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HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

No Exit

Human Rights Abuses Inside the MKO Camps

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I. Summary

The Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) is an armed Iranian opposition group that was formed in 1965. An urban guerrilla group fighting against the government of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, it was an active participant in the anti-monarchy struggle that resulted in the 1979 Iranian revolution.[1]

After the revolution, the MKO expanded its organizational infrastructure and recruited many new members. However it was excluded from participating in power sharing arrangements, and the new revolutionary government under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini forced it underground after it instigated an armed uprising against the government in June 1981. The majority of its top cadres went into exile in France. In France, the MKO continued its active opposition to Iran's government. In 1986, under pressure from the French authorities, the MKO relocated to Iraq. There it established a number of military camps under the banner of the National Liberation Army and maintained an armed presence inside Iraq until the fall of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003.

During the Iran-Iraq war, the MKO fighters made regular incursions into Iranian territory and fought against Iranian government forces. After the end of Iran-Iraq war, the group's armed activities decreased substantially as Saddam Hussein's government curtailed the MKO's ability to launch attacks inside Iranian territory.

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003 put an end to Iraqi financial and logistical support of the MKO. The MKO fighters remained neutral during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. After the occupation of Iraq, the U.S. military disarmed the MKO fighters and confined them inside their main camp known as Camp Ashraf.[2] U.S. military sources told Human Rights Watch that as of March 10, 2005, there were 3,534 MKO members inside Camp Ashraf.[3]

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[1] For a comprehensive history of the organization, see Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[2] Camp Ashraf is located near the city of al-Khalis, north of Baghdad.

[3] Human Rights Watch e-mail interview with U.S. military officials, March 10, 2005.

Some MKO fighters took advantage of an amnesty offer by the Iranian government. Since October 2004, 273 MKO members have returned to Iran.[4] The U.S. military has recognized the MKO fighters in Iraq as Protected Persons under the Geneva Conventions.[5] Their fate remains uncertain; the Iraqi government and the U.S. military appear not to have reached a decision regarding their future.

During Saddam Hussein's last year in power, some Iranians held in Abu Ghraib prison were repatriated to Iran in exchange for Iraqi prisoners of war (POWs). These were dissident members of the MKO who had been sent by the organization for "safekeeping" in Abu Ghraib.[6] The release of these prisoners in 2002-2003 provided a direct window into conditions inside the MKO camps that was previously inaccessible to the outside world.

Human Rights Watch interviewed five of these former MKO members who were held in Abu Ghraib prison. Their testimonies, together with testimonies collected from seven other former MKO members, paint a grim picture of how the organization treated its members, particularly those who held dissenting opinions or expressed an intent to leave the organization.

The former MKO members reported abuses ranging from detention and persecution of ordinary members wishing to leave the organization, to lengthy solitary confinements, severe beatings, and torture of dissident members. The MKO held political dissidents in its internal prisons during the 1990s and later turned over many of them to Iraqi authorities, who held them in Abu Ghraib. In one case, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani was held in solitary confinement for eight-and-a-half years inside the MKO camps, from September 1992 to January 2001.

The witnesses reported two cases of deaths under interrogation. Three dissident members—Abbas Sadeghinejad, Ali Ghashghavi, and Alireza Mir Asgari—witnessed the death of a fellow dissident, Parviz Ahmadi, inside their prison cell in Camp Ashraf. Abbas Sadeghinejad told Human Rights Watch that he also witnessed the death of another prisoner, Ghorbanali Torabi, after Torabi was returned from an interrogation session to a prison cell that he shared with Sadeghinejad.

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[4] According to U.S. military sources, twenty-eight members were repatriated in December 2004, thirteen in January 2005, 100 on March 3, 2005, and 132 on March 9, 2005.

[5] "US grants protection for anti-Tehran group in Iraq," *Reuters*, 26 July, 2004.

[6] Former MKO members who were held in Abu Ghraib prison told Human Rights Watch that their cell doors bore a plaque with "Mojahedin Safekeeping" *[Amanat-e Mojahedin]* written on it.

The MKO's leadership consists of the husband and wife team of Masoud and Maryam Rajavi. Their marriage in 1985 was hailed by the organization as the beginning of a permanent "ideological revolution."[7] Various phases of this "revolution" include: divorce by decree of married couples, regular writings of self-criticism reports, renunciation of sexuality, and absolute mental and physical dedication to the leadership.[8] The level of devotion expected of members was in stark display in 2003 when the French police arrested Maryam Rajavi in Paris. In protest, ten MKO members and sympathizers set themselves on fire in various European cities; two of them subsequently died.[9] Former members cite the implementation of the "ideological revolution" as a major source of the psychological and physical abuses committed against the group's members.

At present, the MKO is listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department and several European governments. The MKO's leadership is engaged in an extensive campaign aimed at winning support from Western politicians in order to have the designation of a terrorist organization removed.[10]

Methodology

Human Rights Watch interviewed by telephone twelve former members of the MKO living in Europe. These witnesses provided credible claims that they were subjected to imprisonment as well as physical and psychological abuses because they had either expressed criticism of the MKO's policies or had requested to leave the organization's military camps.

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[7] *Mojahed*, No. 241, April 4, 1985. *Mojahed* is the official publication of the MKO, and at the time it appeared weekly.

[8] See Masoud Banisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel* (London: Saqi Books, 2004). On self-criticism sessions, see pp. 210-230; on decreeing of divorce, see pgs. 307-311; on renunciation of sexuality, see pages 313-340. Immediately following Masoud and Maryam Rajavi's marriage, the MKO military command issued a directive stating: "In order to carry out your organizational duties under the present circumstances there is an urgent need to strengthen and deepen this ideological revolution. You must pay the necessary price by allocating sufficient time and resources for absorbing related teachings..." *Mojahed*, No. 242, April 12, 1985. The Social Division of MKO also issued a directive to the members stating: "To understand this great revolution ...is to understand and gain a deep insight into the greatness of our new leadership, meaning leadership of Masoud and Maryam. It is to believe in them as well as to show ideological and revolutionary obedience of them." *Mojahed*, No. 242, April 12, 1985.

[9] Arifa Akbar, "Human torches mark protest; 10 Iranian exiles become fireballs, two die martyrs," *The Independent*, July 2, 2003.

[10] Maryam Rajavi, "Empower Iran's opposition forces checking the Mullahs," *International Herald Tribune*, January 28, 2005. Katherine Shrader, "Iranian Group Seeks Legitimacy in U.S.," *Associated Press*, February 24, 2005.

