evin. One of the officers told the interrogator that the new group was more stubborn and experienced, and would not easily give in. We were then separated. I was led to the upper floor. I waited in the hallway until my interrogation began. In the meantime, I heard my husband being slapped around repeatedly. Once he hit the door and was knocked over. I could not take it, so I screamed. After a few minutes I was asked what my name was and what organization I belonged to.

14. I was kept in the hallway for about twenty minutes. I kept asking why my husband was being beaten so savagely. I was then taken to a small room. This room was full of blankets, tapes and books seized from people's homes. The interrogator came in. I was blindfolded. He was so close I could feel his breath. I thought his face would touch mine at any moment. I worried that he was going to do something to me. He talked to me in a disgustingly dirty tone. He asked me in a whisper, "What's your name?" Then, all of a sudden, he asked me to reveal the locations of several people. The question was so sudden that I really had no idea who he was talking about. We knew some individuals only by their organizational nicknames, and others by their real names. I said I did not know who he was talking about. He kicked me in the stomach with his boot. The blow was so unexpected that I threw up.

15. The guards took me out, pulling me by the corner of my veil (because they did not want to directly touch female prisoners). I was told to stand behind the door. "Listen! Do you recognize this voice?" he asked. My husband was a very calm and patient man. He never complained of pain and never screamed under torture. I could hear him sigh, but he refused to scream. He was desperately trying to control his painful sighs so as not to upset me.

16. I could actually hear his controlled breathing in the midst of the heavy rhythm of lashings he was receiving. I could not see anything, but I knew they were beating him with other things as well. I was asked again if I recognized his voice. I did not answer. They opened the door and removed my blindfold. It was only then that my husband noticed my presence. He had been wrapped in a blanket and blindfolded. They untied him from the bed, and four or five officers began beating him. He was whipped, beaten with a cable, punched, kicked and thrown to the wall. He was so weak, he was hardly breathing. But he made no sounds. He endured all of this torture in order to keep my morale strong. I could not stand it anymore. I screamed and asked them why they were doing this! All of a sudden they pushed me toward the bed and tied me to it.

17. At that time women who were politically active usually wore long comfortable pants rather than skirts. But on that day I was wearing a dress, like most other women in Tehran's southern neighborhoods. I was not comfortable in that dress and did not want to lie down on the bed with no pants on. I asked them several times to give me something to cover myself up, but they did not listen. They tied my feet to the bed in order to keep them still, and left my hands untied. I was beaten on the soles of my feet continuously for several minutes. Half an hour later my feet began to swell. I heard one of them jokingly say to the others, "I wonder what her shoe size is now!" They were mocking me.

18. This time they had kept my husband outside the room so he could hear my screams. Later, when I saw my husband briefly in court, he told me that while they were lashing me, they were mocking him as well. "Do you know what they are doing to your wife in that room now?" they asked him sarcastically. Obviously, they were suggesting that something worse than mere lashing was going on inside the room. They insulted him and told him that he was a coward for not being able to defend his wife.

19. Sometime later, they brought over a piece of paper that read, "I, [the name under which my husband was arrested] do not know [my husband's real name]. Should this be proven otherwise, I am prepared to be executed tonight." They told me they had already obtained permission to execute my husband and could carry out the execution that same night.

20. After some time, I lost consciousness because of the persistent torture. When I regained consciousness, I found myself in a room that they called *havakhori*—or "fresh air." Despite its name, the room was not located outside, nor was there any access to the outside. Its roof was covered with some kind of netting that made it difficult to see the sky. When I came to, I saw another man in the room (along with the interrogators). He was weak and in bad shape. I recognized this person. "This is only the beginning—the worst is yet to come," I thought to myself.

21. I was informed that I had been identified by a *tavvab*.[5] The *tavvab* later informed me that she had been instructed to change my clothes and search them while I was unconscious. I knew her. She was the sister of a close friend of mine. She was seventeen years of age when I first met her.

22. The man at the opposite side of the room had been severely tortured and was in terrible shape. The interrogators sprinkled some water on this face. He regained consciousness. They asked him if he knew the whereabouts of a woman. (I found out later they were asking about his wife. His wife had already managed to leave Iran, but he had refused to disclose her location.) He had been arrested quite by accident. He had arranged an appointment with some smugglers who were supposed to provide him with a fake passport. The authorities arrested the smugglers and he was arrested along with them.

Physical Abuse and Torture in Evin

23. After this incident, I was transferred to a cell. When the guard dropped me off at the cell, he said, "You are among friends here." The cell door remained open. I understood later what he meant. A majority of the inmates in that room were *tavvabs*. The cell was very small, with barely enough room to move.

[5] A *tavvab* is anyone who has engaged in the act of *tawbih*, or penitence. It usually refers to "reformed" political prisoners who agreed to cooperate with the regime while serving out their prison sentences.

