

**[PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]**

[Translator's notes appear in square brackets.]

[Personal information has been **redacted**.]

[The excerpt below is from the section of the article that pertains to the Baha'i Faith]

[Adopted from website] [Iran Press Watch](#)

[Date:] 16 April 2014

Letter from Shabnam Tolouie to Mohammad Javad Larijani

Mr. Mohammad Javad Larijani,

Rahmatollah son of Mirza Asadollah, was born in the year 1902. I remember this because he always used to say that he was the same age as Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Iranian revolution, who had come to aid the left and the right wings and turn the monarchy into history with his charisma, and to bring a new form of justice to the citizens of the nation.

Rahmatollah, who was one of the few Baha'is from Sunni background in Sanandaj, was a guarded person. Blunt about all matters and especially his Faith. He had tried all his life to work without clamor and fanfare; he rose to the level of senior staff. He bought a house as an investment for his old age, as middle class people do, and expended all his efforts to raise his children.

In the chaos of 1979, with the slaughter and decimation of people on the left and the right side of the ideological divide, a republic was established and was called Islamic – but its method became violence. My grandfather, who was a retired Ministry of Transportation auditor, became one of the first victims of the harsh shadow of injustice, a fruit of his lifelong work and service. As he normally did over all of his post retirement years, he had gone to the bank to receive his retirement wage when the bank employee, who was too embarrassed to look the 77 year old in the eyes, said: “Sorry, your retirement salary has been stopped.”

Rahmatollah did not believe it and asked, based on what crime? With further follow-up, from this room on this floor to that room on that other floor, the ministry eventually handed him a well-known form – the aim of which is to force Baha'is to recant their Faith – so that he could with a so-called white lie reclaim his lost salary for himself and his wife, who had no other income. Rahmatollah gave up on the idea of reclaiming his retirement salary, and with that beautiful handwriting that he had, next to the question about religion, wrote “Baha'i”. He never saw another payment of his pension for which he had worked so hard, over so many years.

My grandfather continued to hope. “I have heard that they are planning to pay our salaries...” he would say from time to time, until 1994, when he was released from his small frail body, and left to seek justice in the next world.

Keyhan Tolouie, daughter of Rahmatollah, had worked in the bank since she was 18. When she retired in 1979 from her position as the head of the Refah Kargaran Bank – due to having completed her required years of service – besides one or two payments, she never received a retirement pension. From the very beginning one of her old friends who worked in accounts payable had told her, “Mrs. Tolouie, unfortunately they have stopped your pension because you are a Baha’i.” My aunt was too impatient, or perhaps proud to go and follow up, so that the government would hand her a form and attempt to reform her, as her father had experienced. Therefore she immediately accepted this game of life, and endured the financial pressure in silence next to Rahmatollah and her mother.

But the same injustice was wandering the streets looking for victims. Those days, in the year 1983, the prisons were saturated with spilled blood, with the rape of virgins who were sentenced to death, the wailing, lamentation and repentance, and with the soles of feet being torn in pieces under the blow of cable – hard lashes for getting names, or for recanting beliefs. Keyhan Tolouie, due to a pair of socks which was probably too thin or too light for those dark years, was reprimanded in an extremely rude and insulting tone by the “Sisters” (a group of government assigned females who roam the streets of Iran looking for Islamic dress code violations) in Karim-Khan-Zand street. For the first time Keyhan Tolouie opened her mouth to respond to the abusive chastisement of this woman, when the “Brothers” poured in. She (Keyhan Tolouie) was surrounded, and was taken to a notorious patrol post. They pulled out a piece of paper, which was a letter of acceptance of the crime of violating the Islamic cover code, and an apology which she had to sign in order to be released. As soon as Keyhan Tolouie saw the letter, she figured out the end of the story: in Iran, the name and address fields are followed by the question about religion. Keyhan Tolouie, in a fine handwriting using her inherited gold color Parker pen, wrote: “Baha’i”.

Evin was salivating in hunger and anticipation, a new prey was on the way. That night, agents poured into Rahmatollah’s house – all family albums, all memorabilia were taken, of course, including all the gold necklaces, perhaps as trophies, because they were confiscated from a Baha’i house! My aunt was held at Evin for months, Rahmatollah and Her mother with bent backs but heads held up high visited the prison once in a while to hear her voice on the phone across from a glass wall, and bring back the news that “She has been reduced to skin and bones but is still beautiful in a Chador (Islamic head-to-toe covering).” Apparently Haj Tolouie – who is a champion of the abuse of Baha’is – had realized that this prey would not be of much use to them, and she never had any involvement in the activities that he was concerned with. Once during one of her interrogations, he even asked the guards to “bring a chair for our family member” (referring to matching last names), and eventually my aunt was released.