Each witness was interviewed separately several times between February and May 2005. All witnesses are currently living in Europe. More than twelve hours of testimonies were collected. All interviews were conducted in Farsi. Each witness provided independent accounts of their experience inside the MKO camps, and their testimonies corroborated other evidence collected by Human Rights Watch. A number of witnesses who were detained and tortured inside the MKO camps named Hassan Ezati as one of their interrogators. Hassan Ezati's son, Yasser Ezati, also interviewed for this report, confirmed his father's identity as a MKO interrogator.

Of the twelve former MKO members interviewed for this report, eight witnesses[11] left Iraq between 2002 and 2004. The remaining four witnesses[12] left Iraq in the aftermath of the first Gulf War in 1991. In addition to being held in internal MKO prisons, five of the witnesses[13] were imprisoned in Abu Ghraib prison prior to their release.

II. Background

The MKO was founded in September 1965 by three graduates of Tehran University: Mohammad Hanifnezhad, Saeed Mohsen and Asghar Badizadegan.[14] The three shared a history of political activism within the religious-nationalist movement and its affiliated Islamic Students Associations. They believed that opposition forces against the Pahlavi government lacked a cohesive ideology and required revolutionary leadership. They reasoned that peaceful resistance against the government was fruitless, and that only a revolutionary armed struggle could dislodge the monarchy.

The organization's founding trio focused their initial thrust on creating a revolutionary ideology based on their interpretation of Islam that could fuel an armed struggle by persuading masses of people to rise up against the government. This ideology relied

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[11] Farhad Javaheri-Yar, Ali Ghashghavi, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, and Akbar Akbari were repatriated by Iraqi officials to Iran on January 21, 2002. Amir Mowaseghi was repatriated on March 18, 2003. Alireza Mir Asgari was abandoned along the Iran-Iraq border in February 2003. Yasser Ezati left Iraq in June 2004. Abbas Sadeghinejad escaped the MKO military camp on June 20, 2002.

[12] Mohammad Reza Eskandari, Tahereh Eskandari, Habib Khorrami, and Karim Haqi.

[13] Farhad Javaheri-Yar, Ali Ghashghavi, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, Akbar Akbari, and Amir Mowaseghi were imprisoned in Abu Ghraib.

[14] "For the first time in the history of the Iranian people's liberation struggle, an organization with a monolithic ideology, populist ideals, and a policy of revolutionary armed resistance was founded in September 1965." Mojahedin Khalq Organization *Bonyangozaran,* downloaded on March 10, 2005, *http://www.iran.mojahedin.org/books.htm.* See also Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1989.

heavily on an interpretation of Islam as a revolutionary message compatible with modern revolutionary ideologies, particularly Marxism.

Initially, the founding members recruited some twenty like-minded friends to form a discussion group. Their first meeting, on September 6, 1965, in Tehran, is considered the genesis of the MKO. The group's discussions centered on intense study of religion, history and revolutionary theory. In addition to religious texts, the group also studied Marxist theory at length. For its first three years, the group held regular secret meetings. By 1968, these discussions led to the creation of a Central Committee "to work out a revolutionary strategy" and an Ideological Team "to provide the group with its own theoretical handbooks." [15]

During its first five years, the MKO did not carry out any operations against the government. It primarily focused on developing a revolutionary ideology and training its members in urban guerilla warfare. In 1970, thirteen MKO members traveled to Jordan and Lebanon and received military training inside Palestinian Liberation Organization camps. They returned to Iran after a few months.

Prior to carrying out any armed activities, the group planned to focus on developing its ideology and training its new recruits. However, this strategy was thwarted by the emergence of a competing Marxist guerilla group, the Fadaian Khalq Organization. On February 8, 1971, members of the Fadaian launched their first operation by attacking a police station in the village of Siahkal in the northern province of Gilan. This incident marked the emergence of armed struggle against the shah's government.

The MKO's leadership, surprised by the Siahkal incident, decided to expedite their plans for armed operations by organizing a spectacular attack in Tehran. At this time, the government was in the midst of promoting a large-scale celebration marking 2500 years of monarchy in Iran. The MKO planned a series of bombings that would target Tehran's electric power grids prior to the opening eve ceremonies.

During their efforts to acquire explosives, the MKO were infiltrated by the security forces who tracked their activities. On August 23, 1971, just days before the scheduled onset of their first operation, thirty-five members of the MKO were arrested by the authorities. Within the next few months, half of MKO's member were arrested and put on trial by a military tribunal. "They were all accused of possessing arms, planning to

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[15] Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 89.

overthrow the 'constitutional monarchy,' and studying such subversive authors as Marx, Mao, and Che Guevara."[16]

The three founding members of the MKO, along with six others from the group's Central Committee, were sentenced to death and executed on May 25, 1972. Only two members of the Central Committee, Masoud Rajavi and Bahman Bazargani, escaped firing squads when their death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment.

The 1971-72 waves of arrests, executions and imprisonments dealt a severe blow to the MKO, but its remaining members who escaped detection by the security forces continued to recruit new members as well as carrying out a number of armed operations. In 1975, intense ideological differences among the MKO members led to the departure of a sizable number of members, who argued that religious thought was incompatible with revolutionary struggle. This offshoot of the MKO was briefly known as the Marxist Mojahedin and was later renamed Peykar Organization. The MKO members who stayed loyal to the group's original ideology referred to this event as an internal coup.

On the eve of the 1979 Iranian revolution, the imprisoned MKO members were released along with other political prisoners. The group quickly turned its attention to building a nation-wide organization. Masoud Rajavi emerged as the top MKO leader. The group was particularly successful in gaining the sympathies of middle class educated youth. It established offices throughout Iran and built a network of militia that were highly active inside university campuses and high schools.

While supporting the leadership of Khomeini in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, the MKO leaders never managed to gain his trust, and as a result were excluded from power-sharing arrangements in the post-revolutionary government. An intense rivalry developed between the MKO and the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), formed by Khomeini's disciples.

The first president of the republic, Abol-Hasan Banisadr, elected in 1980, also faced serious opposition from the IRP. In the first months of 1981, differences among competing political factions reached a critical juncture. President Banisadr came under intense political pressure from the IRP, which controlled the parliament and most branches of the government and security forces. The MKO and Banisadr formed an

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[16] Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*,

alliance to try and thwart the IRP's drive to consolidate its control over every part of the state.

The MKO started its armed conflict against the Iranian government on June 20, 1981. Thousands of its members inside Iran were imprisoned, tortured and executed during the 1980s.[17] In 1988, the Iranian government summarily executed thousands of political prisoners, many of them MKO members.[18]

On June 19, 1981, Banisadr and Rajavi called for massive demonstrations nationwide. They hoped to duplicate the pattern of the anti-shah revolution by instigating a popular uprising. On June 20, 1981, large-scale street demonstrations were held in Tehran and many major cities. However the authorities used Revolutionary Guards to suppress the uprising, killing hundreds of demonstrators in street clashes.

