



# Surviving Rape in Iran's Prisons

## **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.

**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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The front cover drawing is by Murtaza Ahmadi, a young artist living in the United States.

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Center

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## Introduction

Allegations of rape and sexual violence of political prisoners by authorities began to emerge after the Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979 and have continued, to varying degrees, to the present. However, not surprisingly, there is no reliable estimate of the number of prisoners raped in the Islamic Republic's prisons; no data or comprehensive report has ever been compiled that portrays the full scope of sexual violence in Iran's prisons. The reasons are simple: few rape victims are willing to speak about their experiences due to (1) government pressure and acquiescence, and (2) social stigma. Iranian authorities have and continue to acquiesce to rapes of prisoners by guards and interrogators who use rape to crush detainees' spirits, inflict humiliation, discourage their dissent, force them to confess to crimes, and ultimately to intimidate them and others.

Rape is always traumatic and has long-term physical, psychological and social effects on victims. Understandably, this means that many victims are unable to publicly acknowledge their experiences, even many years later.<sup>1</sup> Many have never even told their families. Given these circumstances, therefore, it is very likely that the few witnesses who have come forward to report rapes they witnessed and experienced in Iranian prisons represent only a small percentage of the total number of cases.

This report documents the ordeals of five former prisoners – two women and three men. They span the almost 30 years of the Islamic Republic's existence. Four witnesses were raped; one was threatened with rape and saw rape victims. Three of the rape victims were politically active, one in the early days of the revolution and the other two during the last few years. All experienced overtly violent and gang rape. In addition to being gang-raped, one of the victims was sexually exploited by a guard. All were traumatized, and some considered suicide.

IHRDC has interviewed many former prisoners who were raped or threatened with rape in Iranian prisons. While many chose to not tell their stories publicly, we wish to express our heartfelt understanding and thank you to all who agreed to speak with us about their experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> See Golnaz Esfandiari, *New prison rape allegations in Iran bring practice to light*, RADIO FREE EUROPE, Aug. 26, 2009, available at <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1808311.html> (last visited June 3, 2011).



## I. Rape and Sexual Abuse in Iran's Prisons since 1979

Numerous reports of rape and sexual violence of detainees by Iranian authorities surfaced after the June 12, 2009 presidential election.<sup>2</sup> For example, a teenager using the name "Ardeshir" described his detention in an unofficial detention center where he was repeatedly raped and watched others being taken from cells to be raped.<sup>3</sup> A young woman using the name "Sara" reported being repeatedly raped by her interrogator after refusing to disclose the whereabouts of her brother. She reported that her interrogator raped her "from top to bottom" and "stuck up his arm deep into her body." She was forced to falsely confess to having sexual intercourse with her brother. Her interrogator continued to summon and rape her after her release from prison.<sup>4</sup>

A teenager using the name "Reza" told of his arrest with 40 other boys during an opposition demonstration in a "large provincial city." Reza was raped as the other boys watched. After he reported the rape to his interrogator, his interrogator raped him so he would learn not to tell such tales anywhere else.<sup>5</sup> An alleged former *Basij* member reported that rape of detainees was a reward conferred on Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami* or *Sepah*) and *Basij* members for crushing the demonstrations. He told how he and a relative came to realize that *Basij* members were raping children who had been arrested. When his relative confronted the senior officer, he "calmly replied with a smile: 'This is *Fath Al Moin* [aid to victory]. It's a worthy deed. There's nothing wrong with it. Why are you complaining?'"<sup>6</sup>

It soon became public that many demonstrators were detained and severely mistreated at the Kahrizak Detention Center outside Tehran. A former detainee reported hearing screams of younger and quieter detainees being raped. Mehdi Karroubi, a former speaker of the *Majlis*, and a presidential candidate in 2009, published a letter to Ayatollah Rafsanjani, then-head of the Expediency Council, alleging torture and sexual abuse of post-election detainees, and the regime closed the facility.<sup>7</sup> However, as noted by the Iranian lawyer Shadi Sadr, this wave of rapes was not an "incident." It was a continuation of practices that had existed since the 1979 revolution.<sup>8</sup>

During the early days after the revolution, many young men and women were imprisoned for political activities, and/or being members of ethnic or religious minorities, and charged with minor offenses.<sup>9</sup> There were reports of interrogators raping and sexually molesting prisoners. For example, Amnesty

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<sup>2</sup> See IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION CENTER (IHRDC), *VIOLENT AFTERMATH: THE 2009 ELECTION AND SUPPRESSION OF DISSENT IN IRAN* 47-48 (2010), available at <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/3161-violent-aftermath-the-2009-election-and-suppression-of-dissent-in-iran.html> [hereinafter *VIOLENT AFTERMATH*].

<sup>3</sup> Martin Fletcher and Special Correspondent in Tehran, *Raped and beaten for daring to question President Ahmadinejad's election*, *THE TIMES*, Sept. 11, 2009, available at [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle\\_east/article6829921.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6829921.ece).

<sup>4</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY LIBRARY, Boroumand Foundation Interview of "Sara," available at <http://www.iranrights.org/english/document-1512.php>.

<sup>5</sup> Homa Homayoun, *Iranian boy who defied Tehran hardliners tells of prison rape ordeal*, *THE TIMES*, Aug. 22, 2009, available at [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle\\_east/article6805885.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6805885.ece).

<sup>6</sup> Lindsey Hilsum, *Iran militia man, 'I hope God forgives me,'* Dec. 16, 2009, available at <http://www.channel4.com/news/iran-militia-man-i-hope-god-forgives-me>.

<sup>7</sup> See *VIOLENT AFTERMATH*, *supra* note 2, at 51; Letter from Mehdi Karroubi to Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, Head of the Expediency Council (July 31, 2009), *English translation available at* <http://khordaad88.com/?p=75>.

<sup>8</sup> Shadi Sadr, *Feminist Attorney Speaks Out Against Rape As a Weapon of Torture in Iran* [translated by Frieda Afary], *PAYVAND IRAN NEWS*, Sept. 8, 2009, available at <http://www.payvand.com/news/09/sep/1080.html>.

<sup>9</sup> See AYATOLLAH HOSSEIN-ALI MONTAZERI, KHATIRAT-I AYATOLLAH MONTAZERI, MAJMU'YYIH PAYVASTHA VA DASTNIVISHA [MEMOIR OF AYATOLLAH MONTAZERI, THE COLLECTION OF APPENDICES AND HANDWRITTEN NOTES] 585 (2001) [hereinafter *MONTAZERI'S MEMOIRS*].

International reported the rape of a girl in a solitary cell by *Sepah* members in 1982. Amnesty reported that “she was forced to undress and submit to oral and anal sex. She was virgin.”<sup>10</sup>

Beginning in 1985, United Nations Special Representatives to Iran issued regular reports documenting allegations of sexual violence and rape in prisons. In a 1987 report, the Special Representative noted that six sympathizers of the People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran testified about experiencing and witnessing many forms of torture, including sexual abuse, in Iranian prisons.<sup>11</sup> One woman, Mina Vatani, reported that she witnessed seventy persons being executed in Evin prison in early 1982, and that the victims included pregnant women and women who had been raped before being executed.<sup>12</sup> The Special Representative also reported that three of the witnesses were examined by Dr. Claudine Jeannet of Geneva in 1986. Dr. Jeannet certified that as a result of being raped, a woman named Azame had many “serious infections that required the removal of her appendix and uterus and an operation on her left ovary.”<sup>13</sup>

In his 1988 and 1989 reports, the Special Representative reported witness testimony that prison authorities had raped prisoners.<sup>14</sup> In 1988, the Representative held informal hearings at which sixteen former prisoners testified about their knowledge and experiences of prison conditions and torture, including rape. Seven were Bahá'ís and nine “described themselves as sympathizers of the Mojahedin organization.”<sup>15</sup> One witness testified that a woman in her sixties was raped and executed; another stated that she witnessed revolutionary guards raping girls.<sup>16</sup> There were also reports of threats of sexual abuse made to female prisoners and female relatives of male prisoners.<sup>17</sup> The 1989 report described the testimony of Shahrzad Alavi Shahidi who reported that a female prisoner became mad after suffering torture and rape. The authorities did not provide physical or psychological care, and she committed suicide in prison.<sup>18</sup>

Witnesses also told the Special Representative that government authorities had given families of several executed female political prisoners certificate of marriages of their executed relatives. The certificates allegedly indicated that the prisoners had been raped before execution.<sup>19</sup> Many have similarly reported that virgin girls sentenced to execution were forced into temporary marriages with prison guards because the guards believed young girls executed while virgins would go to heaven.<sup>20</sup> Once married, the guards

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, *Newsletter*, Apr. 1985, vol. XV, No. 4, available at <http://www.iranrights.org/english/document-105-316.php>. Over the years since, former prisoners have spoken of rape in prison. See, e.g., PARVIN PAIDAR, WOMEN AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRAN 347 (1995); Nasrin Parvaz, *Zireh Boteh Lala Abasi*, [Under the Magnolia Bush] Chapter 10, at 1 (2002), available at <http://www.nasrinparvaz.com/Book/10.htm>; Reza Allamehzadeh, Video Interview of Nina Aghdam, *Are, Halem Khoba . . . [Yes, I'm fine]*, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTM3MyzcsM&NR=1>.

<sup>11</sup> U.N. Econ. & Soc. Council [ECOSOC], Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Special Representative of the Commission, Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl*, ¶ 50, U.N. Doc. [E/CN.4/1987/23](http://www.unhcr.org/refugees/ref/4/CN.4/1987/23) (Jan. 28, 1987) [hereinafter Galindo Pohl Report 1987].

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* ¶ 47(a).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* ¶ 51(a).

<sup>14</sup> ECOSOC, Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Special Representative of the Commission, Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl*, ¶ 9, U.N. Doc. [E/CN.4/1988/24](http://www.unhcr.org/refugees/ref/4/CN.4/1988/24) (Jan. 25, 1988) [hereinafter Galindo Pohl Report 1988]; U.N. General Assembly, Report of the Economic and Social Council, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Note by the Secretary-General*, ¶78, U.N. Doc. A/44/620 (Nov. 2, 1989) [hereinafter Secretary-General Note 1989].

<sup>15</sup> U.N. General Assembly, Report of the Economic and Social Council, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Note by the Secretary-General*, ¶¶ 12-16, U.N. Doc. A/43/705 (Oct. 13, 1988) [hereinafter Secretary-General Note 1988].

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 14 and 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* ¶ 34.

<sup>18</sup> Secretary-General Note 1989, *supra* note 14, ¶ 34.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* ¶ 27.

<sup>20</sup> Temporary marriage in Iran (*siqih* or *nikah-i munqati'*) is a legal contract between a man (married or not) and an unmarried woman. At the time of marriage, the woman must be an unmarried virgin, divorced or widowed. In the contract, both parties agree on the time period for the relationship and the bride gift (*mihriyyih*) to be paid to the woman. A man can marry as many



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raped the girls to prevent them from going to heaven.<sup>21</sup> It has also been reported that, on some occasions, the authorities sent families money and sweets with the bodies of executed female prisoners.<sup>22</sup>

The regular use of sexual violence and rape in Iranian prisons was confirmed in a 1986 letter to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini from his designated successor Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montezari:

Do you know that in the Islamic Republic prisons, young girls are possessed by force? Do you know that it is a common practice to abuse girls with foul languages during interrogations? Do you know that there are many prisoners, who have been blinded, deafened, paralyzed or suffer from serious pains due to inhuman treatments and nobody addresses their plight?<sup>23</sup>

However, reports of rape by interrogators and guards continued. In 1990, the Special Representative continued to report that “a virgin woman condemned to death goes through forced matrimony and is deflowered before the death sentence is carried out.”<sup>24</sup> Navab-Ali Ghaem-Maghami was reported to have been sexually molested by the authorities in Ghom prison, and forced to watch other prisoners being tortured. His clothes were allegedly soiled with urine and excrement from other prisoners.<sup>25</sup> Mehrangiz Yeganeh was repeatedly and brutally raped while serving two and a half years in Tabriz prison. The rapes caused damage to her intestines requiring surgery.<sup>26</sup> A male prisoner was allegedly forced to perform sexual acts and another was sexually abused by four prison guards.<sup>27</sup>

In 1991, a former prisoner told the Special Representative that he had witnessed investigators raping young women.<sup>28</sup> In 1992, the Representative reported that the head of Ghazvin prison and a religious judge, Hojatol-Eslam Haj-Agha Khaleghi, was alleged to have made sexual advances to female prisoners and if they resisted, subject them to torture and rape. He was arrested but released after a short time and continued to work as an interrogator at the prison.<sup>29</sup>

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women as he wants through temporary marriage. A woman cannot be involved in more than one temporary marriage at once, and cannot enter into a new temporary marriage before completing a waiting period mandated by law. *See Ahkam-i Siqih [Laws of Temporary Marriage]* under *Ahkam-i Nikah [Laws of Marriage]*, RISALIHYYH IMAM KHOMEINI, available at <http://takteb.ir/articles/45-islam/298-ahkam.html>.