24. Because I was in such bad shape, my cellmates allowed me to sleep in the corner, against the wall (which was a little higher and more spacious than the rest of the cell). It was the only spot where a tall person could sleep relatively comfortably. Other parts of the cell were tight, and one could not stretch her feet because a toilet was in the way. I could not sleep that night. They checked up on me the day after and saw that I could barely move. I lost consciousness again and was taken to see Dr. Sheikholeslam, who was the Shah's former doctor. When I regained consciousness, I heard Dr. Sheikholeslam arguing with my interrogator. He said, "If you want to kill her, go ahead and kill her. She is almost paralyzed. She can't sustain any more torture!" I was conscious, but I could not move or say anything. I was on an IV when the interrogator left. The doctor said that I should not, under any circumstances, move my lower back for a while. He said I had a fracture close to the spinal cord, and that any slight movement may result in permanent paralysis.

25. This was not the only health problem I had developed as a result of the torture. I also had problems with my kidney and other areas of the body. I was left on my own for seventeen days. On the eighteenth day, I went on a hunger strike. I could not really eat anything anyway.

26. One of the *tavvabs* in the cell was very dangerous. The other two were mostly pretending to be *tavvabs* (even though they still had to file reports on everyone's activities). The dangerous *tavvab* always relayed terrible news regarding my husband. She told me that she had seen my husband wrapped in a blanket and that the interrogators had mentioned that he was dead. Later, she would tell me that my husband was well and alive and was collaborating with the interrogators. She played these horrible mind games with me on an almost daily basis.

27. I knew at that point that I had been positively identified by the interrogator. I did not need to hide anything anymore. My mood changed. I began chanting leftist revolutionary songs. The *tavvabs* advised me against doing this. "Don't play with your life," they said. But nothing mattered to me anymore. I knew I would be executed and I did not want to die in shame.

28. On the twenty-third day of my detention, I was taken in for interrogation again. The interrogator threatened me: "Where do you think you are? Do you think we've forgotten about you? Do you think we'll just let you off the hook? Do you think human rights will come and save you? Do you think this is Shah's time? We are not idiots like the Shah was, allowing the Red Cross and human rights monitors into the prisons." He asked me why I had gone on a hunger strike and whether I actually cared about being released. I told him I was in no mood to trade favors in exchange for my freedom.

29. The next day I was photographed. I thought I was going to be executed because they had threatened me with execution the night before. The *tavvabs* also behaved as if this was my last day. At the time, all I could think about was writing my will and sneaking it out of prison.

My Initial Trial and Death Sentence

30. On the twenty-eighth day, I was summoned again. Again, I thought I would be executed. I was taken to an unfamiliar place. I sat there for a while. I had no idea what they were up to. Then someone came and escorted me through the hallway to the upper floor. I was told to remove my blindfold. I saw a turbaned cleric sitting before me. I realized I was being tried. One of the guards asked, "Do you know where you are?" "No," I replied. He

told me that this was my trial. My hearing lasted five minutes, during which I was arraigned on several charges. Some of the charges were actually quite amusing. For example, I was charged with being a member of a mountain climbing club. Another charge included imprisonment during the Shah's regime. I asked them: "Can someone be executed for being a member of a mountain climbing club or being a prisoner under the Shah's regime? Some people holding office today were, in fact, prisoners under the former regime." The cleric answered, "For a Muslim, this is a positive, but for an infidel— it is simply another reason to carry out the maximum punishment."

31. Anyhow, it was a sham hearing. I had not given them any useful information during the course of interrogations. (The more severe interrogations actually began a year later when they transferred a group of prisoners to Qezel Hesar and forced them to disclose new information about me.) The cleric asked me, "Are you willing to give a televised interview?" I said, "No." He asked, "Are you willing to defend the Islamic Republic?" I said, "No." He asked, "Do you pray?" Again, I said, "No." Then he asked me why I had become politically active. I answered, "I have the same defense I had when I was tried during the Shah's regime. I did not become political because I read books. I am not an armchair political activist. [I became politically active because] I cannot witness injustice and keep silent in the face of it. The Shah's regime was unjust. So is yours. You suppress women and treat them unfairly. That is why I oppose you."

32. The judge responded, "With this statement, you have signed your own death sentence. Do not blame this on us." I was about to exit the room when he asked, "Have you seen your husband yet?" I said, "No." He asked me if I would like to see him. I said, "Of course I would." Then I asked him, "Will you execute both of us? My husband and I?" He said, "Yes." "May I ask you to bury us next to each other?" I asked. He then ordered me to leave the room. I was taken to the office of the *Sepah* forces because there were no other rooms available. They took me to an empty room full of blankets that were strewn all over the floor. I sat there and waited. A few moments later, the door opened and my husband came in.