In the aftermath of the June 20 uprising, the MKO was forced underground and both Banisadr and Rajavi went into hiding. A few weeks later, on July 29, 1981, Banisadr and Rajavi fled Iran and went into exile in Paris. From this point on, the MKO moved its headquarters to Paris and continued to fight the Iranian government by carrying out assassinations and bombings targeting government officials and the IRP leadership.[19]

In Paris, Rajavi and Banisadr consolidated their alliance by declaring the establishment of the National Council of Resistance (NCR) as a coalition of opposition forces, advertising itself as "the democratic alternative" to Iran's government. The Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and a number of prominent intellectuals and individuals also joined the NCR.

However, the NCR's role as a broad coalition was diminished within a year of its founding. Banisadr's disagreements with Rajavi led to his departure in April 1984.[20] The KDPI followed suit and withdrew in 1985.[21] According to Masoud Banisadr, who served as the NCR's chief representative in Europe and the United States until 1996, the NCR

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[17] "Iran: Violations of Human Rights 1987-1990," *Amnesty International*, Index: MDE 13/2/90.

[18] "Iran: Political Executions," *Amnesty International*, December 1988, Index: MDE 13/29/88. See also Ayatollah Montazeri's letters protesting summary executions in 1988, published in his memoirs. Ayatollah Montazeri was Ayatollah Khomeini's heir apparent in 1988. Ayatollah Montazeri, *Khaterat*, http://www.montazeri.ws/farsi/khaterat/fehrest.htm, last accessed March 18, 2005.

[19] Among the most spectacular attacks include the bombing of the IRP headquarters in June 28, 1981 and the assassination of President Mohammad Ali Rajai and Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar in 1981.

[20] "Khomeini's Foes Split," *Washington Post*, April 4, 1984.

[21] *Mojahed*, No. 240, March 14, 1985.

has since functioned primarily as the political wing of the MKO, serving the MKO's lobbying efforts in Europe and North America:

> It was obvious to everyone but ourselves that politically the Mojahedin had failed to create the broad coalition Rajavi had promised....We repeated to each other that the NCR was Rajavi's means of staying on the political scene in Europe and America and nothing more. Its main use was to deceive the Americans and Europeans against thinking of us as the same Mojahedin responsible for assassinating American citizens in Iran...[22]

The MKO's leadership was transformed when Masoud Rajavi announced his marriage to Maryam Uzdanlu on March 18, 1985.[23] The husband and wife team became co-leaders of the MKO. The organization hailed their marriage as an "ideological revolution" that was the result of an immense sacrifice made by Masoud and Maryam Rajavi. Prior to this, Maryam Rajavi had been married to Masoud Rajavi's deputy, Mehdi Abrishamchi. The leadership asked all its members to undertake their own "ideological revolution" by identifying their personal shortcomings in self-criticism sessions.[24] Immediately following Masoud and Maryam Rajavi's marriage, the military command of the MKO issued a directive stating:

> In order to carry out your organizational duties under the present circumstances there is an urgent need to strengthen and deepen this ideological revolution. You must pay the necessary price by allocating sufficient time and resources for absorbing related teachings...Thus in your daily routines give priority to listening to radio messages and explanations provided by your commanders. Believe in the central committee's proclamation that "this ideological revolution will enhance the Mojahedin's capacities enormously; it will ever more unify and cleanse our ranks."...Be certain that your deep belief in the novel leadership of the new democratic revolution of the heroic Iranian people, meaning Masoud and Maryam Rajavi, and by making a direct connection with this leadership and setting it as your example....you will

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[22] Masoud Banisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), p. 219. Masoud Banisadr is a relative of former president Abolhasan Banisadr.

[23] *Mojahed*, No. 241, April 4, 1985.

[24] See footnote 8.

> be able to correct your work habits and be able to deal with and resolve personal, organizational, and military difficulties.[25]

The Social Division of MKO also issued a directive to the members initiating the self-criticism tradition within the organization:

> To understand this great revolution...is to understand and gain a deep insight into the greatness of our new leadership, meaning the leadership of Masoud and Maryam. It is to believe in them as well as to show ideological and revolutionary obedience of them...By correcting your old work habits and by criticizing your individual as well as collective shortcomings, we shall gain much awareness in confronting our enemies...Report to your commanders and superiors in a comprehensive manner your progress, its results and outcomes that you gain from promoting and strengthening this ideological revolution.[26]

In 1986, the French government engaged in direct talks with the Iranian government to normalize ties. As a result of these negotiations, the French government asked Masoud Rajavi to leave France. On June 7, 1986, he left Paris for Baghdad. The MKO relocated many of its resources from Paris to Iraq. On June 20, 1987, the MKO announced the formation of National Liberation Army (NLA) inside Iraq.[27] For the next year, the NLA made several incursions into Iran as the Iran-Iraq war was entering its eighth year. The largest operation, code-named "Eternal Light," took place in the immediate aftermath of Iran's acceptance of the U.N.-brokered cease fire agreement on July 18, 1988 (see below).[28]

After the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein limited the MKO's military activities against Iran. The lack of military activity inside the MKO camps in Iraq coupled with an acceleration of the "ideological revolution" led to a rising tide of dissent inside the organization.

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[25] *Mojahed*, No. 242, April 12, 1985.

[26] Ibid.

[27] "Iran rebels form Iraq-based army," *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 20, 1987.

[28] "Iran accepts UN truce call in eight year war with Iraq," *Associated Press*, July 19, 1988.

III. Rise of Dissent inside the MKO

Former MKO members interviewed for this report cite the following reasons for their decision to leave the organization: military failure of the MKO to dislodge the Iranian government during the July 1988 military operation, forced mass divorces instituted as part of the "ideological revolution" and their persecution and torture by the MKO operatives during "security clearances" in 1994-1995. These three developments are discussed below.

Operation Eternal Light

The MKO trained its fighters under the banner of the National Liberation Army (NLA) inside Iraq. The NLA established several military camps in Iraq and trained thousands of guerrilla fighters to fight against the Iranian regime.

During the Iran-Iraq war, the NLA fighters regularly attacked Iranian troops along the Iran-Iraq border and made several incursions into Iran. The largest operation by the NLA took place after Iran accepted U.N. resolution 598, calling for a ceasefire between Iran and Iraq. Iran accepted the U.N. resolution on July 18, 1988. The NLA forces, estimated at nearly 7,000 fighters, were immediately mobilized for an attack on Iran. This operation was named Eternal Light.

