

**Comments on the article: 'Mojahedin prisoners in Evin talk to UK
MPs'**
**by Anne Singleton, appearing on the Iran-Didban website on
05.07.04**

I was not aware that there were two Iranian lawyers in the room when I met Ibrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam. There were several people in the room that I was not introduced to. As I have not had a proper opportunity to talk to the UK reporter I don't know how "independent" he is.

The reference in paragraph five to the "Mojahedin" (NCRI) trying to bribe officials there is the first time I've ever heard this referred to by anyone.

It is not true that the National Council of Resistance of Iran (referred to in the text as the "Mojahedin") began their campaign to free the two men until after they had been taken to Iran. The NCRI contacted the British Foreign Office and several MPs and members of the House of Lords to appeal to the Syrian Government to release them. I was one of those contacted who made representations directly to the Syrian Government, and through the Foreign Office, to have them released. There is, therefore, no question of the efforts to get Ibrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam released being delayed until they were in Iran and so would be presented as martyrs to the cause.

The NCRI certainly feared they would be tortured, and, given the human rights record of the Iranian Government, this was not an unjustified fear. As far as I am aware, the NCRI never predicted that they would be "executed immediately".

The reference to Ibrahim Khodabandeh being only 6.5 stones is one find hard to believe as I have never seen Mr Khodabandeh looking like a skeleton as he plainly would if he was only 6.5 stones. It is possible, of course, that he was ill two years ago but it is plainly mischievous to imply that this was because he was an NCRI activist.

I do not know how often after being imprisoned in Tehran Ibrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam were allowed to speak to their families on the phone. I do know, however, that to describe Ibrahim's phone contact with his daughter as "regular" is to give a meaning to the word that it does not have. I believe that Ibrahim spoke to his daughter about three times between June 2003 and June 2004; hardly regular.

I do not recall being asked for my reactions to the story of the PMOI/MKO prisoners; so to say that "their accounts moved and disturbed us" and "the

MPs were both moved by this direct appeal", is guess work on Anne Singleton's/Khondabaneh's part (she is the sister in law of Ibrahim).

I listened intently to what the PMOI/MKO prisoners had to say and even now, over a month later, I am not absolutely certain that their highly critical accounts of the PMOI/MKO were the outcome of quiet contemplation unencumbered by any pressures, physical or psychological, from the Iranian regime. There is plenty of evidence that political prisoners in Iran have been subject to torture and other pressures right up to recent times.

One belated thought I've had is – if all these prisoners were brutally brainwashed, how come none of them had killed themselves as they all allegedly claimed the PMOI/MKO leadership at Camp Ashraf had brainwashed them to do?

Anne Singleton/Khodabandeh claims in her article that a "senior security officer" told her that the regime now treated PMOI/MKO prisoners in a humane way because they were no longer perceived as a threat and that stories of "mistreatment" (ie torture and execution) were used by the NCRI as a lever for recruitment. In taking this change of policy there is at least some recognition by the Iranian regime of the terrible treatment of political prisoners. It could also mean, of course, that the regime has moved from physical torture to psychological pressure on prisoners.

I find it difficult, if not impossible, to believe that Ibrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam will receive a "fair trial with proper legal representation of their own choice". This has been reinforced by the recent trial of the alleged killer of the Canadian photographer, Zara Kezemi, in Evin prison last year. This trial was held in secret and cut short. Not even the Canadian Embassy was allowed to send observers to the trial.

On this score the proposition I put to the Iranian Government is that they should return Ibrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam to the UK – as they were illegally taken to Tehran – where their extradition could be requested. If the case against them is as strong as the Iranian Government claims it is, then they should be prepared to put it to the test in a British court.

It is true that my visit gave me much food for thought. I want to pursue the possibility of Ibrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam being returned to the UK and to see if the general amnesty on offer to the NCRI is more than window dressing. I want progress to be made and I hope for a positive response from the Iranian Government. I have no illusion, however, about the Herculean nature of this task. Look at the response I got from the UK Government on the outcome of the EU/Iran human rights dialogue which was going on whilst I was there: -

The EU delegation raised particular concerns about Iran's judicial and penal systems, the situation of religious and ethnic minorities, freedom of

expression and assembly, discrimination against women and the conduct of this year's Majlis elections. The EU also raised the cases of a number of individuals in Iran. We are deeply disappointed that on many issues of concern there has been little or no progress in recent months.

This assessment does not give rise to optimism about the possibility of real progress being made in the struggle for the return of Ibrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam to the UK and the development of a truly democratic and free Iran but we can, at least, all live in hope.

Win Griffiths MP
23rd July 2004