

Mohammad Reza Ashough

ARRESTED: June 1981
DETAINED IN: Revolutionary Guards Detention Center, Andimeshk,
and Unesco Prison, Dezful
RELEASED: 1984
RE-ARRESTED: June 1986
DETAINED IN: Unesco Prison, Dezful
ESCAPED: August 1988



1. My name is Mohammad Reza Ashough. I was born in southern Iran, in Khuzestan Province. I was trained in paramedical studies and while a student I also worked as a food and hygiene inspector, until I was arrested in 1981. I was then 26 years old. I left Iran in 1988, and applied to the UN for political asylum in the United Arab Emirates. I live in the Netherlands.
2. I make this statement in support of an investigation into the mass execution 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.

Pre-arrest Activities

4. I was born in 1955 in Andimeshk, in Khuzestan. When I was a student, different political organizations were active in the university. I was a sympathizer of the Mojahedin (MKO) and I attended their meetings. I was a fan of MKO militants who had been arrested in previous years [under the former regime]; they were my friends.
5. A year before the Revolution, in 1977, I was spending my compulsory service time in the Development Corp (Sepah Tarvij). During the Iran-Iraq War [1980–1988], Iraqi soldiers came within 20 kilometers [12.4 miles] of Andimeshk. I was against the war.



6. Under these circumstances, I became attracted to the MKO because they had political experience [dating back to the struggle against the Shah] and they were Muslims. Some of them [imprisoned under the Shah] had just been released from prison. They were very active [politically]. We wanted to protect the Revolution and stabilize the revolutionary government. I didn't take the clergy seriously; to me they were ignorant in both the sciences and politics. My fellow MKO sympathizers and I were against their reactionary ideas. We were for individual freedoms and against the mandatory veil. We opposed the restrictions that were slowly being imposed upon social freedoms. So, naturally, we were attracted to democratic parties. Furthermore I was an athlete, playing soccer for the Khuzestan team, and the MKO militants were also young and athletic. We were from the same generation; we understood each other.

First Arrest and Trial

7. I was a third-year university student and had been working at the same time as a food and hygiene inspector when I was first arrested in 1981. It was just after the June demonstration organized by the MKO; I was 26 years old at the time. I was kept for two weeks in the Revolutionary Guards Detention Center in Andimeshk, where I was interrogated several hours each night for ten nights, and then I was transferred to Dezful, where I was again interrogated.
8. I was detained for 11 months before I was brought to court in 1982. The trial looked more like an interrogation session than a trial. The judge was a clergyman by the name of Eslami. He is still working as a judge in the city of Qom. I was blindfolded, and could see the judge only for two to three minutes. Then they read the verdict to me. I received a two-year sentence, in addition to a ten-year suspended sentence, but there was no judgment in writing. I insisted that I needed some proof. He just wrote the sentence on a piece of paper and gave it to me. But it didn't seem to be a very official kind of document as it was handwritten. I threw it out of the window. I served my two-year sentence and was released after pledging I would not get involved in politics anymore.

Re-arrest

9. Upon my release from prison in 1984 I was notified that I had been banned from the university and could not continue my studies. I filed a complaint with the Ministry of Education, but they also wouldn't let me return to the university. They said that I could go back to my previous job but that I could not serve in any management capacity. It took a year of paperwork and going through the administrative court in order for me to obtain the authorization to go back to work. Finally, in early 1986, I returned to my previous job.
10. Before the war between Iran and Iraq started, different political organizations had rebelled against the regime. The government had banned all [independent] political activism. Political activists like us had no choice other than to carry on their struggle clandestinely. The MKO people



moved first to Iranian Kurdistan and then to Iraq.