The MKO's leadership, believing that the Iranian government was weak and susceptible to a popular uprising, reasoned that an incursion by the NLA forces would incite such an uprising and would pave the way for their forces to march to Tehran and bring down the government. On the eve of launching the operation, Masoud Rajavi told his troops:

> We will not be fighting alone; we will have the people on our side. They are tired of this regime, and especially since the ceasefire, they have every incentive to get rid of it forever. We will only have to act as their shields, protecting them from being easy targets for the [revolutionary] guards. Wherever we go there will be masses of citizens joining us, and the prisoners we liberate from jails will help us lead them towards victory. It will be like an avalanche, growing as it progresses. Eventually the avalanche will tear Khomeini's web apart. You don't need to take anything with you. We will be like fish swimming in a sea of people. They will give you whatever you need.[29]

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[29] Banisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel*, p. 283.

On July 24, 1988, the NLA fighters left their camps crossing the Iranian border at Khosravi checkpoint.[30] They initially met little resistance as they approached the provincial capital of Kermanshah, nearly 100 miles inside Iranian territory. But Iran's military and Revolutionary Guard responded massively to defend Kermanshah, forcing the NLA fighters to retreat towards the Iraqi border after suffering heavy losses.[31] According to Masoud Banisadr:

> About ten years later, when the organization published names and photographs of martyrs from the operation for the first time, the number of martyred was announced as 1,304. Our other losses were officially 1,100 injured, of whom 11 subsequently died.[32]

The NLA's defeat was a defining moment for many of its fighters who realized their military might was far from sufficient to overthrow Iran's government. "The level of pessimism and lack of trust in Rajavi's leadership was rising daily. Many were asking to leave the organization. Our broken spirits and injured bodies were a sign of the NLA's tactical and strategic defeat," wrote Mohammad Reza Eskandari, another former MKO member who was injured during the operation.[33]

Masoud Banisadr also recalled the aftermath of the operation as a significant turning point for many MKO members:

> Operation Forogh [Eternal Light] dashed our political hopes. Worse, it signified the end of ideology, of moral belief and expectation –for me and, as I soon discovered, many others. Our basic values no longer had any meaning and ceased to sustain us. We had all become actors playing to each other, encouraged by each other. This lie reached its intolerable climax when our "ideological leader" failed to admit his predictions and judgment had been wrong...once, we had been told that belief in Mojahedin was based on two premises: the sacrifice they were willing to make and their honesty. After Forogh the well of honesty completely dried up, and from then on the organization rested on only one foundation: "sacrifice" and more "sacrifice."[34]

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[30] "Incursion by rebels threaten cease-fire," *The Washington Post*, July 30, 1988.

[31] "Rebels routed in push for Tehran," *The Guardian*, September 6, 1988.

[32] Banisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel*, p. 292.

[33] Mohammad Reza Eskandari, *Bar Ma Che Gozasht Khaterat Yek Mojahed* (Paris: Kahvaran, 2004), p. 83.

[34] Banisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel*, p. 306.

Compulsory Divorce

The "sacrifice" required of the members was articulated in a series of "ideological revolutions" promoted by the leadership.[35] The leadership asked the members to divorce themselves from all physical and emotional attachments in order to enhance their "capacity for struggle." In case of married couples, this phase of the "ideological revolution" required them to renounce their emotional ties to their spouses through divorce. Masoud Banisadr reports how this process unfolded during an "ideological meeting for 'executive and high ranking members'" following MKO's defeat in Iran:

> The first thing I was required to do in Baghdad was watch a videotape of an ideological meeting for "executive and high-ranking members." The meeting, called "Imam Zaman,"[36] started with a simple question: "To whom do we owe all our achievements and everything that we have?"... Rajavi did not claim, as I thought he might, to be the Imam of our times, but merely said we owed everything to Imam Zaman... The object was to show that we could reach Tehran if we were more united with our leader, as he was with Imam Zaman and God. He was ready to sacrifice everything he had (which in fact meant all of us!) for God, asserting that the only thing on his mind was doing the will of God,....we were expected to draw the conclusion that no "buffer" existed between Rajavi and Imam Zaman; yet there was a buffer between ourselves and him [Rajavi] ... which prevented us from seeing him clearly. This "buffer" was our weakness. If we could recognize that, we would see why and how we had failed in Operation Forogh [Eternal Light] and elsewhere. Masoud and Maryam [Rajavi] had no doubt that the buffer was in all our cases our existing spouse.[37]

The organization's order for "mass divorce" caused much mental anguish and confusion. Masoud Banisadr details the atmosphere inside Ashraf Camp during this period:

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[35] The concept of ideological revolution started with the "ideological marriage" of Masoud and Maryam Rajavi in 1985. Subsequently, the organization required all of its members to make an "ideological leap" by cleansing their character. This process required all members to write self-criticism reports outlining their character flaws and past mistakes. See footnote 8.

[36] Imam Zaman is the twelfth Shia Imam. According to the Shia Twelver belief, Imam Zaman is the Twelfth Imam in descent from the prophet Mohammad, who went into "occultation" in the Tenth century and will reappear on earth as a messiah at a time of God's choosing.

[37] Banisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel*, p. 307.

> The atmosphere on the base was completely different....The mood was one of unremitting misery...It seemed everyone was in the process of the new phase of the "ideological revolution." The only legitimate discussion was about the revolution and the exchange of relevant experiences. Apart from that nothing was important; there was no outside world....Even poor single people were required to divorce their buffers, having no idea whom that meant; apparently the answer was to divorce all women or men for whom they harboured any feelings of love. Only later did I realize the organization demanded not only a legal divorce but also an emotional or "ideological" divorce. I would have to divorce Anna [his wife] in my heart. Indeed I would have to learn to hate her as the buffer standing between our leader and myself.
>
> Rajavi announced at the meeting that as our "ideological leader" he had ordered mass divorce from our spouses. He asked everyone to hand over our rings if we had not already done so. That meeting was the strangest and most repugnant I had ever attended. It went on for almost a week....[38]

"Security Clearances"

During late 1994 and early 1995, many members of the MKO were arrested by the organization's operatives inside their camps in Iraq. They were interrogated and accused of spying for the Iranian government. They were released in mid-1995 after being forced to sign false confessions and stating their loyalty to the leadership. Five former MKO members interviewed for this report were arrested during this period: Farhad Javaheri-Yar, Ali Ghashghavi, Alireza Mirasgari, Akbar Akbari, and Abbas Sadeghinejad. According to their testimonies—detailed in the next section—the purpose of these arrests was to intimidate dissidents and obtain false confessions from them stating that they were agents of Iranian government. This period was known as the "security clearance" (*check-e amniyati*).

In late 1994, the organization informed its fighters in Iraq of its plans to send small teams of fighters into Iran to carry out operations. Farhad Javaheri-Yar, a former member, told Human Rights Watch:

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[38] Banisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel*, p. 311.