<sup>21</sup> See Galindo Pohl Report 1987, *supra* note 11; MARINA NEMAT, PRISONER OF TEHRAN 101 (2007); Shahrnush Parsipur, *Zindani Tehrah [Tehran Prisoner], a Critique of Tehran Prisoner by Marina Nemat*, RADIO ZAMANEH, Feb. 25, 2009, available at [http://zamaaneh.com/parsipur/2009/02/post\\_234.html](http://zamaaneh.com/parsipur/2009/02/post_234.html) (last visited June 6, 2011); Alahi Shad interview with Soudabeh Ardavan, *Ba doxtaran adami tajavez mishod ke ba behesht naravand*, [Girls Sentenced to Execution were Raped to Deny Them Heaven], RADIO FARDA, Aug. 16, 2009, [hereinafter Shad interview with Ardavan], available at [http://www.radiofarda.com/content/F7\\_Soudabeh\\_Ardavan\\_IV\\_on\\_Torture\\_in\\_Iran\\_Prisons/1800927.html](http://www.radiofarda.com/content/F7_Soudabeh_Ardavan_IV_on_Torture_in_Iran_Prisons/1800927.html) (last visited June 6, 2011); Nasrin Parvaz, *Zindan idama darad v man az “tavabin” dafa mikonem [Prison Continues and I “Defend” the Repentant]*, Aug. 4, 2007, available at <http://www.nasrinparvaz.com/M/Marina%20Nemat.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> See IRAN BRIEFING, *Female Prisoners Raped Before Execution “Lest They Go To Paradise,”* Aug. 26, 2010, available at <http://iranbriefing.net/?p=62>; Shad interview with Ardavan, *supra* note 20.

<sup>23</sup> MONTAZERI'S MEMOIRS, *supra* note 9, at 586-587; REZA AFSHARI, HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN, THE ABUSE OF CULTURAL RELATIVISM 105 (2001).

<sup>24</sup> U.N. General Assembly, Report of the Economic and Social Council, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Note by the Secretary-General*, ¶ 82, U.N. Doc. A/45/697 (Nov. 6, 1990) [hereinafter Secretary-General Note 1990].

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* ¶ 55(k).

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* ¶ 55(y).

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 55(s) and (u).

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* ¶ 129.

<sup>29</sup> ECOSOC, Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl*, ¶ 134, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1992/34 (Jan. 2, 1992) [hereinafter Galindo Pohl Report 1992].

Beginning in 1999, imprisoned journalists, bloggers, and students reported that interrogators raped and threatened them with rape.<sup>30</sup> Prisoners were also threatened with arrest and rape of their family members unless they confessed. For example, Ahmad Batebi, featured on the cover of the July 13, 1999 issue of *The Economist* participating in a student demonstration, wrote in a public letter that, “[d]uring the interrogations, they threatened several times to execute me and to torture and rape my family members as well as imprison them for long terms.”<sup>31</sup>

Omid Memarian, a journalist and blogger, was arrested in 2004 and spent six and a half months in detention. He reported that his interrogator

[u]sed very graphic sexual language during the interrogation process. He often called me “pretty boy.” Sometimes he played with my face, or grabbed my cheeks and ears, or gently brushed my arms and shoulders with his hands. When he did these things, I became extremely worried. I thought he would do something to me. As he did these things he would tell me, in graphic fashion, what he wanted from me. When he explained these things, I often began to cry. I felt horrible. I was in a room alone with a fifty-five year old man, discussing sexual issues which I could not even discuss with my closest friends.<sup>32</sup>

While transferring Memarian to Evin prison, a guard warned: “God willing, they will eventually make a groom out of you.” Memarian remembers that he “knew there is a history of rape in Iran’s prisons,” and therefore “did not doubt the fact that they were capable of doing such things.”<sup>33</sup> Ali Afshari, a student leader in Iran, had similar experiences after he was arrested for the third time in early 2000. His interrogator whispered in his ear that he would be raped if he did not confess, and then described how it would be done by inserting a bottle in his anus.<sup>34</sup>

“Mahdis,” a young woman arrested in 2002 following a student protest and held in Evin prison, reported that she was repeatedly raped by her interrogators:

Following my second interrogation, I was raped for three days. I was bleeding, but they did not even give me a pad. They raped me in a violent manner. The two men never said their names. They called each other “Seyyed” or “Haji.” The first time, I begged them not to rape me and I told them that I was a virgin. But they calmly said, “You haven’t tasted it? Now taste it!” The interrogators cut my clothes with scissors so that they could take them off. My arm was wounded by the scissors. They told me that if I said a thing, they would kill my entire family. I was really injured.<sup>35</sup>

In 2002, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women reported that Soraya Dalaian had been repeatedly raped by two men over a 24-hour period in Evin Prison in 1997. She reported that this was not

<sup>30</sup> See Amnesty International, *Iran: Five Years of injustice and ill treatment: Akbar Mohammadi-Case Sheet*, July 7, 2004, AI Index MDE 13/027/2004, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/42ae98bd0.pdf> (“in 2000 and 2001 former students who arrived in European countries seeking asylum were able seek treatment for incidences of torture – including instrumental rape carried out on men – that were allegedly carried out by officials during and after the July 1999 events of 18 Tir”).

<sup>31</sup> *Public letter of Ahmad Batebi (Hero of the Economist) to the Special investigation team of the Islamic judiciary*, Mar. 23, 2000, English translation available at, <http://www.iranrights.org/english/document-201-392.php>.

<sup>32</sup> IHRDC, FORCED CONFESSIONS: TARGETING IRAN’S CYBER-JOURNALISTS 31 (2009), available at <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/3159-forced-confessions-targeting-iran-s-cyber-journalists.html>.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> IHRDC, Witness Statement of Ali Afshari, at 13, available at <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/witness-testimony/3175-witness-statement-ali-afshari.html>.

<sup>35</sup> IHRDC, Witness Statement of “Mahdis,” at 6, available at <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/witness-testimony/3181-witness-statement-mahdis.html>.

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an isolated case and that women prisoners were systematically raped by judges and high-ranking officials. She alleged there were suites available in prisons for that specific purpose.<sup>36</sup>

Canadian-Iranian photo-journalist Zahra Kazemi was arrested and detained in Evin prison in 2003. She was admitted to the hospital a few days later with extensive injuries, including evidence that she had suffered a “very brutal rape.” She died from her injuries.<sup>37</sup> A student activist reported that when he and fellow activists were detained in July 2007, interrogators threatened them with rape with soda bottles or hot eggs in an effort to convince them to confess to serious charges.<sup>38</sup>

However, Islamic Republic authorities have consistently denied allegations of rape, and failed to address complaints, intervene or protect victims.<sup>39</sup> The United Nations has never received a satisfactory response to its repeated requests for verification of rape allegations. For example, in response to a request for verification of the rape allegations against the religious judge in 1992, the Iranian Ambassador stated that the name had not been found in the Ghazvin prison or civil registries. He also reported that there had not been any proven case of torture in Iran in 1990 and 1991.<sup>40</sup> In 2001, the U.N. Special Representative and the Rapporteur on Violence against Women jointly requested information on Soraya Dalaian's rape allegations. The Islamic Republic responded with the alleged dates of her imprisonment but failed to acknowledge her rape allegations.<sup>41</sup>

In 2009, multiple regime agencies launched investigations into the deplorable conditions, including allegations of sexual abuse and rape, at the Kahrizak Detention Center. While some guards and judicial officials were arrested and disciplined,<sup>42</sup> the investigators denied finding any evidence of rape. In December 2009, the *Majlis* Special Committee to Investigate the Situation of the Detainees of the Post-Election Events issued a report that concluded:

The Committee members had other investigations and the committee of the Secretariat of the Supreme National Security Council also investigated the matter in detail, and the results of all three committees of the *Majlis*, the judiciary, and the Supreme National Security Council conformed to one another completely, and it is announced that after the comprehensive investigations, we have not gotten to any case of sexual assault and strongly deny that.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ECOSOC, Commission on Human Rights, *Report of the special Rapporteur on Violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/49, communication to and from Government*, ¶ 49, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/2002/83/Add.1 (Jan. 28, 2002) [hereinafter Coomaraswamy Report], available at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G02/104/44/PDF/G0210444.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> IHRDC, IMPUNITY IN IRAN: THE DEATH OF ZAHRA KAZEMI 7-8 (2006), available at <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/3148-impunity-in-iran-the-death-of-photojournalist-zahra-kazemi.html>.

<sup>38</sup> See HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, YOU CAN DETAIN ANYONE FOR ANYTHING: IRAN'S BROADENING CLAMPDOWN ON INDEPENDENT ACTIVISM 43 (2008).

<sup>39</sup> See Secretary-General Note 1990, *supra* note 24, at 4; Galindo Pohl Report 1987, *supra* note 11, at 18-23.

<sup>40</sup> Galindo Pohl Report 1992, *supra* note 29, ¶ 359.

<sup>41</sup> Coomaraswamy Report, *supra* note 36, ¶ 50; ECOSOC, Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, prepared by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Maurice Danby Copithorne*, 31, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/2002/42 (Jan. 16, 2002), available at [http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa0238025668700518ca4/40fc68cd8a9a97f9c1256b8100525f97/\\$FILE/G0210126.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa0238025668700518ca4/40fc68cd8a9a97f9c1256b8100525f97/$FILE/G0210126.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> IHRDC, A YEAR LATER: SUPPRESSION CONTINUES IN IRAN 13 (2010), available at <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/3162-a-year-later-suppression-continues-in-iran.html>.

<sup>43</sup> VIOLENT AFTERMATH, *supra* note 2, at 48.

## II. Prison Rape Violates International and Iranian Law

Although rape is a crime in the Islamic Republic, as noted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the evidentiary standards are high and difficult to prove. In 2005, she noted that “[a] victim of rape can only prove her claim by presenting several male witnesses.” She described a case where the rape victim was unable to meet this threshold and therefore was charged with adultery.<sup>44</sup> The evidentiary requirements are even more difficult to meet for victims in prison.

Prison rape constitutes an act of torture, which is absolutely prohibited under both Iranian and international human rights law. Article 38 of the Iranian Constitution provides that “all forms of torture for the purpose of extracting confessions or acquiring information are forbidden.”<sup>45</sup> The international prohibition against torture is codified in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).<sup>46</sup> It is also set forth in several other international instruments, including Article 7 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which provides that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”<sup>47</sup> While the Islamic Republic has declined to be a party to CAT, its authorities are still obligated to respect the Convention’s terms as it merely codified the already-existing universal prohibition against torture.<sup>48</sup>

Torture is defined in CAT as

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession . . . when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.<sup>49</sup>

The U.N. Special Rapporteurs on Torture have consistently noted that rape in prison is torture.<sup>50</sup> For example, the first Rapporteur included rape as a method of physical torture in his 1986 report<sup>51</sup> and reiterated his position in 1992:

Since it was clear that rape or other sexual assaults against woman in detention were a particular ignominious violation of the inherent dignity and the right to physical integrity of the human being, they accordingly constituted an act of torture.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See ECOSOC, Commission on Human Rights, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Yakin Erturk*, ¶ 56, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/2006/61/add.3 (Jan. 27, 2006), available at <http://www.universalhumanrightsindex.org/documents/848/822/document/en/text.html>.