33. It was a sweet, memorable moment. This was the first time we had seen each other face to face and in the absence of others. My husband was in terrible shape. He had a broken shoulder blade, a broken chin and some broken ribs. He had bruises all over his face. He was in rags. He was a very special person. He apologized for what had happened and wished things had been different. He blamed himself for my imprisonment. I tried to disavow him of this guilt and emphasized that he was not to blame at all. None of this was unexpected.

34. We quickly updated each other regarding the previous interrogations and hearings so we could be on the same page for the following trials and investigations. I requested that he give his real name, but he refused. He believed this would lead to more intense torture sessions and punishment. He had not confessed to anything yet and providing his real name meant claiming responsibility for certain things. Our visit was very short. I was transferred back to my ward. There was no mention of an [execution] order. But every time my name was called, I thought I was going to be executed.

35. After my trial, I was blindfolded and accompanied by a female guard called "Rahimi." She was instructed to take me to the "infidels'" ward. Before arriving at my new cell, an interrogator put me through the same line of questioning I had gone through previously (including questions regarding my name, my political affiliation, etc.). Then one of them

said: "Take her to the infidels' section!" Another one responded, "No, take her to Ward 3. She will learn a lesson there!" Only later did I realize why I was taken to that ward.

36. So I was taken to Ward 3, which was known to house brutal *tavvabs*. When I entered, my feet were a little better but my lower back still hurt. They had put me on extra-strength antibiotics without monitoring the dosage and keeping an eye on the adverse side effects. The antibiotics destroyed my teeth.

37. One day, I was told I had visitors. My parents had come to visit me. We were separated by a glass window and talked via telephone receivers. It was my first visit and I did not know that the guards were able to read our lips through the partition. I asked my father to read my lips while he kept talking. I told him that I had not confessed to anything or disclosed anyone's name, and recommended that he tell my friends to leave the country for their own safety. At the end of the conversation, I told my parents that this might be our last visit and that I may be executed soon. My father felt very weak and broken all of a sudden. He was about to collapse. But he quickly pulled himself together and said, "My daughter, be strong. You will never die." I was deeply moved by my father's words. My spirits lifted. It gave me hope to know that I would always remain alive in my family's hearts.

38. After the family visit, I was immediately taken in for interrogation. The torture and threats continued, but the interrogation was not as violent as the first time. They listened to Dr. Sheikholeslam's advice. I was whipped while I was sitting down. They did not tie me to the bed, nor did they strike my lower back. They also struck the center of my head with the tip of a pen. It was very disturbing and unpleasant and the effects have lasted until today. I still suffer from chronic headaches and eye problems.

My Sentence is Reduced to Fifteen Years

39. I was awaiting the execution order when the prison conditions changed. Hojatolislams Majid Ansari and Nassiri, Ayatollah Montazeri's representatives, visited the prisons to study the condition of prisoners. During this period, Montazeri formed a judicial council responsible for reviewing execution orders. Previously, every judge could simply issue an execution order, but upon the formation of the judicial council, executions were carried out only after having been reviewed by the council. The council was composed of five members who had to act by majority vote for an order to be enforced. I was among the first group of unwavering prisoners whose order was reviewed by the judicial council and overturned. I could not believe it when the council sentenced me to fifteen years' imprisonment instead. Fifteen years seemed like nothing to me. I had a strange feeling when I returned to my cell. Until that day, I had seen and planned my life as if I were to be executed. I thought of every moment as my last. I felt strangely at peace. I had no fears or worries. I freely expressed myself. I did what I desired. The *Pasdars* mistreated me because of my unwavering stance. They insulted me and called me an "infidel." But I ignored this and tried to establish a good relationship with my fellow inmates. I tried to do useful things for them, like helping them get their messages to the outside world. I did this not because I was trying to be a hero, but because I needed to keep busy and pass the time.

40. But the fifteen-year sentence upset everything. It changed my life altogether. I was not ready to continue living. I had a strange feeling. I had to live and let life go on. I stayed in that ward for eleven months. The *Pasdars* did not allow fellow inmates to talk to me. Anyone who exchanged a word with me would be called out and questioned. It got to a

point where we had to talk inconspicuously—for instance, while we were performing tasks such as hanging our clothes to dry. For example, I remember consoling one of the prisoners who had been sentenced to death and was constantly crying. Her mood slowly improved, so the guards ordered her not to speak with me anymore. In fact, they instructed all the younger inmates not to talk to me, but we managed to establish contact every now and again.

41. They often took prisoners to the Husseiniyih Hall[6] for interviews, but I did not go. They did not pressure me to go, nor did they torture me because of my lower back condition. Those were difficult times in prison. Some unrepentant leftist prisoners had to pretend they were praying. I was one of the few people who did not pray.