> A message was broadcast on behalf of Masoud Rajavi stating that the domestic situation in Iran was chaotic. It called for volunteers who wanted to go inside Iran, perform revolutionary operations and instigate people to rise up. Many members responded immediately; long lines were formed by applicants. The application forms were nearly forty pages long and included hundreds of questions.[39]

Another former member, Alireza Mirasgari, told Human Rights Watch that discontent and dissent were spreading throughout Camp Ashraf at this time:

> During the second half of 1994, the wave of questions and dissent was reaching a climax inside the organization. Since most military activities had stopped, there was little to do and much time to reflect. Many fighters wanted to leave the organization. I began to note that some people around me were "disappearing." I was told they had left for special operations inside Iran. However, later we found out that they had been arrested and imprisoned inside the camp. I was myself imprisoned in January 1995.[40]

IV. Human Rights Abuses in the MKO Camps

Human rights abuses carried out by MKO leaders against dissident members ranged from prolonged incommunicado and solitary confinement to beatings, verbal and psychological abuse, coerced confessions, threats of execution, and torture that in two cases led to death.

The testimonies of the former MKO members indicate that the organization used three types of detention facilities inside its camps in Iraq. The interviewees described one type as small residential units, referred to as guesthouses (*mihmansara*), inside the camps. The MKO members who requested to leave the organization were held in these units during much of which time they were kept incommunicado. They were not allowed to leave the premises of their unit, to meet or talk with anyone else in the camp, or to contact their relatives and friends in the outside world.

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[39] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Farhad Javaheri-Yar, February 3, 2005.

[40] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Alireza Mir Asgari, February 10, 2005.

Karim Haqi, a former high ranking MKO member who served as the head of security for Masoud Rajavi, told Human Rights Watch:

> I was the head of security for Masoud Rajavi in 1991. They could not believe that I wanted to separate from the organization. I was confined inside a building called *Iskan* together with my wife and our six month old child. *Iskan* was the site of a series of residential units that used to house married couples before ideological divorces were mandated. The organization had raised a tall wall around this area. Its interior perimeter was protected by barbed wire, and guards kept it under surveillance from observation towers. While we were under detention, the organization reduced our food rations, subjected us to beatings and verbal abuses and also intimidated us by making threats of executions.[41]

Mohammad Reza Eskandari and his wife Tahereh Eskandari, two former members of the MKO, also told Human Rights Watch of being detained inside various guest houses after requesting to leave the MKO in 1991:

> The organization had taken our passports and identification documents upon our arrival in the camp. When we expressed our intention to leave, they never returned our documents. We were held in detention centers in *Iskan* as well as other locations. We were sent to a refugee camp outside the city of Ramadi called al-Tash. Life in al-Tash was extremely harsh, more like a process of gradual death. The MKO operatives continued to harass us even in Al-Tash. Eventually in September 1992, we received refugee status from Holland and were able to leave al-Tash.[42]

The second type of detention inside the MKO camps was called *bangali shodan* by the witnesses, referring to solitary confinement inside a small pre-fabricated trailer room (*bangal*). Dissident members who requested to leave the organization as well as ordinary members were detained in the *bangals*. Detention inside a *bangal* was considered a form of MKO punishment for members whom the leadership considered to have made mistakes. They were expected to reflect on their mistakes and to write self-criticism reports while in detention.

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[41] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Karim Haqi, February 11, 2005.

[42] Human Rights Watch telephone interviews with Mohammad Reza Eskandari and Tahereh Eskandari, February 1, 2005 and February 10, 2005.

Masoud Banisadr, formerly the top diplomatic representative of the MKO in Europe and North America, wrote of his experience of being detained in a *bangal* when Masoud Rajavi and other high-ranking members met with him and decided he had been "corrupted:"

> Afterwards my *masoul* [supervisor] advised me to go to a bungalow and think. I had become a *bangali*, which meant being put in solitary confinement, ordered to do nothing but think and write. It was an extreme kind of mental torture, and there were members who preferred to kill themselves than to suffer it.[43]

The third type of detention reported by the witnesses encompassed imprisonment, physical torture and interrogations inside secret prisons within the MKO camps. These prisons were primarily used for persecution of political dissidents. Their existence was unknown to most members. The witnesses who suffered under this form of detention told Human Rights Watch that they were unaware that the organization maintained such prisons until they experienced it firsthand.

One of the witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, spent eight-and-a-half years in solitary confinement, from September 1992 to January 2001, inside the MKO camps. Another witness, Javaheri-Yar, underwent five years of solitary confinement in the MKO prisons, from November 1995 to December 2000. Both were high-ranking members who intended to leave the organization but were told that, because of their extensive inside knowledge, they could not be allowed to do so. They were imprisoned and eventually transferred to the Iraqi authorities, who then held them in Abu Ghraib.

Four other witnesses Human Rights Watch interviewed were detained during the "security clearances" of 1994-1995 because they were suspected by the MKO of harboring dissident views. Ali Ghasghavi, Alireza Mir Asgari, Ali Akbari, and Abbas Sadeghinejad were severely tortured, subjected to harsh interrogation techniques and forced to sign false confessions stating their links to Iranian intelligence agents.

Abbas Sadeghinejad, Ali Ghashghavi, and Alireza Mir Asgari, three former members of MKO interviewed by Human Rights Watch, witnessed the death of Parviz Ahmadi in

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[43] Banisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel*, p. 388.

February 1995 inside an internal MKO prison in Iraq.[44] The three shared a prison cell during the security clearance arrests in February 1995. Parviz Ahmadi was a dissident member who was held in the same cell. Ali Ghashghavi told Human Rights Watch that Parviz Ahmadi was taken for interrogations on his second day of being held in the prison cell:

> It was the start of Ramadan [February 1995] when the prison guards came to fetch Parviz Ahmadi. He was gone for a couple of hours. When they brought him back he was badly beaten and died soon afterwards.

Abbas Sadeghinezhad, who was also present in the cell, recalled the final moments of Parviz Ahmadi's life:

> The prison door opened, and a prisoner was thrown into the cell. He fell on his face. At first we didn't recognize him. He was beaten up severely. We turned him around; it was Parviz Ahmadi taken for interrogations just a few hours before. Ahmadi was a unit commander. His bones were broken all over, his legs were inflamed; he was falling into a coma. We tried to help him but after only ten minutes he died as I was holding his head on my lap. The prison guard opened the door and pulled Ahmadi's lifeless body out.[45]

Alireza Mir Asgari, who was also present, corroborated the circumstances of Parviz Ahmadi's death.[46] In contrast, the MKO's publication *Mojahed* of March 2, 1998, lists Parviz Ahmadi as an MKO "martyr" killed by Iranian intelligence agents.[47]

Abbas Sadeghinejad told Human Rights Watch that he had earlier witnessed the death of another prisoner, Ghorbanali Torabi, after Torabi was returned from an interrogation session to a prison cell that he shared with Sadeghinejad.[48]

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[44] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Abbas Sadeghinejad, February 14, 2005. Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Ali Ghashghavi, February 9, 2005 and May 6, 2005. Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Alireza Mir Asgari, February 10, 2005.

