

Hamid Ashtari

ARRESTED: April 1981

DETAINED IN: Evin, Qezel Hesar, and Gohardasht Prisons

RELEASED: February 1989



1. My name is Hamid Ashtari. I have been a refugee in England since 2006. I was a political prisoner in Iran for eight years, from 1981 to 1989, during which time I was kept in Evin, Qezel Hesar, and Gohardasht Prisons. I was released a few months after the mass executions in 1988.
2. I make this statement in support of an investigation into the mass executions of political prisoners in 1988 in Iran.
3. This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief. Except where I indicate to the contrary, I make this statement on the basis of facts and matters within my own knowledge. Where the facts and matters in this statement are within my own knowledge, they are true. Where the facts and matters are not within my own knowledge, I have identified the source or sources of my information, and I believe such facts to be true.
4. I was arrested in April 1981. I was arrested when I was collecting the Mojahedin Khalq's (MKO) printed newsletters from the Sahab printing house. My brother had been a member of the MKO and had been arrested during the time of the Shah. After he was released, I began to sympathize with his political ideas. We were only teenagers then. I started to work actively with the MKO in 1979.
5. I was tried twice. The first time was in December 1981. The second time was in December of 1982, and I was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for being an MKO sympathizer.
6. I was in Evin from April 1981 until November 1982. I was interrogated in Evin. My arrest took place before the MKO military phase started. Before these events, conditions in Evin Prison were not terribly bad. After I was sent to Evin, I was charged with being an MKO sympathizer. I was not interrogated or tortured at that stage. But after June 1981, things changed.

Arrest and Torture



7. In December 1981 my interrogations started, and from then on I was tortured many times. The most common type of torture was their flogging me with an electrical cable while I was tied to a bed. Another form of torture they used is called *qapani* in Persian (Palestinian hanging), where one of my hands was bent back over my shoulder, as if to touch my back, while the other hand was pulled down and the elbow bent so my hands could almost reach each other behind my back. My hands were handcuffed in this awkward position. Then they hung me from the handcuffs, which would usually dislocate your shoulders and often broke prisoners' shoulder blades and elbows. They applied *qapani* on me once. I have since had to have two operations on my elbow because of this torture. As a result of this torture my body still cannot function completely normally.
8. These tortures were applied to us particularly during our interrogations, but other types of torture, such as group beatings, or making us stand for hours, or depriving us of fresh air, taking showers, or using the toilet, etc., were used on us routinely.

Events Surrounding 1988

9. In Gohardasht, several months before the mass executions started, the transfer of prisoners to various other wards was taking place, and we could not figure out the reason for the transfers. They transferred me, for example, four times to different wards.
10. Shortly before the mass executions started, around 150 prisoners (I cannot give the exact figures) of different political persuasions were brought to the jihad ward. This ward contained several workshops. It seems to me that Davud Lashkari, the deputy head of the prison, had intentionally transferred those prisoners in order to prevent them from being executed.
11. Also around that time, prison conditions changed. Prisoners had started to go on strike; they were bolder in expressing their demands. For example, prisoners brought into the jihad ward refused to eat after they arrived. They asked about the reason for being transferred to the jihad ward. The jihad ward was known as the repenters ward, and they did not want to be considered repenters.
12. In 1988 I was being held in Gohardasht Prison in the jihad ward. I remember that things changed in the summer of 1988. It was about the time that we heard about the MKO attack. Some prisoners in my ward were working in other wards of the prison during the day, as mechanics or builders inside the prison. I worked as a carpenter within my own ward. When these prisoners were no longer taken out of their cells during the day to work we realized that something had changed. All of a sudden, all of the security procedures and the guards changed. All of the old guards that we knew were transferred somewhere else and new guards were brought in. There was also one noteworthy case: one of the officers responsible for our ward had told some prisoners that the situation was deteriorating badly and that widespread executions were being carried out and that we had better not antagonize the authorities. He also



recommended to the prisoners that they answer any questions in the way favored by the authorities.

13. One day, during the mass executions, we were taken, blindfolded, to the office of the ward, and were questioned one by one. They asked me three questions:

Do you still agree with the *monafeqin* (MKO)?

Will you go on television and give a public confession?

Do you accept the validity of the Imam's orders and decrees?

I answered no to the first question and yes to the second and third questions. I was blindfolded the entire time and could not see the judges. I recognized the voice of Lashkari asking me questions.

14. I was then taken to the ward. From our ward we could see that in the yard near the office, there were two lines of prisoners. One line was sent to their cells, and the other one was taken out of the ward. We later heard that the second line was taken to the Hosseinyeh and there they were all hanged. In the Hosseinyeh there was a stage with five or six ropes in a line. They would line the prisoners up, make them stand on the stage, place the rope around their necks, and then kick them off the stage.
15. I was told this by several different prisoners who had been taken to the Hosseinyeh either to be threatened and warned, or to

be killed, but who had been saved at the last minute by a friendly prison guard. For example, Lashkari, the deputy head of the prison, had known many of these kids for a long time; some of them he had known since before he became a Revolutionary Guard—so he would protect them. [“Kids” is a familiar way of referring to a group of people that the speaker feels close to.] For example, Lashkari liked a kid by the name of Shapur Irantalab, who had been to interrogation and answered “no” to each of the questions. Lashkari took him into the Hosseinyeh, showed him what was happening to scare him, and then took him back to the court room telling him, “now say yes.” Lashkari had himself taken another of the kids from the Fadaiyan Khalq (FKO) Minority, Majid Ehsasian, out of the court room and had beaten him with a cable and forced him to write on a piece of paper that he is a Muslim and that he prayed. When Lashkari finally got the confession on paper from Majid, he took him back into the courtroom, gave him the written confession, and Majid was saved. Majid told me this when we went back to our cell.

16. I never saw any dead bodies. I only heard news of the executions from other prisoners, and then from visiting relatives once our visitations started again. I never saw many of my friends after that event.

London, June 2009