<sup>45</sup> *Qanun-i Assasiyih Jumhuriyih Islamiyih Iran* [Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran] 1358 [adopted 1979, amended 1989], art. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, GA res. 39/46, annex, 39 UN GAOR Supp. (No. 51) at 197, UN Doc. A/39/51 (1984); 1465 UNTS 85 [hereinafter Convention Against Torture].

<sup>47</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 7, Mar. 23, 1976, 999 U.N.T.S. 171 [hereinafter ICCPR]. Iran signed the ICCPR on April 4, 1968 and ratified the agreement on June 24, 1975 without reservations.

<sup>48</sup> See Renee C. Redman, *Defining “Torture”: The Collateral Effect on Immigration Law of the Attorney General’s Narrow Interpretation of “Specifically Intended” When Applied to United States Interrogators*, 62 N.Y. UNIV. ANNUAL SURVEY OF AM. LAW 465, 470 (2007).

<sup>49</sup> Convention Against Torture, *supra* note 46, art. 1.

<sup>50</sup> The U.N. Commission on Human Rights first appointed a special Rapporteur to “examine questions relevant to torture” in 1985. In 2008, the mandate was extended for three years. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, *Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/torture/rapporteur/index.htm>.

<sup>51</sup> ECOSOC, Commission on Human Rights, *Report by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. P. Kooijmans*, ¶ 119, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1986/15 (Feb. 19, 1986), available at [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/CHR/report/E-CN\\_4-1986-15.pdf](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/CHR/report/E-CN_4-1986-15.pdf).









**Witness Statement of Saeeda Siabi**

**Name:** Saeeda Siabi  
**Place of Birth:** Azerbaijan, Iran  
**Date of Birth:** July 11, 1960  
**Occupation:** Housewife

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

**Date of Interview:** January 19, 2011

**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Saeeda Siabi. It was approved by Ms. Siabi on May 28, 2011.

## Statement

### Background

1. My name is Saeeda Siabi. I'm from Azerbaijan, Iran. On December 22, 1981, I was arrested with my husband and my four month old son. I spent four and a half years in prison, and suffered severe mistreatment, sexual harassment and rape during interrogation.
2. It's painful to remember the bitter memories of the past. I've forgotten some incidents that happened to me in prison 29 years ago but there are things that I can never forget. Today, I would like to share with you some of those bitter memories.
3. I grew up in a politically active family. My husband and I were both political activists. Like our families, we were engaged in political activities against the Islamic Republic right from the inception of the regime. We believed that the establishment of a clerical system was a step backward for the Iranian people. We believed the clerics were ignorant, savage and barbaric people who would lead our beloved country to destruction. Thus, both of our families were against the regime.
4. The early years of the revolution were very difficult years for all Iranians. The regime brutally targeted the opposition. They arrested, tortured, decapitated and executed them. The regime gradually curtailed the political freedom of political activists.
5. Due to financial hardship, I was living with my sister and brother-in-law, a newly married couple, in a house in Tabriz city. After a while, we understood that it was unsafe for us to live in that house. Therefore, we started looking for a new house.
6. Realizing the imminent danger and that our comrades had been arrested, my brother-in-law and sister left the house. My husband and I looked for a new house. Meanwhile, one of our comrades who were arrested betrayed us and gave our address while under torture. Thus, my husband and I were arrested.

### Arrest

7. It was 4:30 in the morning. I was awake breastfeeding my baby. We had a guest, a young guy, that night, too. Because oil was rationed and we did not have extra oil, he was sleeping with us in the same room. We could hardly heat one room. Around that time, I suddenly heard beating on all the doors and then a rush of footsteps on the stairs and roof. I looked outside and saw that IRGC guards were everywhere. We lived on a dead end road. The street was full of guards.
8. Immediately, the IRGC entered my house. They were armed. Without questioning, they arrested everyone including our young guest. I asked the reasons for my arrest. They said, "Madam! We have a question for you and you'll be back soon. There is no need to worry." It was the common lie they told everybody who was arrested during those years. We all knew it.
9. They searched our house thoroughly, even inside our shoes. We had placed a *Tofan* party's publication in a pressure cooker. They found it and took it with them. Half an hour later, they took us out of the house, blindfolded us and made us sit in a *Pikan* car. They didn't allow me to put on my shoes. They took me with sandals. They separated us and put us in different cars and blindfolded us. Before covering my eyes, I noticed in a blink that there were four cars ahead of us and four behind us in front of the house. They drove us to a *Sepah* center. Some guards stayed in

our home though. Later we found out that they arrested everyone who had happened to visit us. They believed it was a team house.

10. When we got out of the car, my husband who was a very smart and knowledgeable person and never tired of reading books told me, "Please, forgive me if we don't see each other again." I told him "No, don't say such a thing. They said they had one question for us and would release us." He looked at me and said, "It is too late. You must be smart from now on."
11. We were separated. They took my son and me to a room in which I could only stand. It was a one by one meter room. It was January and the weather was extremely cold. My son and I didn't have warm clothes either.

### **Interrogation**

12. Interrogation began immediately. Interrogators came one after another in succession and asked questions. I was blindfolded and could hear only their voices. They had gathered comprehensive information about us and knew about my political rank, real name and the name by which I was known among my comrades. I guess the person who had betrayed us had provided this information.
13. My interrogators used very foul words during interrogation and addressed me with insults and humiliating words. Their foul language was very excruciating. They called me whore and accused me of immorality and sexual intercourse with members of my party in team homes. They told me that I was a person who had no moral values. They accused us of sharing everything with each other in the team homes. They believed that we were sleeping with each other. It was absolutely not true.
14. First the interrogators asked me to reveal the identity of my comrades and the whereabouts of my brother and sister - otherwise they would do this or that to me. They asked for the names of every person I knew. I said that I did not know. When they didn't get what they wanted, they took me to a torture room through a narrow corridor. I was on my way when the radio announced it was 6:30 in the morning. A short while later, the torture began.
15. They beat me with anything that was accessible to them like cable, wire and lashes. They hit me on the soles of my feet. Then they forced me to walk. Sometimes they crushed my feet with their army boots. I was holding my son and some of their blows hit my son too. My main concern was him and I wanted to protect him at any cost. They knew that I was very vulnerable with respect to my son. They wanted to exploit it in order to make me confess.
16. On the first night, when I was brought back to my cell after hours of torture, I noticed that I had many wounds on my head and back. The next day, they hit me with lashes on the soles of my feet. They tied me to an iron bed that was about 60 to 70 centimeters. They made me lie on the bed face down and tied my hands and feet to the bed. Then they took off my clothes and covered me with a thin blanket. Meanwhile, they covered my hair with a scarf to make it seem Islamic. They made my son sit in a corner of the room. He screamed while they beat me. Sometimes, his throat became sore and blood came from his mouth. He was four months old and it was very hard for him to bear.
17. During the first month, they mistreated me for hours every day. After a while, they changed my cell and placed me in a room that was one by one and a half meters. Living in that room was a torture by itself. It was very dirty. There were lots of anti-regime slogans on the wall. Some of

those slogans inspired me. Prisoners had engraved them on the wall. Some had written the date of their execution and some the date of their tortures. All the slogans were depicted on the wall. There were six or seven blankets in the room too. All of them were dirty. There was blood, barf, urine, stool, and hair on the blankets. I couldn't use any of the blankets there. I knocked on the door and asked for blankets. They gave me one but it was dirtier than the ones I had. The floor was tile and very cold. I was worried about my son.

18. There was a sealed door in my cell that seemed permanently locked. There was a thick icicle around 20 inches long dangled from the roof at the corner of the door too. It extended from roof to floor. Apparently rain water had leaked in and formed the icicle there.
19. We were allowed to use the restroom for 10 to 15 minutes three times a day. The water was cold and I had to clean my son with cold water and wash my hands and face with it.
20. Our guards were both men and women. Women, however, made up the majority. Women were on duty for two days and men for one. Some men were kind and allowed me to use the restroom for half an hour. For instance, there was a middle-aged guard who was very kind. He was kinder and behaved very gently with me. When he was on duty, he gave me more time to spend in the restroom. He didn't knock on the door when I took a long time. There were eight cells in that prison. He used to take everybody out before my turn arrived.
21. Torture continued for a month. I faced difficult troubles but became very determined too. I told them that I would not say a word anymore even if I were killed. They asked me about my brother, sister and father. Meanwhile, they succeeded in capturing my father and mistreated him badly. I knew that if they captured my siblings, they would do the same things to them. Therefore, I was determined not to open my mouth under any sort of pressure. My brothers and sisters were at large. My family was literally disbanded at the time. It was a very difficult time for my family.
22. The worst torture for me was to hear the voice of my husband under torture. When they tortured him, I could hear his voice in my room. They deliberately played his voice live for me through speakers at my room. I was ready to go through thousands of forms of torture in order not to hear my husband's voice. It was the most painful torture. I could not stand it. It was breaking and killing me.
23. The skin of my son's feet was burned by pee as I had no clothes and diapers to keep him clean. There was not enough food. After a while, my milk dried up and I didn't have milk or food to feed him. My son kept crying because he was hungry. When I think about those days, I wonder how on earth I tolerated the pain, the stress, the torture, and the psychological pressure and still took good care of my son.

### **Denial of my Child Custody**

24. A week after my arrest, they took my son from me. It was another method of their torture. My son was hurt there. They told me that I was not allowed to bring up a kid as a non-believer in an Islamic country. They said that my milk was religiously prohibited because I was a non-believer. They said that I was an infidel and I was not a proper mom to my son. The next time they came and said that they had decided to give my son to an orphanage to bring him up. I did not give up my son. I told them they could take my son over my dead body. A woman *Pasdar* came to take him from me by force. I hit her in the stomach. She fell to the ground, insulted me, and went away.

25. Then a strong *Sepah* man came and insulted me and said, “Whore, don’t think God has given this son to you. He has given him to the Islamic Government. You don’t have any right over him.” He came and pulled him away from my arm. He was pulling him toward himself and I was holding him in my arms. At this time, I heard a clicking sound from my son’s back. My hands loosened. I thought my son was split in two. He fell on the ground and he took him away.
26. Then they took me to the interrogation room and said that I did not deserve my son because I was an infidel and my hands were “dirty.” When my hands touch him, he gets dirty. They said that he was God’s creature and should be brought up by Muslims. During interrogation, I heard my son’s voice and understood that it was another method of torture to extract information from me. Later I understood that a lady prisoner took care of my son at the time they questioned me that day. I met the lady who took care of my son in the general ward when I was transferred there later on.
27. They interrogated me for two hours. After two hours they brought my son back. He was crying hard. They mistreated me badly during those two hours. They beat me. Sometimes on my back, sometime on my feet, sometimes on my head. They threatened that I would never see my son again. They said that they would kill my son. I knew within my heart that they would not harm my son. However, I was worried that he might have been hurt forever. I’ve not been able to say this thing had happened to him in prison yet. I can’t tell him either. I took him to the doctor. He was in a lot of pain. A doctor told me that he has sciatica.

## **Rape**

28. A week after my arrest after they realized they could not break me, they threatened me with rape. They told me that I was useless and worthy of nothing. They could do anything with me.
29. I was crushed when they threatened me with rape. I grew up in a political family and was politically active from childhood. I had never thought about sexual violence and it had never come to my mind that one day I would be a victim of sexual violence. Just the thought of rape devastated me. I got mad and very angry. I told them, “You were wrong. You can’t do this to me.” They did it out of spite.
30. They took me to a torture room and tied me to a bed. I was wounded and injured but I forgot about wounds and injuries. I thought I was fainting. The anger and the depth of the impending tragedy and the prospect of being raped were suffocating me. I could hardly take a breath. I thought about my son and what he would make of it. I was concerned about the negative impact of rape on him. I was afraid that he could hear and see. I was only thinking about him-just him.
31. Meanwhile, it came to my mind that if they played my husband’s voice at my room, they would play my voice while being raped to him at his room too. Therefore, I tried to suppress my voice. I tried to not make any sort of sound to hint that I was being raped.
32. I thought I had a stroke. I was lying as if I were unconscious. Moments later I felt only... I felt weak, miserable, hatred, and anger. I fell unconscious. When I regained consciousness, I found myself in my cell. I felt extreme burning. In fact, the burning revived me. The burning was thousands times worse than torture. I felt they had inserted something hot or a sharp knife in my back. It was a horrible feeling, absolutely horrible.
33. I wished I was dead. I felt guilty. I thought I was contaminated, tainted and tarnished forever. I cried and cried heavily. My cry was very painful. I felt ruined, degraded and destroyed. I felt I



had been emptied of everything and that there was nothing to live for. I felt I was dirty and that I had no value any more. I felt void and emptiness.