42. During that time, the regime constantly put pressure on us to sign confession letters implicating leftist leaders so that they could blacken their reputations on national television. Some inmates caved in and signed the letters. I remember the prison authorities even collecting prisoner votes for presidential elections. I refused to vote for elections from inside the prison. This refusal often led to arguments, harassment and more interrogations.

43. Here is an example of the harassment I received in prison as an unclean "infidel" or "apostate." I was very close to the small children who were imprisoned along with their mothers and lived in the women's ward. There were twenty-eight of them. The little children usually did not want their mothers to give them a bath, so I bathed them even though I suffered from severe back pain. I had to hold them the whole time because the bathtubs were wet, slippery and very filthy. This strained my back further, but I did it with pleasure. After some time, the *Pasdars* told the mothers that I am a filthy infidel and that they should not leave their children in my hands. The children cried because they did not want their mothers or anyone else to give them a bath. But the mothers eventually gave in out of fear and agreed only to allow me to bathe the children. The final rinsing was left to them.[7] The fact that many of my inmates were forced to pretend that I was "unclean" was very hard on me.

44. Eleven months passed like this. After this, I was interrogated with another group of inmates as some kind of a punitive measure. I wondered why I was being subjected to this new round of interrogations. I was taken for questioning twice a day, sometimes for long hours during the evening. I suffered from severe headaches and lower back pain. Some inmates had begun to think that I had become a *tavvab* because I went back and forth between the ward and interrogation rooms so often. (*Tavvabs* often traveled back and forth when they were in the process of reporting their observations about inmates to prison authorities.)

Transfer to Qezel Hesar Prison

45. I never disclosed anything during the interrogations. They beat me up a bit and threw me back in the ward. One day, one of the guards said, "We will send you to hell!" After this, they transferred me and some others to Qezel Hesar prison.

[6] The Husseiniyih Hall was an amphitheatre in Evin prison where many of the 1988 executions took place.
[7] Some Muslims believe that they should avoid touching water that has come in contact with the body of an unclean "infidel."

46. I finally began to realize why I was being interrogated. Some inmates who were detained in coffins[8] at Qezel Hesar had already confessed. They had given away information about me, which the authorities then used against me. At Evin, we had heard about the horrifying coffins in Qezel Hesar and how they had been used to break prisoners. Some of these prisoners had gone mad and others had turned into hardcore *tavvabs*.

47. There were approximately sixty-three of us in the vehicle that was *en route* to Qezel Hesar. We were discussing what stance to take and what course of action to adopt. Interestingly, when we arrived there, a group that had been sent by Montazeri to investigate complaints by families of those who had been subjected to the coffins arrived at the same time.

48. The authorities became nervous. He instructed us to stay where we were (we had gathered in one of the prison halls) and took off. He was very disoriented. We waited in the hall. We were very hungry, so they brought us some bread and cheese. Then we were locked in a room and left there for three days with food. After three days, they transferred us to Ward 7. Those who were more stubborn were usually taken to Ward 7, and those who they determined were more malleable were taken to Ward 4. But most of us were taken to Ward 7 instead. Once we arrived in Ward 7, we were exposed to prisoners who had just returned from the coffins. Some had completely lost their minds.

Conditions in Qezel Hesar

49. I stayed in this ward from 1984 to 1986. In 1985, they transferred me and thirteen others to another ward because we had continued to maintain our stance. There was really no other reason for the transfer. Unlike other prisoners in my group, I tried not to get into arguments with the guards, but I also did not give in to their demands. I think they were led to believe that I was a more experienced political activist who knew when to pick her battles and provided direction to others. I also had a good relationship with prisoners with varying political beliefs because I did not follow a specific political agenda or group. This was, in fact, one of my biggest problems in prison—I did not side with any particular group or sect. I was on good terms with individuals from other political parties.

50. In any event, in 1985 the above-mentioned group and I were transferred to a place known as the "cowshed," which had apparently been used as a stable at some point in time. It was a horribly filthy place that reeked. We cleaned it up a bit.

51. In 1984, as Montazeri's influence began to increase in Iran's prisons, conflicts began to emerge between officials as to whether or not the prison should be relaxed. Some feared that prisoners would become uncontrollable if they were given more liberties. But after a while prison conditions improved, books were allowed, and access to fresh air became more regular. In fact, some prisoners took advantage of the situation and were able to express their resistance more openly. The *Pasdars* tried to maintain order as they had before, but they eventually caved in to the more relaxed atmosphere.