[45] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Abbas Sadeghinejad, February 14, 2005.

[46] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Alireza Mir Asgari, February 10, 2005.

[47] *Mojahed*, No. 380, March 2, 1998 (on file with Human Rights Watch).

[48] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Abbas Sadeghinejad, February 14, 2005.

V. Testimonies

Mohammad Hussein Sobhani

Mohammad Hussein Sobhani spent eight-and-a-half years in solitary confinement inside the MKO's main camp in Iraq, Camp Ashraf, from September 1992 to January 2001. He was subsequently held in Abu Ghraib prison and left Iraq in 2002.[49]

Sobhani first came in contact with the MKO in 1977, a year before the anti-monarchy revolution. By 1979, he was working "professionally and full time" with the organization. When the headquarters of the armed wing of the organization relocated inside Iraq, he followed suit. By 1991, he had risen in the ranks of the organization and had become a member of the Central Committee. However, ever since the "ideological revolution," when divorces were mandated, he became uncomfortable with the path pursued by the leadership. His differences with the leadership of Masoud and Maryam Rajavi and other members of the Central Committee reached a climax in 1992. Masoud Rajavi argued for remaining in Iraq regardless of the end of the Iran-Iraq war and Saddam Hussein's defeat in the first Gulf War in 1991, he said. Rajavi still hoped that fighting between Iran and Iraq would resume, and based the organization's strategy on such a development. Sobhani says he found the possibility of a new war highly unlikely given the dismal state of Iraq's armed forces. Other members of the Central Committee saw his arguments as a challenge to the Rajavis' leadership:

> As long as my criticisms were mild, I was left alone. But as soon as I persevered in my questioning, their behavior changed dramatically. In the beginning, I discussed my concerns personally with the leadership, Maryam and Masoud Rajavi. I also brought up my concerns with other members of the Central Committee. These discussions reached a dead-end. Once they became certain that I didn't share their views, on August 28, 1992, they convened a meeting (*neshast taiin taklif*) to determine my faith and to decide if I was staying with the organization or not. The process began with intimidation, verbal abuse, and beatings. Of course, since I was a high ranking official I was treated better than ordinary members. I was told that my criticisms and questions were just an excuse to quit the struggle. Their conclusion was that I was a quitter

[49] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, February 14, 2005 and May 6, 2005.

> (*borideh)* and didn't have the strength to continue the struggle any longer.[50]

On August 31, 1992, Sobhani was moved to a prison and kept under solitary confinement for the next eight-and-a-half years.

> After the first two months in prison, all of my beliefs in the organization fell apart. Up to that point I considered my differences with them as a matter of divergent political views; I wasn't questioning the MKO's underlying essence. I used to mark my prison walls each time I was subjected to severe beatings. There were many occasions of lesser beatings, but on eleven occasions I was beaten mercilessly using wooden sticks and thick leather belts.[51]

Sobhani was handed over to Iraqi officials in January 2001. He spent one month in *mukhabarat* prison and then transferred to Abu Ghraib. He was held in Abu Ghraib until January 21, 2002, when he was repatriated to Iran in exchange for Iraqi POWs. In Iran, he was detained and interrogated by the Iranian government. After three days, he escaped from a low security detention center and fled Iran. He is currently living in Europe.

Yasser Ezati

Yasser Ezati was born on May 27, 1980, to Hasan Ezati and Akram Ghadim-al-ayam. He said that his father, also known as Nariman, was a well-known interrogator inside the MKO prisons. Yasser's mother died during one of the MKO's military operations.[52]

Ezati moved to Iraq with his family at the age of three and grew up inside the MKO military camps. During the 1991 Gulf war, Ezati and other children inside the camps were separated from their parents and sent outside Iraq. During the next three years, Ezati lived with three different families in Canada. These families were MKO sympathizers. In the summer of 1994, the MKO moved Ezati to Cologne, Germany, where he lived in a group-house for the MKO children. The organization recruited Ezati for military training when he was seventeen years old and sent him to Iraq in June 1997.

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Yasser Ezati, February 9, 2005.

> After the first six months in Iraq, I realized I had no desire to stay. In Europe I had an image of a democratic organization, but in Iraq I realized the extent of censorship and control. I wanted to leave. I was repeatedly told the only way out was to go to Iran. I was too afraid to go to Iran.[53]

Ezati was extremely uncomfortable with the many means of thought control enforced inside the camps. He said there were many gatherings where high ranking officials lectured members not to think of any issue except those relating to internal MKO operations. "We had to write self-criticism reports on a regular basis. If we had any thoughts outside of the organizational framework we had to report them," he said. Ezati's most daunting experience took place in summer of 2001:

> It was a gathering called *to'emeh* [lure, or bait] that lasted four consecutive months. All of the camp members were present during these sessions. At this time the number of dissidents who wanted to leave the organization was growing daily. First, Masoud Rajavi talked about the Mojahedin's basic ideology. He then talked about the organization's strategy, and finally he addressed the issue of those members wishing to separate from the organization. His purpose was to intimidate members and to say that anyone who wants to leave is a traitor. These sessions were held from morning to evening. Dissident members were brought in front of the audience and forced to self-criticize their actions and thoughts. They were expected to conclude by saying that they will remain with the organization. As soon as someone would speak their minds or criticize the organization, the attendees would attack him/her mercilessly using harsh verbal abuses. Anyone who dared to ask to leave the organization would immediately be labeled an agent of the Iranian government. It was psychologically devastating. I had to pledge my allegiance to the MKO numerous times during these gatherings. After four consecutive months of psychological pressures, I ended up signing documents that I would stay with the organization.[54]

After the American occupation of Iraq, Ezati managed to escape Camp Ashraf in June 2004. He is living in Europe.

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

Farhad Javaheri-Yar

Farhad Javaheri-Yar is a former fighter with the MKO in Iraq.[55] He served in various capacities in intelligence and security operations. In 1995, he became aware of dissident members being imprisoned inside the MKO camps in Iraq. He wrote a letter to his superiors requesting to be released from his duties and expressed his desire to leave the organization. His superiors tried repeatedly to intimidate him into staying. After his refusal, he was incarcerated in various prisons inside the MKO camps in Iraq from November 1995 to December 2000. He was subsequently turned over to the Iraqi officials and held in Abu Ghraib prison until January 2002, when he was repatriated to Iran.