34. I had my period when I was raped. They knew about it. A lady *Pasdar* had asked me about my period before. She came to me before the rape and asked me if I had my period. I told her that it was none of her business. She asked, "How would you do it when you are having your period?!" I asked, "Would you give me a pad if I tell you that I'm having my period?" She said, she did not mean that. Without thinking of her purpose, I told her that I had my period. Thus, I felt a lot of pain in my back. They raped me from both sides. From my back too. I was bleeding. I did not have anything to clean myself. I used my scarf. I used one side of my scarf for my son and the other side for my own purposes. I'm certain of my back. I felt burning pain. I do not ever want to remember this. I can't reckon with this. Whenever it comes to my mind, I try to forget it. I've not been able to address it. Recently, after thirty years, I can reckon with it somehow. My mind is helpless. I can't think how it happened.
35. They were three persons. I didn't know at that time. I was in shock and fear. I had forgotten about the wounds in my back and feet. I felt they had inserted a sharp burning knife in me. It was painful and horrible. I cried. I cried a lot. I felt ruined, wicked, despicable, degraded and destroyed.
36. Time had no meaning for me in prison. I didn't think about time there. Passage of seconds, hours, days and nights were meaningless for me. I was in a dark room. I didn't know how long I was unconscious. I could not guess how much time had passed while I was in that condition there.
37. Years later when I came to Canada and visited a psychologist, I understood that rape is a form of torture and that there is no difference between rape and other sorts of torture. But at that time, I felt sin and guilt. Since then I've never dared to look at my son's eyes. He was four months old but now he is 29 years old.
38. I guess it was the fifteenth day when I was raped for the second time. I don't know about the exact date and time because my cell was dark. There were lots of lines on the wall. Every prisoner had made his own calendar. I had my own. I drew a line on the wall every day that passed. Thus, I think that day was the fifteenth day after my arrest.
39. The cell's door did not open that day. Prisoners usually made noise when they wanted food or wanted to use the restroom. That night, however, hours passed, nobody came, the prisoners did not make any noise. There was a strange kind of silence in the prison. When guards did not show up, we knew that there was no one around; so we spoke with each other. Other prisoners often asked me about my husband, my son and how old he was. They asked very basic questions. They didn't ask about my crime and charges. That night, however, there was no guard around; I didn't hear anybody's voice.
40. It was the second week of my imprisonment. I did not touch hot water all this time. My son's feet were raw because he peed on himself and because I had to clean him with cold water. In fact, all of his body was scratched. I cleaned his neck, hands and feet with cold water. I had fifteen minutes and I had to do this within fifteen minutes. He had two pieces of clothing and I had to keep one clean all the time.
41. When nobody came that night to open the door, I thought everybody had given up and fallen asleep. That night, I realized why the cells were so dirty. They didn't allow prisoners to use the restroom.

42. I usually knew when the guards changed shifts at midnight. But that night, I didn't hear any footsteps outside. I wondered why the guards did not change shifts. Suddenly, I heard footsteps behind the door to my room that seemed sealed permanently. Somebody knocked on the door.
43. I kept silent. I realized the footsteps were different from the sounds I used to hear when guards changed shifts. They were coming closer to my room. I thought they had come to take me for an interview, the restroom or questioning. I was thinking about these things when the small outlet on the door opened.
44. He had an ugly look. Very ugly. He had a beard. He stared at me. I thought he was about to attack me. I got scared and went back and hid myself in the corner of my cell. His looks troubled me. His horrifying stares terribly terrified me. I pulled my scarf down and covered my son who was in my arms.
45. He signaled me to come to him. I said, "No." Then, he went out towards the cells where interrogators questioned us. After a while, he came back with keys; opened the door very softly, entered the room and came toward me. He threatened me to keep silent; otherwise he would suffocate me.
46. Then he said that he wanted to express his interest in me. He said that he loved me and liked me very much. He said that he had been looking at me for some time and following me everywhere I walked.
47. I was about to tell him "you dirty bastard," when he put his hand over my mouth. I felt choked. He removed his hand from my nose to let me take a breath. He said that he knew that they didn't give milk to my son. He started speaking softly. He said that if I kept silent, he would remove his hand from my mouth. I nodded in consent. He let me go, took a few steps and returned, and said that he knew for some time that I was in trouble and mistreated by them. He said that he was not like them. He said that he would help me, bring milk, and a pad for my son. He promised to bring clothes for my son, provided I did not say no to his dirty desire and let him do me.
48. I guess he might have been my interrogator. I had not seen him before. I was blindfolded during interrogation. His voice seemed familiar. He said that I should not ask him how he knew me but he always looked at me. He spoke in Turkish with me. It is difficult for me to reconstruct his conversation in Persian now.
49. I said, "I'll never allow you to do such a thing with me." I said that I would rather die under torture than allow him to rape me. I told him that I would die and what difference would it make if I died a day earlier. I would never degrade myself. He pleaded again and asked me to let him do it. I was mentally and physically broken then. I could not think well. My brain was not working well. I never consented. I didn't want to.
50. Now when I think about that time and his words, I believe he was one of those people who had raped me before. For instance, he said that I had a beautiful body and that I was hot. I guess he was one of them. This incident happened exactly a week after the first rape.
51. He passionately expressed his love and affection for me and offered to change my cell, etc. I was dead frozen there in the corner of my cell. I could not move. I was twenty-one years old. He said that he felt pity because I was young. He spoke very softly and passionately. I don't know what happened to me. He touched my body but I pushed his hands away. He said that he knew me and

was sad to see the pain my son and I were suffering in prison. He was friendly to my son. He touched him, but I pushed his hand. He touched me and my son, but I kept pushing his hands. Meanwhile, I thought I had enough time to shout and ask for help. I did.

52. Then he said, “You are more naïve than I was imagining” and added that he had already vacated the ward. I realized that the ward was, in fact, silent. I couldn’t hear any sound. He had planned it in advance. I had naïvely thought that others had fallen asleep. He said that it was too late for me to save myself. I should give up. He said something like this that I can’t recall now: He said that I did not have any choice. He said that there was only him and me. I asked him to let me clean my son and use the rest room. He agreed and offered his help. He opened the door and took me out without a blindfold. I went to the restroom, which was very small. He went and brought warm water. It was the first time I washed my son with warm water. He also brought a piece of cloth. I don’t know whether it was clean or dirty. Then again...he seemed scared and restless. He was in a hurry and kept saying, “Hurry up, hurry up. It’s getting late!” He did not mistreat me during the rape. It was purely a sexual act for him and he did it for his dirty pleasure. I don’t know what time it was or how long it took. My son was in my arm. He took my son and put him in a corner. I did not accept it. I held my son in my arm. He did his job and left.
53. He did it secretly from others. Other guards didn’t know about this. I don’t know how powerful he was. Apparently, he was a senior guard who had the authority to send others somewhere else. When he brought me back from the restroom, all the doors were open and there was nobody in the cells. He said that he had tried hard to organize this one. He threatened that he would handcuff me if I resisted and advised me that I would be more in pain in that situation. He said that he would do it at any cost. Unfortunately, I couldn’t stop him. He was far stronger than me. He did it by force. The dirty man did not show up again.
54. After that, I felt guilty and despicable. I felt that the parts of my body that he had touched were cut by a knife. I wanted to cut every part of my body that he had touched. I was thinking those parts had become dirty. I felt guilty. I thought I was to be blamed because it was me who let him do it. Whenever I remembered that he was telling me to hurry up, I reprimanded myself for becoming weak. I was very angry and agitated. I thought it was me who let him do it. I did not have any way to escape him. At the beginning, I thought he would bring milk for my son. When he didn’t return and didn’t bring anything, I felt very angry. I cursed myself.
55. Then I decided to commit suicide. I looked for something to kill first my son and then myself. I thought about the rapes a lot. The more I thought, the more I blamed myself, and the more I suffered. This feeling still torments me.

### **Some Memories**

56. I have a few memories about the rape of young girls in prison. The first one is about the sister of my brother-in-law. When I was transferred to the general ward, I met friends of my sister-in-law there. They confirmed the following: she was arrested in 1981 and executed in 1982. She had visitation before execution. During one of her visits, she somehow conveyed to her mom that she would be executed that night. She told her mom that she had been raped so that she would not go to heaven. I’ve heard of similar incidents. There were three sisters in the general ward with me in prison. Their names were Akram Sadiqi, Shfiqa Sadiqi and Safia Sadiqi. The last one was executed in prison. Her sisters told me that their sister was raped before execution. They said that a guard took her to the prison library that was used for praying. After half an hour, they saw her hardly able to walk. She was holding her stomach and walked leaning forward. One of the sisters

had a son, named Rezbeh. There is a picture of our sons with each other in prison. I still have that picture with me.

57. I was released in Tabriz in early 1984. I lived with my husband for 16 months. My engagement, wedding and birth of child took 16 months. After our arrests, we became separated. My husband was forced to give interviews but he did not. Later they charged him with smuggling heroin in prison and sentenced him to execution. He was executed two days before the Persian New Year in 1983. I heard about his execution two months later.

### **Life after Prison**

58. After I was released, I led a difficult life. I had no money, house or property. I had no income. Nobody was willing to hire me and therefore, I could not rent a house. It was a difficult time and everybody was afraid. They believed that I would put them in danger because I was a political person.
59. Finally, I married my brother-in-law who was seven years older than my husband. He had been imprisoned too and severely tortured. Therefore, he suffered from depression and mental abnormalities. One reason I married him was because of my son. My father-in-law, who was the legal guardian of my son, wanted to take him from me. I did not want to be separated from my son by marrying somebody else. He wanted to take my son from me. My son was seven years old then. He was everything in my life. Without him, life had no purpose for me. I could not live without him.
60. I gave birth to my second son with my second husband. When my second son turned six years old, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I received chemotherapy in Iran. Two years later, I had an operation. Then I left Iran for Canada. My older son remained in Iran with his uncle. Seven years later he joined me. He was 25 years old when he got here. He is living with me now. My younger son is 20 years old and the older one is 29.
61. Here I was diagnosed with uterine cancer and had an operation. I had a second operation here on my ears because my second husband and *Pasdars* beat my ears causing me to become deaf. I have regained my hearing now but now I suffer from back pain and acute arthritis. These diseases cannot break me. I get along with them. I still have a good spirit and live a good life with others. I visit people of my age and support women's causes. I've regular weekly meetings with them. Sometimes, we share our pain, sorrow and happiness with each other and support each other with all our means.
62. I didn't tell anybody about my rape; not even my sister in Iran. I kept silent there for 20 years. When I got to Canada, I met a psychologist here. She understood my behavior and said that I must have suffered a lot and I opened myself to her for the first time. It's years since I started receiving different treatments. But I have not recovered fully from the trauma. I still have nightmares and take 50 to 60 pills every day. Many people have urged me to file a complaint against the Islamic Regime, but I did not.
63. My children are adults now and I'm positive they will understand me now. Therefore, I told my stories to you. I trust you and hope you would use this for the right purpose. I'm telling my story hoping that it does not happen again and that others do not suffer the pain I went through.



**Witness Statement of Mojtaba Saminejad**

**Name:** Mojtaba Saminejad  
**Place of Birth:** Tehran, Iran  
**Date of Birth:** September 30, 1980  
**Occupation:** Blogger, journalist, human rights activist

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

**Date of Interview:** February 4, 2011

**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Mojtaba Saminejad. It was approved by Mr. Saminejad on May 18, 2011.