52. In early 1986, the regime issued an order that all female prisoners were required to wear black *chadors*[9] and pants when they left their cells. We were also forced to wear head

[8] "Coffins" refer to makeshift wood planks that were waist-high and arranged in such a way as to create small sections inside a larger room. Each tight section held an inmate, who was usually blindfolded with their hands tied behind their backs. The inmates were forced to sit upright without back support and with their legs stretched out in front of them. This form of sensory deprivation was made popular by Hajji Davood Rahmani in Qezel Hesar prison.
[9] The *chador* is a veil that covers the whole body.

scarves underneath our black *chadors*. At the time, many of us leftists only wore colored veils. (The Mojahed prisoners usually wore black *chadors* anyway.) The colored veils served as our identification tools. Even when we were blindfolded, we could sneak a peek from under our blindfolds and identify people by the color of their veils. We always tried to wear the same color so we could be easily identified among ourselves. For me in particular, the color of the veil was very important. It helped my husband recognize me in case we ran into each other when we were transferred out of our cells for any reason. (He also wore a particular pair of trousers that immediately allowed me to recognize him.) Because of this, many leftists resisted wearing the black *chadors* for as long as they could.

53. Ultimately, many of the prisoners decided to go on a hunger strike. In response, prison officials prohibited them from seeing visiting family members, gaining access to accommodations or receiving medical treatment until they decided to wear the black *chadors*. They transferred a group of the most stubborn prisoners to an underground cell located close to several torture chambers. Then they brought in several non-political prisoners who had been arrested on prostitution charges and threw them in the same cell. They did this to impugn the prisoners' reputations. After about two years, the group finally gave up and agreed to wear the chadors. I was not a part of this group, but I resisted for a while as well. We declared that we would not leave our wards, even during visitation hours, until the regime changed its position requiring prisoners to wear black *chadors*. This decision meant denying ourselves a valuable source of information—our families—who acted as our contacts to the outside world.

54. I was among those who were not in favor of this move, but I joined in to show solidarity with others. I did not want to sabotage the movement. In any case, the regime did not budge and kept up its pressure and threats. After a while, the resistance broke, the regime segregated us into smaller groups and detained us in different sections of the prison. The family visitations also resumed.

55. The situation in Iran's prisons had changed drastically since 1984, when Lajevardi was removed as the head of prisons. In 1985, Montazeri pardoned many Mojahedin prisoners who were to be executed by the regime. A limited number of leftists signed letters denouncing their political beliefs and were freed. The prison environment changed all of a sudden. The number of prisoners was cut in half and a rather homogenous population remained. Leftists made up the majority of the prisoners. This population mostly included unrepentant inmates who had refused to submit to the authorities' demands. There were also a few *tavvabs* among us, but most had been released as part of the amnesty. Prisoners were generally friendly with each other and there were less frequent confrontations with *tavvabs*. But torture and abuse still existed. Sometimes they arbitrarily summoned one prisoner and whipped her. We were forced to watch this scene, or else we received lashes ourselves.

Transfer Back to Evin

56. I was transferred back to Evin in 1986. After that, visits from both inside and outside the prison followed a relatively normal routine. Everyone was allowed visitation rights, unless they were being penalized. Visitations between inmates, which used to be a privilege and not a right, also became more frequent during this time. Before, the authorities almost always denied this right if the prisoner refused to submit to their demands.

57. My husband was sentenced to death following four separate trials. But his sentence was later overturned and reduced to life imprisonment. This all goes back to Montazeri. In 1984, he announced that political prisoners who had no history of armed resistance and had not threatened the lives of civilians and regime authorities should not be executed simply because of their beliefs. And this was exactly the case with my husband. He was to be executed because of his political opinions. (Of course, his family also tried very hard to save him from execution.) In March 1987, his execution sentence was reduced to life imprisonment. For the first time, I thought it may actually be possible for us to be together again one day. The thought had never crossed my mind before.

58. From the time of my arrest until 1987, I was only been allowed one visit with my husband. After 1987, they allowed more visits. I saw my husband a total of three times before he was executed in 1987. Mojtaba Halvai (who was the head of security at Evin prison) frequently visited his ward and threatened him. He said they told him: “Don’t ever think that we’ll let you off the hook now that you got a life sentence. We *will* kill you!” They often came to me and said the same thing: “We will not let him live. You *will* see his dead body!”

59. By 1987, some prisoners had agreed to write repentance letters denouncing their former political beliefs. This was a precondition to being released. As I previously mentioned, newspapers were allowed inside prison and we read them closely. There were many articles about the war with Iraq and its repercussions. The newspapers often reported on differences between heads of the regime on whether or not the war must go on. These open and frank discussions had never taken place before. Inside prison, we began to feel that the war was entering a new stage and that perhaps the conflict would soon come to an end.