Javaheri-Yar joined the MKO in August 1982 in Tehran and became active in their underground armed resistance. He was arrested in October 1984 by the Iranian authorities and spent the following four years inside Evin, Ghazal Hisar, and Gohardasht prisons in Iran. Upon his release, he contacted MKO operatives in Europe and was smuggled to Karachi and from there to Iraq. He entered Iraq in 1989 and became an active member of the MKO's armed wing.

Javaheri-Yar became disillusioned with the MKO in 1995 after learning from a number of other MKO cadres that they had been recently imprisoned by the organization:

> In July 1995, I returned to Camp Ashraf from a reconnaissance mission. During the preceding months, I had noticed a number of my friends had "disappeared." I was told that they were inside Iran to carry out missions. I met two of them, Akbar Akbari and Ali Taleghani, who told me that they were imprisoned inside Camp Ashraf during this period and were forced to sign false confessions indicating their ties to Iranian intelligence agents and [promising] that they would never leave the MKO.
>
> I could not believe that the Mojahedin would engage in acts of torture and forced confessions similar to what the Iranian government used. I wrote a number of reports for my superior. In these letters I expressed my disapproval of the mistreatment of members and submitted my resignation. My request was repeatedly ignored.[56]

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[55] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Farhad Javaheri-Yar, February 3, 2005 and February 25, 2005.

[56] Ibid.

Javaheri-Yar persevered with his request to leave the MKO, but was told that the organization could not relieve him of his duties because of his extensive knowledge of MKO's activities. Once Javaheri-Yar realized he would not be free to leave, he escaped from Camp Ashraf on November 28, 1995 and attempted to reach the Jordanian border. On November 30, 1995, he was arrested by Iraqi security forces near the city of Tikrit. He pleaded with the Iraqi forces not to return him to the MKO camp, but his pleas were ignored and he was handed over to the MKO forces in Camp Ashraf. During the next five years he was held in solitary confinement in various locations inside the MKO camps, from November 1995 to December 2000.

> During the first two months, I was kept inside a pre-fabricated trailer room called a *bangal*. I was told that I could not leave the camp but could resume life inside the camp if I chose to do menial labor, such as making bread or sweeping streets. I refused their offer, and their response was harsh. I was moved to a prison cell in Avenue 400 of Camp Ashraf. The cell's dimensions were three by two-and-a-half meters [nine feet by eight feet]. It was connected to a narrow hallway—one meter [three feet] wide and three-and-a-half meters [ten feet] long—that led to a small toilet and sink.
>
> In February 1996, I made very loud verbal protests from inside my cell. To punish me, they confined me inside a bathroom for three consecutive weeks. I was miserable. There was no room to stretch or lie down. The tiled floor was wet and cold. It was a terrifying experience.[57]

The MKO's leadership, including Masoud Rajavi, promised Javaheri-Yar that he would be released "soon," but each time they broke their promise. Javaheri-Yar was imprisoned in solitary confinement inside Camp Ashraf, as well as Camp Parsian, until December 2000, when he was turned over to the Iraqi intelligence forces (*mukhabarat*). He spent one month in a *mukhabarat* prison before being transferred to Abu Ghraib prison. He was repatriated to Iran on January 21, 2002. He left Iran and is living in Europe.

Ali Ghashghavi

Ali Ghashghavi joined the MKO as a fighter in Iraq in 1989. He was arrested in February 1995 during the "security clearance" phase and was imprisoned for four

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[57] Ibid.

months in Camp Ashraf. He told Human Rights Watch of his experience during this period:[58]

> One night in January 1995, I was called over by my superior and told that a member of the Central Committee wanted me in her office. I was excited to be meeting such a high level official at such an unlikely hour. I assumed there was much importance attached to this meeting. We got into a military vehicle; it was around midnight. They took me to a place inside Camp Ashraf called *Iskan*. It is at the far corner of the camp where a series of apartment buildings were used to house families [before they were forcibly broken up]. It was a rather isolated spot—barren desert and frighteningly secluded.
>
> There were a few people inside, five or six. I was taken to an empty room and told to wait. A few minutes later, another member, Hussein Nizam, was brought in. Hussein Nazim had spent many years inside the Islamic Republic's prisons, so he knew something else was happening. I was somewhat naive and didn't have much of a clue.
>
> Suddenly the door opened and a group of people attacked us mercilessly, blindfolded us, tied our hands behind our backs, and put us inside a car. We were driven around for half an hour. We stopped inside an area that was approximately at the center of the camp. I didn't know this was a prison until I was taken there. The prison was on Avenue 400 of Camp Ashraf near the water tanker. Until then, I had assumed that explosives or sensitive documents were guarded inside.
>
> Our clothes were taken from us and we put on prison garb. We were led to a large cell holding nearly twenty-five prisoners. The prison cell was on the ground floor of the building; there was a small window near the ceiling for air circulation. A small toilet and shower were built at one end of the cell.
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> There was a period when prisoners were taken on a daily basis for interrogations and beatings. One method was to kick the prisoner's legs and knees repeatedly with military boots with metal covers on the front.

[58] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Ali Ghashghavi, February 9, 2005 and May 6, 2005.

> Another method was to put a thick rope around the prisoner's neck and drag him on the ground. Sometimes prisoners returned to the cell with extremely swollen necks—their head and neck as big as a pillow.
>
> I experienced the pain of leg-beatings firsthand. During one of my interrogation sessions, the interrogator told me that if I don't give them guarantees that I will stay with the leaders forever, he would kill me right there and then. I asked him "what worthier guarantee there could be than my coming here to join your ranks and fight against Khomeini?" He replied that now that the ideological revolution had been instituted and life was harder, people like me couldn't bear it and wanted to leave. He said, "I can see it in your eyes that you are dying to quit the organization."
>
> He went to the next room while he told me how he was going to beat me up badly. He changed his shoes and put on a pair of these military boots. He came back, and two hefty guards held me. He began kicking my legs repeatedly. My legs are still unbalanced from these beatings. Interrogations sometimes lasted for up to thirty or thirty-six hours non-stop.

Ghashghavi was released in May 1995, after a meeting with Masoud Rajavi who told him, "The judicial branch of the National Liberation Army has acquitted you." After this experience Ghashghavi, explored ways to escape Camp Ashraf. On March 20, 1998, he was imprisoned for forty-five days and then turned over to Iraqi intelligence agents. He spent another forty-five days inside the *mukhabarat* prison in central Baghdad before being transferred to Abu Ghraib. He was repatriated to Iran on January 21, 2002. In Iran, he was interrogated and brought before a court that sentenced him to nine years in prison. After sixteen months of imprisonment, he was given a forty-eight hour release to visit his family. He used this opportunity to escape and leave Iran. In August 2003, he fled Iran and is currently living in Europe.