### Statement

1. My name is Mojtaba Saminejad. I was born on September 30, 1980. I was a student of journalism and communication at Tehran University.
2. I was arrested twice. The first time was on October 31, 2004 and I was released after 88 days on bail. Two weeks later, on February 12, 2005, I was arrested again and remained in prison for 21 months.
3. The first time I was arrested for exposing the detention of three bloggers on my blog. However, they charged me with other offenses later for articles that I had written in my blog. Some charges were very serious like insulting the Prophet Mohammad, which if proven, is punishable by death, insulting Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khāmene'i, crimes of national security, disturbing public opinion, propaganda against the Islamic Republic and above all, the crime of insulting to Prophet Mohammad.
4. It was around 8 p.m. when I was arrested the first time. I was at home with my mother, one of my brothers and a friend. Four people came at the door and asked for me. I went to see who they were. They showed me my picture and asked if it was me. I confirmed that it was. They showed me a dossier that contained my writings and introduced themselves as law enforcement officers. They forced their way in and said they wanted to search the house. I asked for a warrant. They did not show one. My mother and I asked them again about a search warrant and who they were. But they said they were from law enforcement. One of them introduced himself as Mr. Tehrani.
5. Later, during my interrogation and conversations with my interrogators, I found out that they belonged to a special committee established unlawfully by *Sepah* (Iran Revolutionary Guard Council, IRGC) under the direction of Judge Sayeed Mortazavi and Judge Moghadis (assassinated later) to fight internet crime and to suppress bloggers.
6. This committee called "Internet Office" was not officially established. Nonetheless, it was active and targeted bloggers. I had written an article about their unlawful activities in my blog before my arrest. The media somehow knew about it but the government did not officially confirm its existence.
7. They searched my home extensively for one and a half hours. During their search, my father arrived. He also asked them for a search warrant but they did not show one. They cursed and insulted us during the search and threatened me. One of them forced me to get into my blog and change its content. They particularly wanted me to deny that three bloggers had been arrested for political reasons and to report that they were arrested for drinking at a night party. I didn't write it. One of them wanted to use force and violence. My mother and brother stopped him. He said that I'd be imprisoned for years if I did not change the content of my blog. I wrote what he asked me to write but wrote it in such a way as to make readers smell a rat. For instance, I wrote that I was going to Shiraz to participate in a book exhibition. It was the month of Ramadan and everybody knew that book exhibitions would not be held during that month.
8. I believe that even if I denied the arrest of the three bloggers, I would not have been released. They had come to arrest me. They collected all my personal documents during the search.

9. They took me out of the house, blindfolded me, and told my father that they had a few questions for me and would release me the next day. There were two cars waiting outside. One was a van and the second was Peugeot. They put me in one and forced me to put my head between my legs.
10. I didn't know where they took me. After half an hour, the car stopped. Later I understood it was Evin prison. There, they gave me a medical checkup and asked me some questions about my health history. Then they made me stand for 45 minutes facing the wall and after that transferred me to a cell in Ward 2A administered by the IRGC. I guess that ward is located on the southeastern part of Evin. They kept threatening me that they would keep me in prison for years and would subject me to "chicken." Later I understood what they meant. "Chicken" was the name of a kind of torture. They tied prisoners to a board, hung them and lashed them.
11. At night, they transferred me to a solitary room. I was there for four nights. They gave me a pen and a piece of paper and instructed me to write when I wanted to use the restroom and put it out the outlet. There was a small slot at the bottom of the door through which they gave me food. Around this time, I saw by chance a blogger in the prison whose wife had reported on his blog that he had been killed in a car crash in Ahwaz. I was surprised to see him alive.
12. The fourth night, my interrogation began. I had around 13 interrogators during my interrogation. It seemed they were members of a team supervised by the special committee established to suppress bloggers. One of my interrogators was named Sayeed Amir. Four years ago, I found out that he was appointed head of the security service of Alama Tabtabai University. I guess he still holds that position. After four nights, they took me for interrogation but I was returned to my cell immediately. I saw there were six interrogation rooms in our ward. After asking my identity, the interrogator instructed the guard to take me back and bring me after he was finished praying. Half an hour later, I was taken for interrogation. The moment I got there, someone slapped me and pushed me against a wall. Then five or six people started beating me. They did not ask me any questions but beat me for half an hour. When I started to bleed, they stopped beating me. Then, they made me sit on a chair. Nobody informed me of my charges. After a while, they handed me to a guard who led me back to my cell.
13. The next day around four o'clock, an interrogator called Mohibi, from Region 21 of the Tehran Prosecutor Office wrote my charges on a piece of paper and asked me to sign it. I was charged with crimes against national security and disturbing public opinion. He wrote a bail amount of one hundred fifty million *Toman* on my charge sheet too. He asked me to sign it. I asked about the money and he said it was bail. I asked whether my family knew about it and he assured me that they did. He lied. My family did not know where I was. He did not explain why I was charged with those offenses. I asked to meet with a lawyer. He said that I did not have any right to an attorney and counsel, and nobody would agree to defend me.
14. The next time, they wrapped my head in a plastic bag, handcuffed me, made me lie on the ground, and tied my feet with a rope. Then they gave me a shock. I guess it was an electrical shock. I got a severe headache. This sort of mistreatment continued for some time. After a while, my interrogators said that they would not come and speak with me unless I confessed and disclosed the location and identity of my blogger friends. I did not know my blogger friends' names and locations. I said that I didn't know. I was transferred to my room. Nobody came to see me for 12 days. I felt unbearably lonely. My interrogators were my only means of contact with the outside world. When they didn't come, I went on strike and did not eat for two days. After twelve days, the interrogators returned. For a while the pressure reduced. After that, the interrogators did not use violence until they were replaced and the mistreatment resumed.

15. After a while, I found out that twenty-one bloggers including Hussain Raisi, Mohaamd Reza Khansari, Kaveh Ramzani, Afshin Zarie and the three bloggers whom I had reported being arrested on my blog, namely Mohammad Blodi, Omid Shikhan and Paivand Sharif, were in that prison with me. Some nights, they conducted interrogations concurrently of six bloggers in six rooms. They beat all of us. Those nights were very scary. One night I heard the interrogators in the room next to mine demanding that two guys, both bloggers, confess to having illicit sexual relations with each other.
16. One of them lived next to my room. He was young and told me a very sad story. We used to speak with each other through small windows at the bottom of the doors. He said that many times a guard on duty had entered his room and asked him for sex. We had six guards who were on duty in three shifts. He said that he had cried. The guy told me that he was very scared of the guard and whenever that guard was on duty, he did not dare go to the restroom. He was in deep trouble.
17. We used to knock on each other's wall when we wanted to talk. I knocked on the wall and asked him to come to talk. He did not come for two nights. The third night, when he came, he told me that he had been forced to have sex with the guard. I think it was during the third week after my arrest. Usually, the guard entered his cell at midnight. It was just for sexual pleasure. I urged him to complain, but he didn't want to. He was charged with serious crimes. He was scared that complaining might endanger him further and he might receive a heavier sentence. He was sentenced to four years' imprisonment later. After a month, many of these prisoners were released.
18. After a while, I was allowed to briefly call my family and inform them that I was fine. My conversation lasted only one minute.
19. I think about a month and half after my arrest, I met a friend of mine who was a blogger in the restroom. He was extremely angry. He made the time to tell me how he had been mistreated the night before. He was ordered to either cooperate or eat a bowl full of excrement. Since he did not confess, he was forced to eat it. He said that he did it.
20. That night when they took me for interrogation, I noticed that my prior team of rude interrogators had returned. They asked me to disclose the identity and locations of my blogger friends again. I honestly didn't know some of the bloggers. I befriended them online and posted comments on their pages. They subjected me to harsher mistreatment than before. It was midnight. They showed me a bowl full of feces and a paper and pen to write. They basically gave me two options: confess or eat. I said I didn't know. Then they forced my head into the bowl of feces and made me eat it. I had to. There were about four interrogators in the room that night.
21. After this incident, I went on a hunger strike again. I was on strike for five or six days. Interrogations did not cease. Beatings reduced, but they put extra psychological pressure on me. For instance, they told me they had arrested my father because he kept asking about me. Once, they insulted my mother. It was unbearable for me and I had a fight with my interrogator. On another occasion, they showed a fake confession of a friend of mine who had said many things against me. They threatened me that I would be sentenced to harsh punishment. They wanted to know about other bloggers and still asked me about them. For instance, they asked me about Behzad, a blogger who had written articles about religion on his blog. I didn't know him. They told me to either disclose his whereabouts or they would rape me with a baton.

22. Sexual intimidation and sexual discussion was part and parcel of many interrogation sessions. Sometimes they described the rape in graphic detail that made me throw up. For instance, they would tell me how they would rape me. During interrogations, they asked me questions about my sexual relationships with my friends who were girls. For instance, they wanted me to confess to unlawful sexual relationships with my friends. One of my friends was a journalist. They wanted me to confess to having a sexual relationship with her. I spoke with her a while ago after her release following the 2009 post-election demonstrations. She was asked similar kinds of questions when she was detained. They also wanted me to describe the act of sexual intercourse of a friend of mine with his fiancée.
23. After a while - I guess it was after my second strike - a cleric came to meet me. I was blindfolded and handcuffed. He made me sit on a chair for six or seven hours. He talked and ate dried fruit. He explained the kinds of troubles I would face if I did not confess. He discussed American elections and Iranian elections. That night, I found out that my detention had been extended for another two months.
24. I went on strike for a third time. Then, they allowed me to meet with my family. I broke my strike. My family didn't know where I was. They had gone to different places and inquired about me. No one admitted detaining me.
25. After the sixtieth day, my interrogator put pressure on me to give a video interview. They asked me to talk about the Internet and testify that those who use the Internet would become corrupt. I did not agree to give a video interview. However, on the eightieth day, the pressure was reduced and after 88 days, I was released on bail. I had been in solitary confinement all that time.
26. The night I was released, I set up a new blog for myself and wrote about what happened to me in prison. Two or three days later, I went to Shirin Ebadi's office, the Defender of Human Rights Center, and took shelter there. I complained to the Islamic Human Rights Commission and wrote a letter to Khatami, then President, and Ayatollah Shahroodi, the head of judicial system.
27. Therefore, two weeks later on February 13, 2006, I was arrested again. I received a warrant to appear in the Prosecutor's office in Region 21 of Tehran. There, Mohibi, my interrogator, said that they had warned me not to tell anybody about my prison experience. Then, he wrote my offenses and charged me with the crime of national security, disruption of public opinion, publishing false [information] to disrupt public opinion, denial of the emergence of Mahdi (the Shiite religious messiah) - such a crime does not exist in the Penal Code - spreading immorality, unlawful sexual relationships, insulting prophets, and insulting Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamene'i.
28. Mohibi wanted me to sign my charge sheet. I did not sign. I had two lawyers: Mohammad Siazadeh and Faridoun Shami. I said that I wanted to meet my lawyer before signing the charge sheet. He said that if I didn't sign it, I would be arrested. I did not sign and Mohibi ordered my arrest. I was transferred to Evin and held in quarantine. In Evin, they registered me but did not conduct a medical checkup. I was in quarantine for two days. Then I was transferred to Qezel Hesar.
29. After being admitted there, I was transferred to Ward 3. Qezel Hesar had 8 Wards. My interrogators visited me a number of times in Qezel Hesar and interrogated me. The interrogations were again about my sexual relationships. They wanted to know about my relationship with one woman who was outside Iran. I heard that after her return, she was urged to file a complaint against me for sexual abuse, but she did not.