Keyhan Tolouie never spoke of prison. Once in a while you heard a sentence you needed to link to another sentence you had heard the year before to figure something out regarding events (hile she was in the prison. Most of what I wrote, I had gathered from her mother or non-Baha’i friends whom I came to know later as her cellmates while in prison.

Keyhan passed away last year after a long period of suffering an illness – in Tehran, the capitol of the Unjust Regime, without being afforded her or her father’s citizenship rights, or even access to her own health insurance. She left for possibly a different place, where she could trust someone and tell him or her of her persecution by the authorities in her own birthplace.

I am Shabnam Tolouie, daughter of Kourosh and Leila, born in 1971 in Tehran. I am an actress, theater director, and playwright; five time winner of the International Fajre Theatre Festival, chosen by a panel of judges; author of the book My Dear Actor (Bazigar-e aziz-e man) and several plays and stories. I am the same little 11 year old canary with the grey Islamic Veil from Marivan School who chanted Allah-o-Akbar with her pleasant voice at the Namaz (in school) on a daily basis...

But the little Canary who did not know the rules of the game, when the religion teacher in the class spoke of Islamic justice and the position of minorities, she remembered the situation at her house and asked the teacher: “then why it is that Baha’is are fired from their jobs?”

The little Canary missed the sparkle in the eyes of the teacher who was on her way to take the news that she had just harvested to the principal. Had Mrs. “S.” not expelled me, at the age of 11, from Marivan Middle School at the end of that year with charges of being a “Baha’i”, I might have been a Shiite Muslim today like all other members of my mother’s family – no doubt complaining of current injustices in Iran like many other Iranian Muslims.

I – “Mrs. Hekmati” from the TV series “With no explanation” – am the same person who, when the security agents came to the location where we were filming to hand me the famous “form”, wrote with a beautiful and legible hand writing, “Baha’i” in the blank religion space using my cheap Bic pen. The security agent trembled, and later took a photo with me to take to his wife and children as a memento. Because he knew that with this “confession”, I would soon be eliminated by an invisible hand, not just from that show but from wherever I had been as if I had never existed.

Mr. Mohammad Javad Larijani,

You recently said: “The authorities have never confronted the followers of this Faith for the sake of being a Baha’i, because they believe every Iranian citizen has certain rights according to constitution law; it is not possible to keep people from what is offered in constitutional law.”

By reading your statements I am reminded of the famous expression taught in religious classes: “expedient lies” and the “presumption of innocence”. I prefer to say that what you have recently said about the rights of the Baha’is is not an example of the first expression (expedient lie); hopefully the principle of innocent until proven guilty can be upheld about you in this case. This is why, after all that has gone on over all these years, and my imposed exile after I was forbidden to continue my work, instead of swallowing my sorrows as I always have, I have decided to take the opportunity to tell you about just three examples – a mere handful in the pile of hundreds of thousands of more profound and far more bitter stories, imposed on Baha’is based on a secret amendment to the law that they created.

By the way: now that the followers of this religion have full citizenship rights, I would like to remind you that among Baha’is in Iran, there are also children whose mothers have been imprisoned due to their belief, and mothers whose murdered husbands don’t have a memorial stone on their graves, and as a matter of fact their young sons and daughters are also in prison, and their sick have no right to Government Insurance Services, and their youth are blocked from entering university, and their children are humiliated in classes and are expelled from grade schools, and their houses are burnt by forces that are immune from investigation, and their veins are cut while in bed asleep by anonymous elements with full impunity, their walls are filled by profane anti-Baha’i graffiti overnight, their merchants are threatened; their cemeteries have been destroyed, innocents are accused of espionage, and moral terror against Baha’is in the public media is continuously propagated – and all that just to eliminate... from existence... a community of Iranian citizens... by the name of Baha’i.

We and our children and our children’s children are the witnesses and bearers of pain and oppression against Baha’is. Mr. Larijani, allow us to be the narrators of officials’ promotion of justice.