60. Some prisoners were taken for questioning during this period. One of the interrogators, named Reza Ershadi, enjoyed engaging in ideological discussions with prisoners and claimed to be very familiar with the viewpoints of Iranian leftists. One time, he explained that there were two views among regime heads. Some believed that they must execute all political prisoners and create a more open prison atmosphere so that foreigners could not accuse Iran of perpetrating human rights violations. This, he said, was the “easy solution.” The international community would make some noise in the beginning, but they would eventually forget everything. There were others, however, who believed they should free some prisoners and reduce the death sentences of others to life sentences or less.

61. These views generated lots of debate among the women in our section. Opinions varied. I truly believed that they would never release those whom they feared, including politically mature prisoners whom the regime considered very experienced and who had the ability to reorganize the movements outside prison. I thought they would be executed for certain. I even told my fellow inmates, “I don’t think my husband, Hamid, will leave prison alive.” Despite constant discussion and debate over such matters, we never received a definitive answer regarding what the regime would do with us and other political prisoners.

Noticeable Changes Prior to the Summer of 1988

62. A little while later, we noticed that prison authorities had begun regularly questioning us every two weeks in a special room under the staircase. Hosseinzadeh (the deputy warden of Evin prison during the summer of 1988) questioned us one after the other. The

questions were always the same, "What is your name? When were you arrested? What is your opinion on the current wave? What do you think of the Islamic Republic? Do you pray?" Hosseinzadeh often said things we could not make sense of. For example, he would say, "Things are democratic, Madam. Tell me what you really think." When they asked me what I thought of the Islamic Republic, I told them that I did not believe in it. But when it came to whether or not I believed in Marxism, I told them that it was not their business and that I would not discuss my personal beliefs with them. But Hosseinzadeh kept insisting that it was a "democratic environment." We knew he was suggesting something—we did not know what it was, exactly.

63. We knew they were up to something. These regular questionings occurred almost two months before the 1988 massacre. During this time we received some news that prisoners in the male wards were becoming bolder. The regime reacted harshly by beating and torturing many prisoners, which in turn caused more resistance among the inmates. News of such moves reached us in dribs and drabs.

64. Back in the female wards, prison authorities began summoning several prisoners and telling them things like, "Certain events are about to unfold." Or, "Pay attention … In a month or two things will occur that you cannot anticipate." One of them said, "We are telling you—none of you may come out of here alive." But when they said these things, we assumed they were just threats. A fellow inmate, Golzadeh-Ghafouri (who was the daughter of Ayatollah Golzadeh-Ghafouri, and whose brothers had been executed), warned her parents that things were serious.

65. In the past, when interrogators summoned prisoners and questioned them regarding their political affiliation, Mojahedin members always responded "*monafeqin*."[10] But suddenly they began responding with "Mojahedin." This bold move surprised us. We knew something was happening, but did not know what. A little later we found out that those sentenced to life imprisonment had been separated from those with death sentences.

Evin Goes into Lock Down

66. On July 18, 1988, a few fellow inmates who had visitors said they heard on the radio that the regime had accepted United Nations Security Council Resolution 598 and the war had come to an end. On July 20, Nazli, a cellmate of mine, had a visit with her brother who had been sentenced to death in prison. She told us that her brother told her that this could be her last visit with him. We were truly surprised, and there was lots of discussion regarding what would happen next. There was no way we could foresee what would actually happen.

67. Four or five days after the cease-fire, a group of prisoners came back from their visitation sessions and said they saw a note on the hallway that read, "All visits—internal and external—are banned until further notice." This news was very strange to us. This was the first time the prison had cut off visitation rights for everyone, including *tavvabs*. Prior to that, there had never been a period in which they cut off visits for everyone (except during the first wave of arrests that occurred in the early years of the revolution). We were confused as to what was going on. Family visits ended for us.

[10] *Monafeqin* was the derogatory name used by the regime against Mojahedin members. *Monafeq* means 'hypocrite' in Persian.

68. On July 26, we heard about the Mojahedin's "Eternal Light" operation on the radio TV. That was the last night we were allowed access to televisions in our wards. The war had ended, but they continued to broadcast military songs on television in connection with the Mojahedin's defeat. Then all of a sudden we saw images of dead bodies flashing on the screen while the announcer said: "These are the much hated bodies of *monafeqin* … disgracefully defeated in the war." Only then did we realize that the Mojahedin had launched a military attack. After the news segment ended, the television was removed from our ward.

69. That night, around 9:30 p.m. the guards rushed into our ward and removed our television set. They also collected all the newspapers. We were surprised with the speed and ruthlessness with which they did these things. The next day, around thirty Mojahedin prisoners were taken out of our ward.