11. During the Iran-Iraq War, I was in touch with an MKO contact person. He would commute from Pakistan to Iran and organize the transfer to Iraq of volunteers who wanted to fight the regime. I didn't want to go to Iraq. The volunteers were people who had been arrested once, or were friends and relatives of MKO members. In 1985 the MKO contact person was arrested at the Pakistani border. Soon after he was arrested, all the people he had been in touch with—about 50 people—were also arrested. In June 1986, I was arrested for the second time, at my workplace.
12. Unesco Prison in Dezful was dedicated to hosting ordinary criminals (as opposed to political prisoners). The prison is called “Unesco” because it was built for educational purposes by Unesco, during the time of the Shah. After the Islamic Revolution it was turned into a prison, but they kept the name, so it's known as the Unesco Prison. After a while, when a lot of political activists were arrested, all its cells were full. Soon they built three additional rooms [a political ward] near the prosecutor's office and transferred all the political prisoners [from the general ward], about 30 to 40 people, there. Some time later, people who had been arrested in other cities were also transferred to Unesco Prison, and kept in the general ward for a few days, and then they were transferred to the political ward. They were 27 to 28 people who were arrested in Ahvaz, Andimeshk, Dezful, Shush, Haft Tappeh, and Masjed Soleyman.
13. Altogether there were approximately 65 of us [political prisoners].
13. I was tortured for about a year. Unesco Prison has an underground area, just below the court, called the Tamshit Room, which still exists. There they would lay the prisoner down and tie his hands and feet and start flogging. The prisoner was interrogated and beaten once a week. I did not accept the charges levelled against me [intending to go to Iraq to wage war against the regime] because I really never intended to go to Iraq. But still, every week they would interrogate me and beat me with blows and kicks for the same charges.
14. I was interrogated ten times in Andimeshk and ten times in Dezful, but I denied all the charges levelled against me. . . .
15. I was taken six times to the religious judge Hojjat ol-eslam Ahmadi. Because I would not say anything about my political activities, the interrogators would demand that the judge issue a “confession flogging” verdict. So each time Ahmadi would order, “Beat him until he speaks or he dies.” So the interrogators would come into the room where I was being flogged to get confessions. During the flogging blood would gush everywhere.
16. When a prisoner's feet were swollen and injured they would lash another part of the body, to avoid skin tears. My feet and body were injured and in terrible shape. My skin was all broken. My feet were deformed. They would give three or four blows, then the interrogators would start questioning me, and if they didn't hear the response they were expecting, they would hit me



again. Thirty or 40 blows—sometimes up to 60, until they would get tired and I would pass out.

Second Trial

17. The second time I was arrested, my interrogator in Unesco Prison, in Dezful [Khuzestan region], was a man by the surname “Kazemi.” He was also the interrogator at the prosecutor’s office. Kazemi brought the MKO contact person [who had been in touch with me] from the Sistan Baluchistan region [where he had been arrested] to Khuzestan [where I was being held]. This person had denounced me. Kazemi told me that he knew I was a member of that group [MKO] and that there was no need for me to confess. I was sentenced to a ten-year imprisonment then.

Events Surrounding 1988

18. When the Iran-Iraq War ended we were told, by the families who were visiting, that a delegation would be coming to consider pardons for the prisoners. After a while rumors about Khomeini’s pardon intensified as the war was ending. One day during the very last days of the war, the prison guards brought a television into the ward and it showed the Mojahedin attacking Iran. About five days after the end of the war, we were told that the pardon committee had arrived at our prison.
19. From that day on visitations were suspended. When the pardon committee arrived, the guards told us to leave our belongings. We were all blindfolded and lined up. I couldn’t count everybody but there were

about 60 or 70 of us, [which means that] they had brought [MKO] prisoners from the ward where ordinary criminals were kept. This line-up was of MKO sympathizers only. They took us to court eight at a time, where Ahmadi was sitting. Ahmadi was the religious judge, and Kazemi, the interrogator, was also there. There were three other people in the room: Ava’i (currently a prosecutor in the Tehran Public Court), Hardavaneh (the head of Unesco Prison), and Kafshiri (Commander of the Revolutionary Guards in Dezful). I knew Kafshiri, because he had been one of the people flogging me in 1983 when I was first arrested [in 1981]. And there was also an intelligence officer [present]. We were all blindfolded. When we were questioned by the judge, we were told to take our blindfolds off for a moment and look at the judge and then to put the blindfolds on again. We would take the blindfolds off only when they asked us a question.