30. After a while they transferred me to another ward. Drugs were easily available there. I saw the rapes of young prisoners by older prisoners there. I saw it many times. The most susceptible prisoners were the young guys who were brought to Qezel Hessar from juvenile correction centers after they turned eighteen. The goons and stronger prisoners commonly sexually abused and raped the younger ones. The first saloon in Ward 3 belonged to prisoners under the age of 24. I saw many rape victims in that saloon. Sometimes when one of them ran afoul of the guards, they were punished and sent to other saloons. They were vulnerable among the goons and easily raped there.
31. I didn't hear guards raping these guys. I reported about rape of prisoners to the authorities but they did not address it. I came to know about rapes of prisoners in the first week. I was in the shower. There were six or seven rooms in our ward. The doors were small and one could see feet and heads of prisoners. Once in the showers, and many times in the wards, I witnessed rape. Many Qezel Hessar prisoners are quite familiar with this kind of situation.
32. After a while, the head of our ward assigned me to report the number of prisoners in each saloon to him every night. Therefore, I used to go to other saloons to check how many prisoners were in each room. I saw many times that the older prisoners were sexually abusing the younger ones in those saloons.
33. I lived for six months among the Afghan prisoners. They were treated extremely badly in prison. I don't remember the date. One day early in the morning, we woke up when we heard an extremely loud scream. The head of our ward said that an Afghan prisoner who had quarreled with a guard had been taken to the main office and he said it was his voice. He was right. It was his. He was raped with baton there. He was brought to the saloon after two hours and I saw him there.
34. After the rape, two Afghan prisoners took him to the health clinic. When he came back, my Afghan cellmates asked me to do something for him. I contacted Mohsen Bagi and asked his advice. We decided to write a complaint against the guards. The abused prisoner signed it. My cellmates signed it as witnesses. The abused prisoner went to the main office to submit the complaint. He was accompanied by our ward representative. Three or four hours later, they returned with bags of candy, chocolates and dried fruit. I realized that he had been paid some money too. The guard convinced him to withdraw his complaint and he agreed.
35. Then I was summoned to the main office. I was threatened to not follow up on his complaint and told that if I did, I would be in serious danger because they had made the victim withdraw his complaint.
36. The guards knew about rape in prison but they did not want to address it. They considered it an ordinary and routine prison phenomenon, like fighting and drugs. When I reported to them, they told me that they were unable to control it. The fact of the matter was they did not want to address and control it. They ignored it and let it go. They did not try to prevent the abuse or punish, even symbolically, the abuser.
37. I was tried by three courts. Branch 13 of the Revolutionary Court tried me for the crime of national security, and insulting Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khāmene'i. It found me not guilty for the crime of national security but found me guilty of insulting Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khāmene'i, and sentenced me to the maximum punishment which was two years imprisonment. My other charges, namely the crime of spreading immorality, disruption of public opinion by spreading false information, and unlawful sexual relationships, were tried in the

## Witness Statement of Mojtaba Saminejad

Special Court of Arshad in Region 21 of Tehran. I was found not guilty of prostitution but guilty of the crime of disruption of public opinion and sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment. For unlawful sexual relationships, I was fined 100,000 *Toman*. My harshest trial was for the crime of insulting the Prophet in Branch 16 of the Criminal Court. I was found not guilty. Overall, I was sentenced to 36 months' imprisonment and a 100,000 *Toman* fine.

38. I was in prison for 21 months and released on bail. I stayed in Iran for another two years and left in 2008.



**Witness Statement of Maryam Sabri**

**Name:** Maryam Sabri  
**Place of Birth:** Tehran, Iran  
**Date of Birth:** 1988  
**Occupation:** Business

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

**Date of Interview:** December 3, 2009

**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Maryam Sabri. It was approved by Maryam Sabri on November 9, 2010.



## Statement

### Background

1. My name is Maryam Sabri. I'm twenty-one years old and worked for a boating company before leaving Iran.
2. I was admitted to Tehran's Art University in 2006 and became a member of the political council of the University. I did not belong to any specific political party and did not have vast political activities at the University. I participated in non-political programs and demonstrations on the campus. Nevertheless, the Protection Office of the University, an intelligence unit of the university, decided to expel me temporarily from the university in 2007 and later stated in a letter that I did not have permission to attend my classes anymore. Thus, I was expelled permanently from the University a year after I was admitted.
3. I became politically active during the 2009 Presidential Election. After participating in the demonstration, I was arrested by plainclothes agents, transferred to an unknown detention center, where I was mistreated and repeatedly raped.

### Election

4. I was hesitant at the beginning to vote in the 2009 Presidential Election. I was even advocating for boycotting the election. I believed that voting would imply that we were happy with the system, but when Khatami came forward and introduced Mousavi and asked people to support him, I changed my position. I became hopeful and thought if Mousavi gets elected; society will open up like it did in Khatami's reform era. Therefore, I joined the Mousavi campaign in Tehran and advocated for him. I was usually out every night when Mousavi had a debate. The passion and the enthusiasm among the people were promising. People chanted "Ahmadi, bye-bye" because they were certain that Ahmadinejad would lose the election.
5. Our hopes were crushed, however. The Islamic Republic used us as a toy. We voted but the regime had decided in advance who the winner would be. Voting was just a game that the regime played with us. We went to the street to declare that we had been robbed of our votes and to show our discontent with the election result. We urged supporters of Mousavi and Karroubi to come out and demonstrate that we were more than the number of people the regime claimed voted for Mousavi and Karroubi.

### Demonstrations

6. I participated in all the demonstrations until I was arrested on July 30, 2009. I can't recall the dates that I participated in demonstrations but I remember the days.
7. On Monday, [June 15, 2009], we were supposed to start our protest from Enghelab Square and walk to Azadi Square but the plan changed and we started from Imam Hossein Square and went to Azadi Square. On Tuesday and Wednesday, [June 16 and 17], people got together in front of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) in Vali Asr Street and Haft-Tir Square. On Thursday, there was a demonstration in the afternoon and we gathered in Haft-Tir Square. On Tuesday there were two demonstrations. One was at Haft-Tir Square and the second was at Tajrish. The demonstrators walked from Tajrish to Rah-e Ahan Square at the end of Vali Asr. On Monday people again protested at Karegar Street.

8. We had one purpose in demonstrating and that was to voice our protest against the official announcement of the election result and to publically denounce the government for cheating. The demonstrations were mostly peaceful. We did not want to clash with the security forces, particularly with the plainclothes agents. We chanted but did not use violence. But sometimes the plainclothes agents provoked us into resorting to violence. For instance, our demonstration in front of Voice and Version on Tuesday and Wednesday was in response to Ahmadinejad supporters' demonstration held the day before. We went to the streets to show our strength, our popularity and that our supporters outnumbered the government's followers.
9. It was not easy to inform people about the demonstrations during those days. The SMS and mobile phones did not work. We called each other through land lines and used social networks like, Facebook, Yahoo 360, and weblogs that were not filtered during those days. There were many weblogs that activists run and we used them to inform others. Our slogan was that we were media and we could be powerful if we joined our voices together.
10. I usually participated at the demonstrations with four or five of my friends. Two of them were my classmates in Tehran. They are on the run now. The other two were arrested the day I was arrested. I have not heard from them and do not know their whereabouts.
11. The security forces that clashed with the demonstrators were the Special Forces of Tehran's Police, *Basij* and the Iran Revolutionary Guard Council (IRGC). All of the above-mentioned forces used violence against civilians and hit the demonstrators without mercy. They hit the boys, girls, young and old. They were all equally vicious.
12. In addition, there were plainclothes agents that clashed with the protestors. It was hard to distinguish whether they belonged to the IRGC or *Basij*. They were more aggressive and beat the demonstrators ruthlessly. *Basij* in Tehran have a very distinct look. They all have either beards or stubble, tight clerical collars that are closed all the way to their throats, baggy pants and shirts that are one size too large. Although *Basij* do not wear uniforms, their styles of clothing make them distinguishable from other forces.
13. *Fadayan-e Rahbar* (Special Forces of the Supreme Leader) were also involved in suppressing the demonstrators. We could distinguish between *Basij* and *Fadayan-e Rahbar*. In fact, they are a branch of the *Basij* but have a very strong commitment to the Supreme Leader and will die for him. They consider the Supreme Leader pious and an undisputed leader. If someone insults him, it is like insulting their loved ones. He is dearer to them than their loved ones.
14. It seemed like the security forces coordinated their activities with each other. I don't think we dared to ask the forces to identify themselves. They were very hostile to us and didn't answer any of our questions. They had come to beat us - not to help us. For instance, I saw them once beating a young man in Haft-Tir Street. The man kept asking why they were beating him but they kept beating him without saying a word.
15. As the demonstrations continued, the size of the security forces increased on the street throughout the first week. I saw that NAJA brought more forces by buses and vans to Tehran. For example, I saw NAJA emptying two mini buses full of people at Vanak Square.
16. Most often before targeting us with electric and regular batons, the security forces used tear gas and pepper spray. They beat us, chased us, and arrested us. Sometimes we responded and they would get hit and run. It was like a cat and mouse game. The plainclothes agents chased the demonstrators into homes and hit them there. For instance, I was in Sadatabad in Kaj Square with

a bunch of other kids on a Saturday night. *Basij* saw us and came after us. We ran to hide. They pulled some of the kids from apartments and arrested them. They also arrested the apartment owners who hosted the kids.

17. Sometimes, the security forces attacked peaceful demonstrators to rile them up and turn them into an angry mob. For instance, on a Monday at Azadi Square, the public walked from Imam Hossein Square to Azadi Square and chanted a lot. We stayed for a while at Azadi Square and then decided to go back to Imam Hossein Square. We did not chant any slogans on the way back. We walked in silence and held some pictures in our hands. The *Basij* would come and insult people and start fights. They would come and instigate the guys. In Azadi Street, close to Enghelab [Street], a group of them had come amongst the people and insulted the wife of a man who was there and started a fight. They were *Basij*, plainclothes, with batons in their belts.
18. On another occasion, I saw security forces beat individuals in groups and secret police using knives and razors in the crowds. I think it was Thursday when this incident happened in Vanak Street. We were at Vali Asr and going towards Park Way. The security forces and *Basij* attacked us at Vanak Square and beat everyone who came their way. One of them had a knife. I saw him pull a pocket knife from his belt and run towards the demonstrators. I was very scared for my life and ran. I didn't stop to see what he did with his knife.
19. I also saw the security forces shoot into the crowd in Azadi Square on a Monday. A young person died as a result of this shooting. He was shot in the back of the head. The shot was fired from the rooftop of the *Basij* building. He was exactly in front of the *Basij* building in Azadi Street.
20. Also I heard shootings on a Thursday at Vali Asr. The demonstrators usually gathered at Vali Asr or Haft-Tir on Thursdays. I was further up the street when the shooting began from further down towards the end of the line, around two or three streets south of the place where I was. Everyone started to run. We were trying to find a hole to hide in. Later I heard that two people were wounded there that day. I think the plainclothes agents shot directly at demonstrators, while the security forces that had uniforms shot in the air or used pellet bullets. I got hit by a pellet bullet. Half of my leg was bruised and hurt a lot for a while.

## Arrest

21. On Thursday, the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Neda's death, I was chanting slogans at Behsht-e Zahra. Our slogans were "Our Neda is not dead, but the government had died," "dictator resign," "Ahmadi have shame, let go of the people." We had flowers in our hands that day and chanted "Military brother! End the brother killing." We handed flowers to security guards. We threw petals in their direction. The guards did not have any interaction with the demonstrators. They were merely observers.
22. However, at around 5:00 and 5:15 pm some guys shouted "Run!" When I turned, I saw that there were loads of *Basij* and *Sepah* behind us. There were around a hundred. I started running in the [cemetery's] sections, and after I was hit a few times while running, I fell to the ground in one of the sections. [By] the time I got up, there were plainclothes men all around me. They started beating me with batons and kicking me. Then they took me away. There were five of them and they were all men.
23. They transported me to a white van that had no other signs. After a while, they blindfolded and handcuffed me in the van. I heard the footsteps of newcomers while I was sitting in the van. After a few minutes, the van moved. They asked a few questions such as my name and wrote them

down in the van. Many other people were arrested with me including a girl, whom I didn't know and don't know where she is now, a friend of mine whom I said in the van that I didn't know her. There were about five detainees in the van I was placed in. In addition, there were many other cars around that were loaded with detainees. I personally counted 7-8 cars loaded with demonstrators. The reason for our arrests was participation in the demonstration. The government labeled us as rioters.