70. A few days later, we heard the angry words of Ayatollah Mousavi Ardebili who was giving the traditional Friday sermon on the prison loudspeakers. His words whipped the Friday sermon crowd into a frenzy and they began chanting slogans against the country's political prisoners. I will never forget what Ardebili said: "We have been even more compassionate to our prisoners than the Prophet. But they did not appreciate this compassion, and instead collaborated with the *monafeqin* to martyr our children on the field of battle."

71. Then we heard the sermon crowd chant death slogans against the *monafeqin* and others. I do not remember who read the second sermon, but he said, "We will kill ten of them for every fallen *Pasdar* brother." He continued, "Those who were freed from prisons killed our children, so we must show no mercy on the prisoners. They are all agents of our bloodthirsty enemy and they must be destroyed!"

72. That evening we talked about who might be executed and what might happen. Many of us believed that they would leave the leftists alone because we were not involved in any of the military operations conducted by the Mojahedin. But the rest of us believed that this was merely a pretext for them to get rid of the prison issue once and for all.

Mojahedin Prisoners are Summoned

73. The day after, they summoned Mojahedin prisoners in groups. There were thirty-five people in the first group. It was 2 p.m. in the afternoon. By the time they bid us farewell, it was around 4:30. And by the time they were all removed from our ward, it was about 5:30.

74. One of them returned after some time. The regime often did this to send a message to us indirectly and create fear among us. The authorities would pretend that the prisoner had been released by mistake, but they would give them ample time to tell us what they had witnessed. Once the prisoner had relayed the regime's message, they would be taken away again. This prisoner said: "I don't know where they took them, but their papers said Gohar Dasht [Prison]." They used to take prisoners to Gohar Dasht as a punitive measure. But we were still in disbelief.

75. Another strange incident happened that evening. The *Pasdars* were chanting violent slogans. At 9:30 p.m., we heard gun shots. It had been a long time since we had heard gunshots inside the prison because they no longer executed prisoners outdoors. We thought they wanted to create terror among us. We knew that the regime was doing

something dangerous and we knew that they would execute a few, but we could not connect the dots. We did not think the gunshots were related to the state of emergency inside the prisons. We thought they were simply fear-mongering.

76. But over the next several days, they continued taking away Mojahedin members until there were no more of them left. At the time we did not know what had happened to them.

Leftist Prisoners are Whipped

77. Around late August, someone who had spent some time in solitary confinement in the prison's sanitarium building[11] somehow made it to our ward in the rehabilitation building.[12] She snuck up to our ward and told us, from behind the closed door, that leftist prisoners in the sanitarium were being whipped five times a day. She did not say anything else. We did not know why. We recalled that the only time the guards had lashed the prisoners five times a day was during the early 1980s when they wanted to force them to pray. But as far as we knew, they had not lashed anybody since then. We did not understand why they were lashing prisoners now.

78. Then, another group of prisoners who had broken under torture returned to the ward below our ward where Mojahedin and repentant prisoners were being detained. Only then did we fully realize the reason why prisoners were being whipped five times a day. Prisoners who caved in under torture were forced to perform their prayers out loud. Many had a designated *tavvab* who was responsible for monitoring their prayer. Some did not know how to pray. They were harassed by the *Pasdars* and forcibly taught how to pray. It was a group of these prisoners who were brought to our ward. They had resisted for years and had seen and experienced very severe torture throughout their years of detention. But the new campaign of systematic whipping had shattered them and they were now prepared to pray. Some had even signed statements rejecting their former activities in return for the promise of being released. Those who refused to sign these statements remained in prison.

79. The whipping sessions seemed endless. They woke us up in the morning, tied us to a bed and lashed us over and over again. They would repeat this every day at 2 p.m., 4 p.m., 6 p.m., and 9 p.m. We spent most of our time in anticipation of the next round of lashes. It was not only the physical pain that tormented the prisoners, but the anxiety, sleeplessness and the dreadful waiting. Sleep deprivation caused many of us to break.

80. In any case, by the time the broken inmates were returned back to their wards, they were devastated beyond measure. I saw some of them. I believe the guards wanted us to see them in that state. I had seen people who had been broken and had revealed information under torture, but this was entirely different. They refused to talk to anyone. Their presence and demeanor was a tremendous blow to our morale. A prisoner needs to be surrounded by positive energy in order to remain strong and grounded. Seeing them in

[11] The sanitarium building was referred to as the *Asayesh-gah* in Persian. The sanitarium was composed of solitary cells that were, on rare occasions, filled with more than one prisoner. Most of the time, however, prisoners were sent there for punishment and kept in cells by themselves.