20. The judge asked me: “Would you fight the Mojahedin or not?” I tried to avoid giving a positive response. I said, “Well, I’m not a fighter. I work for the Department of Hygiene. If there is anything to do with hygiene and there is a need, I will do it.” But they kept saying, we only need one answer, “Would you fight [against the MKO] or would you not?” I evaded the question, again by saying that fighting is not my job. And then the religious judge and the interrogator started to debate over my case. I said: “I don’t believe in Saddam and I will not go to Iraq [to join the MKO forces].” The judge asked me, “Would you die for Iran and Islam?” And I said, “I



would. If it's necessary to die, I would die." The judge asked, "Would you step on a mine [for the sake of the Islamic regime]?" I replied "why should I have to step on a mine? One who is a supporter should go on a mine."* The intelligence officer said, "Add his name to the list of executions." Then the religious judge asked one more time if I would walk [on a mine] or not" and I said I wouldn't. He said no more.

21. In his [4 August 1988 complaint] letter [to Ayatollah Khomeini, about the ongoing unfair procedures] Montazeri quotes the same religious judge, who had reported to him that he had told the interrogator and the intelligence officer that I should not be executed, but he could not convince them, because the decision was based on a majority vote. As they were trying us one by one, they told each of us: "he too is one who will be executed." Some [prisoners] said that they would not fight against the MKO. Among the eight of us, only two said that they would fight against the Mojahedins. Their names did not appear on the list of executions. They separated them from us and we later heard they had been spared, and were released about three to four months later. One was about 15 to 16 years old and the other around 20 or 21.
22. We stood in line, eight by eight. It was a long line. The trial of 60 people had lasted less than one hour. Then we were taken back to the ward. In the evening, they came and said, "Take your belongings. We

are taking you to Ahvaz." It was after dinner, around 10 p.m. They told us, "You'll go to the prosecutor's office first, which is right there." There was a room, [where] they told us, "Put your bags here." They took us in one by one to another room, where there was a table facing the wall. There they sat me on the chair behind the table and told me, "Write your will." I said, "I won't. I have to see to my family." Kazemi, the interrogator, told me, "You have ten minutes to write your will. You need to have written your will when I come back." When they came back, I still had not written it.

23. They put the blindfold on me, tied my hands, and beat me up. They took me to the prison courtyard. When I looked from below the blindfold I could see that all of the prisoners sitting in that open area were blindfolded. Every one of them had written his will. I said, "I need to go to the bathroom." I looked again beneath the blindfold, and I saw two ambulances and two minibuses, a couple of Land Rovers from the Revolutionary Guards. They dragged me to the bathrooms and brought me back to the same place.
24. It was around 1 a.m. when they put us in the minibuses. They told us that they were taking us to Ahvaz, but once we were on the minibuses and could look around, we all realized we were not going towards Ahvaz. It was the wrong direction. We were going toward Dehloran, toward Iraq.

*"Step on a mine": a reference to a tactic commonly used by the Revolutionary Guards in the Iran-Iraq War, in which waves of boy soldiers were sent across minefields to clear the way for the Guards' advance. Hundreds of thousands of young Iranians perished in these "human wave" attacks.



It was completely the opposite direction. Two Revolutionary Guards were at the front of the bus, and all the cars were following each other. The two buses were in the front, and, behind them, other cars. We were taken to the area where the Vali Asr Garrison is located. In this garrison there was a bathroom. The Guards told us to go there and do the *ghosl* [cleaning ritual—religious cleaning—for the dead]. An old man who used to bring food to the prisoners was there in the garrison giving us some white fabric to use as shrouds. We were also given camphor. They told us, “go wash, use the camphor, and put the white cloths around yourself.”

