

[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]

[Adapted from website:] Iran Wire

[Date:] 20 Farvardin 1395 [8 April 2016]

From Khavaran Mothers to Evin Mothers

On Sunday, 9 Esfand, last year [28 February 2016], when Peyman Koushk-Baghi and his young son Bashir went to visit his wife, Azita Rafizadeh, who has been serving a four-year sentence in Evin Prison since November last year, he was arrested by three plainclothes officers and taken to prison to serve his five-year sentence.

Azita and Peyman were both lecturers at the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education [BIHE] who were arrested in Khordad 1390 [May 2011] and summoned to the prosecutor's office in Evin for questioning on charges of activities against the national security through membership in the training institute.

In Ordibehesht 1394 [February 2015], they were sentenced by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court, headed by Judge Moghiseh: Azita to four years in prison on charges of "membership in the unlawful Baha'i administration for the purpose of action against the security of the country through illegal activity in the training institute (BIHE)" and Payman to five years in prison under taz'ir¹ law. The judgment rendered by the court of first instance was upheld by the Court of Appeals in Mehr 1394 [September/October 2015].

Earlier, Azita Rafizadeh had expressed her concern about the custody of her young child if she and her husband were sentenced at the same time: "Bashir is five years and nine months old. We went to Mr. Khodabakhshi, the deputy prosecutor, and we said that our son had no guardian except his father and me. We wanted him to do something so that our sentences would not be carried out together. This request, however, did not succeed and we were both sent to prison."

In Ordibehesht 1394 [April/May 1994], Narges Mohammadi, a human rights activist and spokeswoman for the Defenders of Human Rights Center, was arrested at her home and transferred to Evin Prison. The issue of Narges's children was raised, due to the fact that her husband, Taghi Rahmani, had been forced to leave the country in Esfand 1390 [February/March 2012], and this eventually led to the departure of her two children to join their father

Iranian law does not make special provisions regarding the possibility of postponing the sentence of one of the parents in case of simultaneous punishments; however, some articles of the Code of

¹ [Ta'zir (discretionary punishment): Punishment with maximum and minimum limits determined by law and judge, respectively.]

Criminal Procedure provide for the possibility of postponing the mother's punishment in certain circumstances, like Article 501.

According to this article, in cases such as pregnancy, lactation or postpartum, the judge can postpone the sentence of imprisonment of the woman. In Mordad [July/August] of last year, Narges Mohammadi wrote a letter from inside the prison, addressing the situation of imprisoned mothers. She talked about the suffering they have been enduring.

Following the publication of this letter, a group of social, political and cultural activists launched a campaign in support of these mothers called "Campaign in Support of Imprisoned Mothers". More information has been provided by the Facebook page of the campaign about the imprisoned mothers of the women's ward in Evin Prison.

The fate of Evin mothers is not like that of Khavaran mothers, but their situation is not better, either. Khavaran mothers are a group of Iranian women who lost their children and some relatives in the mass execution of political activists in the summer of 1367 [1988/1989] and have continued their civil protests against the perpetrators of these executions and the Islamic Republic.

Shima Behravesh is the pseudonym of one of the leaders of the campaign to support the imprisoned mothers. In an interview with Iran Wire, she stressed that the campaign is not to support prisoners of conscience and political prisoners; however, there may be more pressure on prisoners of conscience and political prisoners. She said, "There are 23 women prisoners currently in the women's ward of Evin Prison, 13 of whom are mothers, including Mahvash Shahriari, Fariba Kamalabadi, Narges Mohammadi, Faran Hesami, Azita Rafizadeh, Fatemeh Mosanna, Maryam Akbari Monfared, Elham Barmaki, Ziba Pourhabib, Fahimeh Arefi, Sedigheh Morad, Zahra Zehtabchi and Elham Farahani. These individuals are in prison simply for expressing their beliefs (such as the Baha'is or members of the Erfan-e-Halqeh [Mysticism of the Ring]) or for their peaceful activities.

According to her, the campaign was formed through a letter and request from Narges Mohammadi in early Mordad of last year [end of July 2015]: "The campaign is trying to improve the situation of imprisoned mothers, both political and ordinary prisoners. In law-abiding communities, a number of facilities are provided for imprisoned mothers; for example, in some cases, instead of imprisonment, other punitive measures are considered for mothers, or kindergartens are built near the prison so that mothers can be there during certain hours of the day and emotionally communicate with their children. Unfortunately, not only do our laws not provide for such measures, but in many cases the sense of being an imprisoned mother is used as a weapon of pressure; for example, until the beginning of last summer, children under the age of 18 could have face-to-face meetings with their mothers for half an hour every week, but since then, until Mehr 1394 [September/October 2015]—without any legal justification and only to put pressure on the imprisoned mothers—the face-to-face meeting was changed to once every two weeks. From Mehr [September] to Bahman [February], the visits were changed to once a month. Since Bahman [February], it has returned to the same pattern of once a week, but the appointments are scheduled for Sunday middays when children are at school."

The lack of a telephone in Evin's women's ward is another problem: "The lack of a telephone puts a lot of pressure on mothers. Imagine a mother who has a four-year-old child, who has received no news from her child for a week or two. If this mother is suddenly gripped with maternal anxiety or has a bad dream about her child and feels something bad has happened to her, there is nothing she can do to calm herself down a bit and she just has to wait until the next appointment."

Meanwhile, mothers such as Mahvash Shahriari, Fariba Kamalabadi or Elham Barmaki are in a different situation; their children live abroad and therefore do not have the opportunity to visit their [mothers] in person: "To these mothers permission may be granted to call once every few months."

While expressing that any small protest with regard to the mothers' situation could lead to more restrictions on their visits, Shima said, "When Maryam Akbari wrote in a letter to Ahmed Shaheed, the UN special rapporteur, about her situation, at the time of her next visit with her child, when they took her to visit her child, the [prison authorities] told her that her visit had been cancelled. This means the ultimate pressure on a mother, where she sees her child from a distance but is unable to see her close up."

These bitter experiences have been repeated many times for other women prisoners. They are prison mothers; companions of Khavaran mothers.