[12] In Persian, this building was referred to as the *Amoozesh-gah* (literally, a 'teaching institution' or 'academy'). The *Amoozesh-gah* was a three-story building that had six wards. Each floor had two wards. Wards 1, 2 and 3 were located on one side, and Wards 4, 5 and 6 on the other side of the building. Women *mellikesh* prisoners were kept in Ward 1 on the first floor; Mojahedin and leftist *tavvabs* were kept in Ward 2 on the second floor; and unrepentant prisoners who had not yet finished their terms were on the third floor. Women prisoners, both Mojahedin and leftists, lived together in these wards.

that condition—shattered after having resisted for so many years—was so devastating. Many of us could easily imagine ourselves in their position.

81. Prisoners were taken in groups to be whipped and returned only when they surrendered. Most groups gave up within ten or fifteen days and were returned to the ward. We were next in line and faced with a profound dilemma. If we wished that the other women would resist, it meant we wished them more torture. But wishing their return meant it was our turn to go. It was an infernal state. Some women committed suicide during this time. One slit her wrist and another hanged herself. I was against suicide, but when my turn came, I hid a broken piece of glass in my purse so I could take my life. Others had similar thoughts.

Prison Conditions Return to "Normal"

82. We were awaiting our turn when suddenly a group of prisoners who had not broken under twenty-three days of torture was brought into our cell. We were puzzled. They told us that the prison authorities had stopped the whippings for a week now and had even applied medication on the backs of several prisoners so their wounds would heal faster.

83. That same night, November 3, 1988, the authorities supplied us with paper and told us to write letters to our families requesting that they visit us. We had not seen our families in a long time. We were surprised by these moves and did not know what to make of them. Families who did not receive a letter would eventually come to realize that their loved ones had been killed. Some prisoners who were denied visits were instead allowed to contact their loved ones via telephone. But they never allowed me to contact my husband. I soon realized that this meant that he had probably been executed. I received news of my husband's execution on December 7, 1988.

84. Some women who had been allowed to speak to their brothers or husbands had very strange stories to share. One said that she no longer recognized her husband. He had lost weight and aged tremendously. It was as if many years had passed since they had last seen each other. Then she told us that she had asked her husband what had happened to him and he refused to answer. The only thing he said was, "They made monkeys out of us, and played all kinds of games with us."

85. We were told that we could give flowers to our families. The regime had placed flowers in one corner of the visiting hall so that we could buy them if we wished. On the one hand, the regime was informing families that their loved ones had been executed. And on the other, families of survivors were exchanging sweets and flowers. All of this was happening at the same time, at the same place. It was surreal.

86. Some families exchanged flowers and sweets. Others were given the clothes of their executed loved ones. Some families were told ahead of time that their loved ones would be released in a few days. I watched some of the prisoners who were awaiting release eat sweets. For me, consuming sweets meant celebrating the death of the many who had been executed.

87. They provided the families of those who had been executed with a phone number or an address so they could obtain more information. After some time, female visitors (mostly mothers and wives) were banned from visiting because they had staged serious protests in front of the prison. The regime did not know what to do with these mourning mothers. They tried to avoid them. For example, my mother-in-law was not notified of her son's

death. She had actually called my father and requested that he go collect his clothes on her behalf. Families who had no news of their loved ones were told by the regime to wait at home until they received a call.

88. Twelve days after my family visited me, I was interrogated again. The asked me the same set of questions. I was asked to write a letter of repentance and told that I would be executed the next day if I refused. I refused. We were instructed to write our last will and testament that evening. (By "will" they meant a letter to the family declaring that we were responsible for our execution.) Instead, I wrote a letter to my family reminding them to stay strong. I still have a copy of that letter with me.

89. They did not summon us the day after. But two remaining leftist prisoners were taken away that same night. One of them went on an indefinite hunger strike and another went on a ten-day strike. The former continued her resistance for eighty-three days. She had decided to end her life, but the regime wanted to keep her alive and torment her. She eventually lost consciousness and they put her on an IV. They force-fed her until she caved in. The prison authorities maintained that she was young and impressionable—they would not let her choose death over life. If they did not want her to die, she would not die.

The end.

Look for the following to come from IHRDC:

- The Islamic Republic of Iran's **abuse of human rights** following the June 12, 2009 presidential election

Below is a translation of the poem that is part of the painting of Khavaran cemetery depicted on the front cover. Both the painting and the poem are by the artist Kianoosh Majidi. Her brother was executed at Evin Prison in 1988.

We have idolized Abraham

We send our best and brightest to the slaughter house, and take a knife to their throats

We turn our beloved into Basij, and send them to the front to be martyred

We call the devoted "Mojahed," and hand them over to the executioner

We consider our children Fedai, and march them to the gallows

We are the ones who cut Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir and spilled his blood

For his wisdom was far greater than ours

We are the ones who killed Sohrab

For he was young and noble

We sacrificed Siavash

For he was pure

We need as many victims as there are pebbles at Khavaran, so we can wash away our sins

For we do not appreciate our beloved

And we know not how to love

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