24. I didn't understand where they took me from there. A long time transpired between the time they arrested me and the time I was dropped off. I guess I got off the van at a yard which was not very large because after a few steps, I reached the stairs. I went down the stairs to a basement. After a few steps down in the basement, a metal door opened. I was pushed into a room and my blindfold was removed. It was a very small square shaped room. I couldn't lie on the floor. I could only sit and stretch my legs on the tiled floor. It did not have any windows and was completely dark. I couldn't see anything. It was very dirty and smelled really bad.
25. I was not registered at this location. I could not see the guards because they kept us blindfolded when they took us out to use the restroom and for interrogations. When I was not blindfolded, the guards covered their faces with masks that only showed their mouths and eyes.
26. I guess all prisoners were held in solitary cells there. There was absolute silence when I was taken out of my cell to the bathroom. The bathroom, however, was horrible. If I slipped, I would fall into the toilet hole. It was like an old bathroom in a remote village where people dig a hole on a steep side with a triangle shape on top. I was allowed to use the bathroom 4-5 times daily.
27. I was in this location for 14 days and heard a lot of screams, crying, and cursing. I think a day and half after my arrest, they took me for interrogation. I did not have one interrogator. Different people interrogated me but none of them explained my charges. I didn't see any of my interrogators apart from my last one who took off my blindfold and let me see his face. He was a tall person and had light color eyes, fair skin, light hair, and a broken nose. He had a detestable look - a look that I will never forget until I die.
28. At the interrogation, they asked me questions like who my leader was, who I take my instruction from, how I coordinate my activities, where I go and where I meet with my friends. My first interrogation session lasted about two and a half hours.
29. The second and third interrogation sessions went like the first one. My interrogators, who had changed, asked me the same questions as before. At the end of the third session the interrogator got very angry and threatened me with harsh consequences. He said, "You are asking for trouble for yourself. If anything happens to you, you are responsible. You should only blame yourself. Perhaps you will open your mouth the next time. You did not cooperate with us; we will deal differently with you next time." This was the threat I received from my third interrogator. Then I was sent to my room. I didn't understand the meaning of the threats.

### **Repeated Rape**

30. The fourth interrogation session started like the other ones. He asked the same questions. Then he said, "Apparently you don't want to talk, no?" When he saw that I said nothing, he said, "You don't want to cooperate? No?" I said nothing. He said, "OK, fine. You wanted your vote? I am here to give your vote back. I will give you your vote now and you can see if it is any good." I felt him grab my shoulders. He had never grabbed me this hard while he beat me. He got me up from the chair and took off my clothes by force. I was screaming and crying. I begged him. I

swore to everything he believed in. He laughed and said, "I don't have a God or prophet. Don't bother yourself [with it]." I was crying and saying, "Please, for God's sake, I will do whatever you want, whatever you say." He said, "No, you didn't cooperate in the beginning and now I want to give your vote back. Why are you upset? Why are you crying? No need for tears. You were being brash and wanted your vote, and I am going to be brash and give your vote back. Don't cry."

31. Then what should never have happened, happened. He raped me. After that, I was almost half conscious when I was taken to my cell. They acted as if nothing had happened. They threw me in my cell. I didn't understand how much time passed. For me, every moment was like years.
32. The fifth session of interrogation was conducted by a different person. The interrogator asked me the questions I'd already been asked. Then he said, "Apparently, you won't open your mouth. OK, fine. We'll deal with you in the manner you understand." He started to take off my clothes again. I was screaming and he was laughing. Then he said, "Even if you kill yourself shouting here, nobody can hear you." Then he raped me a second time. I was sent back. I went to the bathroom and then to my room.
33. The same thing happened during my sixth interrogation session. The only difference was that I didn't cry and didn't scream and beg this time. The interrogator was laughing and saying, "Why don't you beg me? Beg me, I may feel pity and let you go. Cry, cry, so I let you go. Maybe I feel pity for you." But it was like I knew what would happen and didn't care anymore. I did not cry and did not beg because I was sure what was going to happen. I was sent back to my cell.
34. The next time when I was taken for interrogation, the interrogator asked me the same questions and then raped me. He opened my blindfold and I saw his face. He sat in front of me and started talking. He asked, "Do you want to be let go? Do you want to stay alive? Do you want to see the outside again?" I cried and said, "Yes. Whatever you say, I'll do it. Whatever you want. Just let me go. Either kill me or let me go. Don't hurt me like this anymore." He laughed and said, "No, we won't kill you yet." He said, "We'll let you go, but there is a condition, and that is that you have to go where we tell you and do as we tell you. Also, you can't tell a soul about the events that happened here. If you do, we'll kill you and won't let you stay alive. We are following you constantly and won't let you get out of our hands. If you do anything wrong, you won't stay alive. Like many others who died and no one found out, you will die too." I cried and said, "OK, fine, just let me go." Then he threatened me again and said, "You owe me. If you go out, you'll do whatever we say."
35. Then the interrogator said that they would take me to court and I had to be ready for it. He added that if I acted like a good girl, the court would release me, and if I acted like a bad girl, I would not make it to the court building.
36. I was released, but it was on the condition that I cooperate with them. In the end, I said, "I'll do as you ask, just give me some time to heal." He laughed and said, "You are fine. Maybe you have some body pain and bone pain, or maybe dislocation. But none of these are important. You are still alive." I said "fine." I was supposed to collaborate with them, participate in demonstrations, and take pictures and movies. Get to know the guys and get their numbers, give them their numbers. This was their plan, but I neither went to demonstrations nor cooperated with them after that.

37. They took me back to my cell. Some time passed. Then they came and I walked up the stairs I had come down. I reached a yard and felt fresh air. They put me in a car and released me in Chitgar Park. It was dusk and somehow dark. I found out that it was August 14, 2009.

#### **After Release**

38. After I was released, they called me three or four times on my cell phones. I had two SIM cards (two numbers). I thought they knew only about one of them. I received a call and my interrogator said, "We'll call you and give you the instructions where to go and what to do." I asked where, and he said, "It's not your business. We'll inform you when you must know." Then he warned me that I should not turn my phone off, to be accessible and answer my phone, and added "We'll coordinate with you where to meet. We have something for you."

39. I was very afraid. I turned my cell phone off and threw my SIM card away. After that, I received a call one midnight. I was not expecting them on the line. My interrogator said, "You thought you can escape from us?" I said that my cell phone had a problem. He started cursing me and said, "Don't make excuses!" I hung up and turned off my phone. A few days later, I turned my phone on to find out a friend's number. As soon as I turned it on, the phone rang. It was him again. He started cursing and said, "Why did you turn your phone off? Why don't you answer? Where the hell have you been? Why didn't you go home? Don't think we are joking with you!" I hung up on him and threw my SIM card away.

40. Two day later, I left Iran and crossed into Turkey. I went to the U.N. office and filed an application.

41. I do not know who was responsible for my arrest. After my release, I did a TV interview which made the government admit in an article that it was the IRGC that arrested me that day.

42. After I fled, they arrested my brother and father. My father was detained for three days. My father received a summons to appear in a Revolutionary court. I do not know what happened to him. It's been five years since I've been in touch with my father or spoken to him. My cousin whom I was in touch via e-mail updated me about the incidents that happened to my family after I left. He told me that my father and brother were pressured to ask me to return to the country and confess on TV that I've lied about being raped in prison.



**Witness Statement of Matin Yar**

**Name:** Matin Yar (pseudonym)

**Place of Birth:** Esfahan, Iran

**Date of Birth:** 1987

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

**Date of Interview:** April 17, 2010

**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Matin Yar. The statement was approved by Matin on October 5, 2010.



## Statement

### My Early Life

1. My name is Matin Yar and I am twenty four years old. I was born in Esfahan, Iran in 1987 and was a university student there when I fled the country 17 months ago. I left the country because I was imprisoned, tortured and raped in prison, and because of fear of execution at the hands of the Islamic Republic. I faced these forms of persecution because government officials discovered that I am homosexual and under Iranian law, homosexuality is a crime punishable by death.
2. Sometime between the ages of nine and twelve, I realized that I had fundamentally different feelings towards my male friends than other boys my age. While other boys felt mere friendship, I felt a deeper attraction. At first, I believed I suffered from a disease of the mind and blamed myself for what I perceived to be immoral feelings; with time and maturation, I came to realize that nobody was to blame for my feelings because they were not fundamentally wrong. I accepted that I was homosexual and that there was nothing I could do but accept it.
3. Throughout my adult life, I was forced to keep my homosexuality a secret. I think my mother may have suspected there was something different about me but I never volunteered my secret to her or to the rest of my family. I kept my homosexuality to myself because I was afraid my family would disown me for feelings I could not control. Keeping such a secret from my family had an injurious impact on me both physically and psychologically; it was a very difficult time in my life.

### My Arrest

4. In 2007, a group of four or five of my homosexual friends and I decided to go for a walk at a local garden in the province of Esfahan. While in a secluded garden, we acted recklessly by taking part in homosexual activities. People in an adjacent garden saw us engaged in the homosexual acts and attacked us. After a brief skirmish, our attackers reported the homosexual acts to the father of one of the boys in my group. The boy's father subsequently filed a complaint against all of us with the local police.
5. The Esfahan police summoned me to their barracks about a week after the incident for questioning. The Esfahan police were notorious for their cruel and sadistic treatment of prisoners. Upon introducing myself at the station, I was detained and taken into a cell block administered by the detective branch for interrogation.

### My First Stint in Detention

6. I was held in a detention facility in Esfahan province for two to three weeks during which time I was interrogated by local authorities. My interrogators wanted me to confess to "*Lewat*" (involvement in homosexual activity with men) and to being homosexual; they also wanted information about the locations where homosexuals in Esfahan congregate. Even though I made it clear that I was not privy to the information the authorities sought, I was tortured by my captors.
7. My primary interrogator's name was Arzani. He was a short, pudgy man who was notorious in Esfahan for his ruthless attitude and inhumane interrogation tactics.
8. When I first entered the interrogation room, I noticed a large iron shaft hanging from the ceiling. As my terrified eyes fixed themselves upon the suspicious device, I heard the unmistakable sound of Arzani's menacing laugh. For a moment, my eyes darted in his direction and he informed me the

apparatus was called a “speaking rod.” Unsure of what to make of his statement, I continued to examine the device, intent on determining how my interrogators planned to use it. Without warning, the guards grabbed me by my ankles and hoisted me into the air. Hanging upside down from the speaking rod, I learned of its true nature. In this position, I was subject to vicious beatings by my torturers.

9. While on the speaking rod, my interrogators used a myriad of techniques to extract information from me. They punched me and kicked me, intent on shattering bones with each consecutive blow. When their hands and feet turned numb, they used batons and whips. When they grew too tired to lift their tools, they subjected me to powerful electric shocks. All the while, I hung in place, defenseless to the assault. I suffered several injuries from my time on the speaking rod including a broken nose, several broken ribs, and numerous other injuries to my head and my core. The beating was so severe that within my two weeks of interrogation, I attempted to commit suicide. I was at the point mentally where I would rather have died than go back onto the speaking rod.
10. Horrifying as it was, the speaking rod was only one of many kinds of torture to which I was subjected. In Esfahan, my torture was comprehensive, permeating every single moment of my detention.
11. We were not allowed doctors or familial visits in detention in Esfahan. We were given insufficient food. The guards forced us to clean the toilet with our tongues. All the while we were insulted and degraded.

### **My Charges**

12. After about a week in detention, I was brought to a courtroom where a judge officially informed me of the charges I faced. Due to the fact that I owned the car we used to get to the garden, I was charged with organizing the entire event and held as the principal offender. Each of my friends was released on 10,000,000 *Toman* bail, while I was hurried back to the detention facility. Upon my return, the torture was intensified.

### **My Second Stint in Detention**

13. The second time around, my torturers diversified their techniques. Sometimes, they stripped me naked and exposed me to uncomfortable positions. In these humiliating positions they degraded me, insulted my mother and whipped me sadistically. I was hung from the ceiling, soaked in icy water and exposed to the elements. At one point, I began to pray aloud to God to help me. Arzani overheard my prayer and scoffed, “I am your God now.” He was right; I was completely at his mercy.
14. On three or four different occasions, I was subjected to mock executions at Esfahan. The first time, several guards came into my cell and told me they had received my sentence and that I was to be executed. They marched me to the basement of the detention facility. Once in the basement, they asked if I had any last words for my family and whether I wished to revise my will. Following these pleasantries, the guards lined me up against a wall and cocked their rifles. Finally, they fired. The guards walked up to my body and told me I was dead. They said that any sensation of life I felt was purely a psychological illusion attributable to the massive blood loss I suffered. Soon thereafter, they picked me up and escorted me back to my room.
15. Within three weeks, the authorities broke my spirit and I agreed to sign whatever papers they put in front of me. After my dehumanizing experiences, I hoped that a confession would put an end to my suffering. I confessed to “*Lewat*” (engaging in homosexual activities) and to being homosexual.