Alireza Mir Asgari

Alireza Mir Asgari was a deputy director of one of the MKO's military units in 1994 when he started to have concerns about the organization's links with the Iraqi military. In January 1995, he was arrested and imprisoned. In June 1995, he was released after signing a contract promising to remain with the MKO's forces. He was arrested again in 1998 and spent eight months in solitary confinement. In 2001, he arranged to escape, but his plan was discovered and he was imprisoned again until 2003, when he was turned

over to Iraqi forces who then abandoned him along the Iran-Iraq border. He described his sudden arrest in 1995:[59]

> I was arrested without notice on January 29, 1995. I was told to go to a meeting with a team who were preparing for operations in Iran. These kinds of discussions were a regular part of my duties. I was taken to a room and told to wait. Hasan Mohasel, one of the MKO's top intelligence officers, came into the room and put a note in front of me saying that I had been arrested because I was an agent of Iranian intelligence and had infiltrated the Liberation Army. I couldn't believe what was happening; I thought it was a joke and started to laugh. But Hasan Mohasel cursed me and told me to stand against the wall. Suddenly two or three more people entered the room and began to blindfold me and to tie my hands behind my back. I was in total shock. They put me in a car and drove around for forty-five minutes inside the camp. I was taken to a building; I didn't know where it was. Hasan Sadat Darbandi, also known as Adel, removed my blindfold and threw me into a cell with many other prisoners. I could not believe it; I thought there had been a coup inside the organization. Each day, a number of prisoners were taken for interrogation. They were beaten badly; after they were brought back, their heads and faces were tremendously swollen.
>
> After a couple of days, it was my turn to be taken for interrogation. They asked me why I had joined the MKO. I told them I came here to fight Khomeini's government, but they said that wasn't true. During the first couple of days of interrogation, they beat me mercilessly. It was very depressing; I really wanted to commit suicide. I was only seventeen years old when I left Iran and came to Iraq to join the MKO. I had spent my entire adult life in their camps.
>
> Eventually, I gave up and agreed to sign the forced confessions stating that I had ties to Iranian intelligence. I was taken to a meeting with Masoud Rajavi, who told me that if I stayed for another two years, they would release me and send me to Spain.

[59] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Alireza Mir Asgari, February 10, 2005.

Mir Asgari was released in June 1995. He spent the next two years waiting for the organization to release and transfer him to Spain. However, he was told that because of his wealth of information, he could not be released. His protests led to his imprisonment again:

> On March 5, 1998, I was taken to a prison where my old case from 1995 was reopened. They said that based on my own confession, I was an Iranian agent and could not be trusted. I spent eight months in solitary confinement. During this period, I was told that my sister in Iran had been arrested and executed. Later I found this to be untrue.[60]

After recanting his request to leave Iraq, Mir Asgari was released. Since the organization was not going to allow him to leave, he started to design an escape plan. His plan to escape was discovered, and he was arrested again. He was kept in solitary confinement for nearly two years, from 2001 to 2003. A few months prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, in February 2003, Mir Asgari was turned over to the Iraqi forces who took him to the Iran-Iraq border along the Arvandrood River [Shatt al-Arab] and released him there. He is living in Europe.

Akbar Akbari

Akbar Akbari became familiar with the MKO on the eve of the Iranian revolution in 1978. He started his professional association with the MKO in February 1979. In June 1984, he was arrested by the Iranian authorities and was imprisoned in Iran for more than four years. Within a few months of his release in September 1988, Akbari left Iran to join the MKO operations in Iraq.[61]

In 1993, he decided to leave the organization and wrote a number of letters to his superiors asking to be released.

> My supervisor was Mehdi Abrishamchi, who was one of the high ranking members of the Central Committee. After I wrote him a letter expressing my intention to leave the organization, he called me to his office, tore the letter into pieces, threw it in a garbage basket, and said, "I don't want to hear of this anymore. You are not to discuss it with

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Akbar Akbari, February 27, 2005 and May 6, 2005.

> anyone." I was also called to private meetings with other high ranking members who reinforced the same message.[62]

Akbari was supervisor of a section in Communications Department (*Setad Ravabit*). He carried out many sensitive tasks for the organization, including working as a personal body guard of Masoud Rajavi. Akbari was arrested in December 1993 and held inside a prison in Camp Ashraf.

> The interrogators were extremely rough. From the moment I entered the room, I was subjected to beatings. I was put on a chair that was fixed to the floor. My hands and feet were tied to the chair, I couldn't move at all. I was beaten with a thick hose and kicked repeatedly with a military boot. My interrogator also used a pair of heavy plastic slippers to hit me in the face and head.
>
> I was asked to confess to being an agent of the Iranian government. After a few interrogation sessions, the interrogator dictated a confession letter that he asked me to sign. Then he told me, "Now it is proven that you are an agent who has infiltrated our organization."[63]

Akbari was then taken with a group of prisoners to meet Masoud Rajavi. Rajavi told them that he had "forgiven" them and they could return to their duties. He was let out of the prison in June 1995. Akbari escaped Camp Ashraf in February 1999 and set out for the Jordanian border. He was arrested by Iraqi security forces in Ramadi and handed over to the MKO.

> When I was returned to Camp Ashraf, I was taken to a room where Hasan Mohasel told me I would be imprisoned because I was an infiltrator. High ranking members of the organization were present. I was taken to a fort called Ghaleh Afsaneh and kept in solitary confinement for a full year, from February 1999 to March 2000.[64]

In March 2000, Akbari was turned over to Iraqi security forces who took him to Abu Ghraib. Akbari was in Abu Ghraib until January 21, 2002, when he was repatriated to

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Bid.

Iran in exchange for Iraqi POWs. He was detained and interrogated by the Iranian authorities. He said that during a weekend release to visit his family, he escaped and fled Iran. He is now living in Europe.

Sayed Amir Mowaseghi

Sayed Amir Mowaseghi joined the MKO in 1984 and was imprisoned by the Iranian authorities from 1984-1987. After his release, he went to Pakistan, and from there was able to travel to Iraq, where he joined the MKO forces in June 1988.[65]

In 2001, he chose to leave the organization, but was not allowed. A "court session" was convened in September 2001 in the presence of Maryam and Masoud Rajavi, who refused to grant him permission to leave. Subsequently, he was subjected to verbal abuse and humiliation:

> I was taken to a large gathering of nearly 600 people. They led me through the crowd; I was spat on, kicked and verbally abused. I was moved to a trailer, they called it *bangal*, and kept there in solitary confinement until June 2, 2002, when I was handed over to the Iraqi forces. The Iraqis took me to Abu Ghraib, and I remained there until I was repatriated to Iran on 18 March 2003.[66]

[65] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Seyd Amir Mowaseghi, February 4, 2005.

[66] Ibid.