25. I said, “I don’t want to wear that.” Kazemi came back with two Revolutionary Guards and told me, “You have to wear this. I will be back in ten minutes, and you’d better be ready.” I took a quick shower and put my own clothes back on. It was a tense atmosphere. They tied my hands and put a blindfold on me and started to beat me up; I was screaming and fell on the floor. Other prisoners started to scream. And we could hear women washing themselves, waiting to be executed too. And everyone was giving their names out loud, because I guess they wanted someone to tell their families, so that people would know who had been taken.
26. I finally understood they were serious and all this was for real. But some of the prisoners still had doubts. I was on the ground; everyone else had their shrouds on. Kazemi said: “Take him and execute him as he is.” They threw me on the minibus and told me to go and sit in the back seat. I sat on

the right-hand side of the bus, and everyone came in white. Everyone hands tied with plastic rope. Everyone blindfolded. But my rope had loosened while they beat me up. It was dark. Prisoners were tired. The guards were also terrified. Everyone was screaming. Mostly, they were insulting Khomeini. I tried to move the blindfold a little with the help of the seat. I told Sadeq, a person who was sitting next to me, that I could get out of the handcuffs, and that I was going to escape. Even in the shower, I had looked to see if I could escape, but it didn’t look like a safe place to try. The buses were going slowly, because it was a war zone, and it’s really not very even—the road was bad. And there was dirt everywhere. There were other cars passing by as well. I opened the window and took my shoes off. I told Sadeq that I was going out. Once I decided to jump out of the window, I saw my cousin sitting just in front of me. So they took him too to be executed.

27. I noticed the noise and tumult in the bus. There were two Revolutionary Guards in the front of the minibus. I was lucky that I could open the window. I thought: if they don’t shoot at me within ten minutes after I throw myself out, my escape will be successful. I slowly put my hands on the edge of the seat and stood up and threw myself out of window. I fell on the ground on my back. The air was very dusty, I waited for a couple of seconds, nothing happened. Then I ran for between 200 and 500 meters [200–500 yards], only to realize that I was still within the garrison precinct and had just reached the barbed wire. I climbed up the barbed wire and threw myself to the



other side. Only the next day did I realize how much blood I had lost. After 20 years I still have the scars from the injuries.

28. I was hardly a kilometer away [from the barbed wire] when I heard bursts of machine gun fire, followed by single gunshots. It was late at night and in the silence of the night I could hear the sound of the gunshots. They executed the prisoners. And they looked around with lights [trying to find me]. I could see the moving lights. I continued walking away until I got to the Karkheh River, and I could see where I was. There are hills on the other side of the Karkeh bridge called "Ali Gorize." I had gone hunting there before so I knew the area very well. I headed north. By morning I was quite far from the garrison.
29. They didn't bury all the executed ones in one place. They scattered their bodies into six different remote cemeteries. Some were buried in the deserts. Later, when the families went to the graves, wishing to exhume the bodies, they opened the graves and found out they were empty.
30. The day after my escape my father was summoned to court. The religious judge, Ahmadi, told him, "You must turn Mehdi in," and my father said, "But you have him. I don't have him." My father didn't know I had escaped. And they told him, "No, no, no, we don't have him," and they told them, "If he comes to ask for money, or anything else, don't give it to him."
31. I fled to the mountains. Two days later, in the mountainous war zone, I found a pair of military boots [which I put on] and I started walking toward Andimeshk. On the road to Andimeshk, I hitchhiked and a car gave me a ride. I got off near Andimeshk. I was covered with dust, very hungry and in very bad shape. I went to the house of an acquaintance. There I was informed that the security forces had broken into the house of one of my relatives to look for me.
32. So, I left town on foot and walked north until the next morning—two train stations away. I took the train to Tehran; it was crawling with Basij militia returning from the war.
33. I hid in Tehran for a while and [after that] I returned to Ahvaz, and from there I fled to the United Arab Emirates. I still have the plan of the prison with me. I drew it 20 years ago when I escaped. I was very agitated. I couldn't sleep for months.

Amsterdam, June 2009