### **My Day in Court**

16. After three weeks in Esfahan, I was taken once again to court; here I saw the judge for a second time. This time, the judge was quite kind and nurturing. He told me that I looked very young and that he wanted to help me but could only do so if I confessed to my crimes in court. Crying, I told him that I was not a bad person and I could not help the fact that I was homosexual. I told him that I had a right to live and pleaded with him to help me with my charges. Upon hearing my pleas, his tone changed entirely. He compared me to a sodomite, called me a curse on society and ordered me out of his courtroom.

### **My Experience in Prison**

17. From the courtroom, I was taken to a prison facility known as Dastgerd. Before Dastgerd would accept me, however, the prison required a full medical examination. Due to the severity of my injuries from the preceding weeks of torture, Dastgerd did not want to admit me until I had been treated for my wounds. After several hours of negotiation, the Esfahan police convinced the Dastgerd prison authorities to admit me and I was brought into the grounds.
18. At Dastgerd, I surrendered what clothes and personal belongings I had to the prison authorities. I donned the prison garb assigned to me and was shuffled back into line with the other incoming prisoners. The line led me to a small room where prison authorities took my picture and my fingerprints before issuing me an ID card. From there, I was transferred to the health clinic where I was vaccinated, cleaned and shaved. I stayed in the health clinic for three days nursing my wounds before a man named Amini took me to my general ward.
19. I was 20 years old at the time of my imprisonment; consequently, I was assigned to the juvenile ward. On my first night at the juvenile ward, I was placed on the floor of the mosque of the ward and instructed to sleep there. The next day, the head of our ward, Baqiri, spoke to all of the new prisoners at the main office. Baqiri told us that we were to grow beards and enlightened us to the rules of the prison. From there, we were divided into small groups and sent to our respective rooms in the ward.
20. The rooms were small and crowded. My room had 14 people living in it but could hardly fit. Due to the space constraints, when it came time to sleep, we were forced to do so in shifts with some people sleeping and others staying in the prayer room. We occupied every square inch of that room.
21. Living in such close quarters with other prisoners, I learned many of their stories. I was living with men who had murdered, smuggled contraband and were addicted to hard-core drugs. Even with their long rap sheets, none of my cell mates would admit to being homosexual. They would not make such an admission because they feared the consequences. If prison authorities discovered you were homosexual, they made life very difficult for you. Unfortunately, my file was clearly marked; in Esfahan, I confessed to “engaging in homosexual activity” and to “being a homosexual.”
22. Due to the fact that I am homosexual, I was transferred from the juvenile section to the consultation ward. The purpose of the consultation ward is indoctrination. There, I was forced to read the Quran, take ideological classes and pray to Allah.

## **Rape**

23. The difficulties of being homosexual did not begin and end at the consultation ward. During my time at *Dastgerd*, I was targeted as homosexual and brutally raped several times by prison authorities. I know it was prison authorities who raped me because of the ease with which they bypassed the prison's intricate security system. The men who raped me did not do so in a solitary cell but navigated the prison and moved me from a public cell to a more private cell so they could take their time with me. An ordinary prisoner would not have been able to move another prisoner from a public cell to a private cell without being disturbed by prison authorities.
24. The first time I was raped was three or four weeks after my initial transfer to *Dastgerd* from Esfahan. Three men came into my room in the evening while the other prisoners were out for fresh air, kidnapped me from my cell and took me to a private room where they took turns forcing themselves on me. As they raped me, the men tried to humiliate me. One of my attackers told me that my young skin was soft, bare and smooth. Once they were finished, the men told me that if I complained to anyone, they would kill me and make it look like a suicide. My attackers were sadistic individuals and I did not know what to do. I was too frightened to inform other prison authorities because I did not think they would sympathize with a homosexual. I also feared my attackers would carry out their threats to kill me if I complained. On the other hand, I bled for days after each attack and was unable to treat my wounds. I was unable to walk or use the restroom. My health was worsening and the situation was coming to a head.

## **My Release from Prison**

25. Thankfully, soon thereafter I met with my attorney and signed a document that changed my temporary imprisonment status to release on bail. I spent two months in prison under "temporary imprisonment status" because the prosecutor had not completed my files and had neglected to submit them to the court. My bail was set at 30,000,000 *Toman* which my uncle put up for me by giving the deed to his house; from there I was released on my own recognizance.
26. I was hospitalized for two months after my release to recover from the torture and the rapes I endured. By this time, my family knew that I was homosexual and treated me very differently than they had before I had left for prison. Some relatives cut off communication with me entirely; others refused to loan me money to help me pay for the expenses I had accrued while in prison.

## **My Escape from Iran**

27. Throughout the whole ordeal my only thoughts were of escaping Iran. I knew there was no way I would survive a public trial. Homosexuality is a crime punishable by death and the system of justice is merciless in Iran. The trip to Turkey did not require a visa and it was the cheapest way to get out of Iran so I decided to travel by train to Turkey seventeen months ago.



**Witness Statement of Sorrour**

**Name:** Sorrour (pseudonym)  
**Place of Birth:** Mahabad, Iran  
**Date of Birth:** 1984  
**Occupation:** Kurdish Activist

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

**Date of Interview:** February 27, 2011

**Interviewer:** IHRDC Staff

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Sorrour. It was approved by Sorrour on May 30, 2011.

**Statement**

1. My name is Sorrour. I was a resident of Mahabad, a Kurdish city in Western Azarbaijan, Iran. I currently live in Turkey.
2. I left Iran for two reasons. The first reason was the serious troubles that my father, with the assistance of the Islamic Republic, created for my mother and me. The second one was because of a rape assault on me while in police custody in Tabriz.
3. My father belongs to the Mangur tribe of Kurds and is a military person that we call “*Jash*” in Kurdish. My grandfather had moved to Mahabad a long time ago. The Mangurs live mainly in the central parts of Mahabad. Mangur men are traditionally involved in military activities. Therefore, my father’s family has been a military family for generations. Most of the Mangurs are supporters of the Islamic Republic and consider themselves more Iranian than Kurds. However, physically they look like Kurdish people and speak Kurdish with a regional dialect.
4. My father is a Basij, a voluntary paramilitary force under the command of the Iran Revolutionary Guards Corps. I saw his membership card one day in his pocket. My friends, however, had told me before that my father was a Basij as they had spotted him in a military parade; I did not believe them until I saw his ID card. My father occasionally went on duty and disappeared for one or two nights. When we asked him where he was, he gave different excuses to cover up his activities. When he went on a mission, a car would come and pick him up. When he was home, he worked as a carpenter, boutique businessmen, welder and aluminum constructor, and performed some other manual jobs.
5. My mom was a Kurdish activist like my older brother and supported *Komila* and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, which are leftist Kurdish organizations active in Iranian Kurdistan.
6. Thus, my father did not have good relationships with my mother and older brother. They used to fight with each other. Their relationship deteriorated particularly after my mother left my father. He started to abuse and mistreat her even more than before.
7. I have very painful and horrible memories of my father. He was responsible for having me arrested, tortured and raped by the Iranian police forces.
8. When I returned from military service, I saw that my father and mother had separated. My mother had gone to live with my older brother and informed him of the abuses she had suffered at the hand of my father. Then, we decided to move and live with my grandmother and under the protection of my mother’s brother. Life was not easy there either. I ran into serious trouble there too. I had a fight and my foot was broken, my hands were cut by a knife, my eye was injured, and my head was wounded.
9. Then my mother and I went to Tabriz to live away from my father’s reach. Nevertheless, he found us there four or five months later. He came to our home and threatened us and cursed my mom. I tried to stop him from cursing and insulting us. He wounded me with a sharp knife and cut my hand and throat. Then I heard an ambulance come. I was arrested and taken to a police station that was in the vicinity of my rented house.
10. There the police beat me, cursed me, and insulted the dignity of my mother and sister and my Kurdish origins. The moment I got to the police station, they began beating me. Then they

subjected me to sleep deprivation. The moment I fell asleep, they threw water on me and hit the iron bars of my cell with batons producing loud sounds that made me deaf. I could not sleep there. The next day, they came again and told me that because I got into a fight with a military person of the Iranian government, I should be subjected to punishment that I would never forget. I would not dare do it again.

11. The room was cold and I was blindfolded. There were two guards in the room. One of them put his feet around my neck and held me tight between his legs. Then the second one inserted a bottle in me and started to torture me. Whenever I think about that incident, I become distressed and hate my father. I question whether it really was my father who allowed them to do such a horrible act to me!
12. The rape injured me but the physical injury was not as painful as the psychological pressure. I suffered from post-rape trauma syndrome afterwards, particularly two months after the incident when I decided to commit suicide. But every time, the thought of my mother's loneliness stopped me from taking my life. I shiver whenever I remember that incident. I was somewhat politically active then and supported a political group that my mom was supporting. Unfortunately, I do not remember the exact date of that dirty incident now.
13. Sometime after that incident, I left Iran and came to Turkey in May 2009. My father still threatens me and my mother. He found our phone number through my sister. Since arriving in Turkey, I have become more politically active and am a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party now.





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A report on human rights abuses perpetrated by the Islamic Republic of Iran against Iran's Kurdish minority.

**Back Cover Poem Translator**

**Elizabeth T. Gray, Jr.** is a poet, translator, and corporate consultant. *The Green Sea of Heaven*, her translations of Iran's mystical lyric poet Hāfiz-i Shīrazī (d. 1389), were published in 1995 by White Cloud Press. With artist and virtuoso musician Reza Derakhshani, she co-produced a CD in English and Persian in 2002. Poems and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry International*, *The Kenyon Review Online*, *Little Star*, *The Cortland Review*, *The New Orleans Review* and *Provincetown Arts*. She serves on the Boards of Friends of Writers and is Chairman of the Board of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. She lives in New York City.

The English translation of *Sajadeh farsh-i 'unf-o tajavor...* first appeared on the website of *Little Star*, a journal of poetry and prose, <http://littlestarjournal.com/blog/> and is reprinted with permission.

## ON THE PRAYER MAT OF VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

[*Sajadeh farsh-i 'unf-o tajavor...*]

By Simin Behbahani (Translated by Elizabeth T. Gray, Jr.)

O you who preach the *shari'a* on the prayer mat of Rape and Violation—  
Whose hand has blinded you to the murder of Faith and Compassion?

Every night those who can't take it any more cry "Allah-u Akbar!"  
We are a volcano that has shattered the demon's wing.

They are so blood-drunk that Fairness means nothing.  
I'm ashamed to say more. They have dishonored Virtue herself.

Nothing is left of *sharia'* except its name. And at common law everything is forbidden.  
As proof, here is Taraneh's body, here is Neda's heart.

Wearing a mask of calm mothers bury their Sohrabs.  
Who will cure the hate of these grief-stricken Tahminas?

Some clerics recognized the Imam's pride and cloak at the eye of this storm.  
In what robes can they dress now? How will they try to be kind?

The prayer mat's warp and weft are ripped. On it a brutal demon squats.  
May a great flood wash away Hypocrisy's prayer mat and prayer.

*While born a member of the "free verse" (she'r-i now) generation, Simin Behbahani (1927- ) preferred to write in traditional forms while defying their conventions and turning them to different purposes. "On The Prayer Mat of Violence and Aggression" was written in 2009 after the national elections ended in violent protest and mass demonstrations against the Iranian regime. Instead of allusions to wine, nightingales, and the Beloved, Behbahani's ghazal casts accusations against the clerical regime and invokes the names of specific individuals killed in the crackdown: Taraneh Mousavi was arrested and raped to death in prison; Neda Agha Soltan was shot in the streets of Tehran and the video of her death was viewed worldwide on the internet. Linking pre-Islamic epic to current griefs, Behbahani also alludes to the Shahnameh: Tahmina is the mother of Sohrab, who was killed by his treacherous father Rustam.*