

IN THE PROSCRIBED ORGANISATIONS APPEAL COMMISSION

BETWEEN

Lord Alton of Liverpool & Others

Appellants

- and -

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Respondent

WITNESS STATEMENT OF WINSTON JAMES GRIFFITHS

Introduction

1. I was the Labour Member of Parliament for Bridgend from 1987 to 2005, when I retired. I served as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales 1997-8. Prior to being Member of Parliament for Bridgend, I was a member of the European Parliament for South Wales for ten years from 1979 (a two year overlap as MP and MEP).
2. During my many years in Parliament I became familiar with and worked closely with the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and its member organisation, the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI). As such, I am very familiar with the two organisations, their leadership, history, activities and political agenda.
3. I refer to the bundle of documents marked exhibit "WJG1".

Iranian Regime's Misinformation Campaign

4. I am aware, through personal experience and the experience of many former colleagues in Parliament that whenever a Member of Parliament expresses

support for the goals of freedom and a secular democracy for Iran, as espoused by the NCRI and PMOI, they are immediately bombarded with misinformation about Iran's main opposition from a variety of sources. Sometimes MPs and Peers are contacted directly by the Iranian Embassy in London, which tries to convince Parliamentarians that they have misunderstood the Iranian regime and been deceived about the true nature of the NCRI and PMOI. On other occasions, disaffected former members of the PMOI who have been recruited by the Iranian regime to spread misinformation against the PMOI approach Parliamentarians. Lord Avebury, who has extensively researched and written about the Iranian regime's misinformation campaigns against the PMOI said about these individuals in his book 'Iran: State of Terror',

"These persons, due to their low or non-existent motivation to continue the struggle and maintain their principles, allowed themselves to be bought by the regime at a later stage. Such people have so far provided the regime's terrorists in Europe with most extensive intelligence and political services."

5. On other occasions, Parliamentarians are approached by organisations that claim to be human rights organisations/NGOs who want to save PMOI members from the organisation. These front organisations for the Iranian regime include Nejat Society, Peyvand and Aawa Association. The Iranian regime also uses numerous websites to spread misinformation against the PMOI, including those listed below:

<http://www.irandidban.com/index-e.asp>
<http://www.iran-interlink.org>
http://www.nejatngo.org/index_en.php
<http://www.theblackfile.com/edefault.asp>
<http://www.habilian.com/default-en.asp>
<http://www.negaheno.net/>
<http://www.banisadr.info/>
<http://hasanzebel.blogfa.com/>
<http://82.182.32.11/falagh/index.php>
<http://www.zarrebin.com/>
<http://www.zarrebin.com/English/default.asp>
<http://www.iranpeyvand.com/index.html>
<http://www.survivorsreport.org/>
<http://www.irane-ayandeh.com/>
<http://www.mehdis.com/>

6. I have read the witness statement of Lord Alton of Liverpool who deals at length with the elaborate and well-financed misinformation campaign against the PMOI. The Iranian regime expends large sums of money and makes every effort to tarnish the image of the NCRI and PMOI abroad and diminish its support generally. However, the regime focuses particular energy on Parliaments across the world, which is where the PMOI have historically enjoyed enormous support.

Objectivity of 'Private Individuals'

7. I am aware that in paragraph 45 of his second witness statement, Benjamin Fender questions the objectivity of the witnesses who have given statements to the Commission on behalf of the Appellants.
8. I intend to highlight in this statement the lack of objectivity/credibility on the part of some of the individuals with whom the Foreign Office is in contact in respect of the PMOI and on whose views the Foreign Office has certainly relied. I understand that the Secretary of State has disclosed in his open exculpatory material a series of emails exchanged between the FCO and 'private individuals'. The Secretary of State was later required to reveal the identities of the private individuals, who included Massoud Khodabandeh and Gary Sick.
9. An example of Foreign Office reliance on statements made by the likes of Massoud Khodabandeh is illustrated by a 1 August 2006 email from a Foreign Office official to other Foreign Office officials. Attaching a copy of an email from Massoud Khodabandeh, the sender states, "*Massoud Khodabandeh's reply to a comment on G2K has some useful bits (in bold)*".

Massoud Khodabandeh and 'Iran-Interlink'

10. Massoud Khodabandeh is a former member of the PMOI who left the organisation in the mid-1990s, after which, according to his brother, Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) recruited him. He is married to Anne Singleton and together they run the 'Iran-Interlink' website. At pages ... to ... of

exhibit "WJG1", appears a copy of the witness statement signed by Abraham Khodabandeh and filed with the Commission in 2003, as part of an application for deproscription previously made by the PMOI. In that witness statement, Abraham Khodabandeh explains how his brother travelled to Singapore to meet with MOIS officials and how Anne Singleton also travelled to Iran for a few months where I understand she was instructed to set up the 'Iran-Interlink' website.

11. I am also aware that during those proceedings, the Secretary of State relied on information and documentation provided to the Foreign Office by Anne Singleton and 'Iran-Interlink' (see paragraphs 16 of the witness statement of witness 'A', as well as documents B8, B9 and B10, which appear at pages ... to ... of exhibit "WJG1"). This evidence was responded to at length in the second witness statement of Mohammad Mohaddessin.
12. Massoud Khodabandeh and Anne Singleton, through their website, as well as other activities, appear to lead a small number of individuals engaged in an aggressive demonisation campaign against the PMOI. The hostile nature of the language they use on their website and statements make their position clear. Iran-Interlink states that it *"informs about the real nature of the Mojahedin as a religious/personality cult; exposes the Mojahedin's abuse of its members' fundamental human rights..."*
13. The Foreign Office was aware of the agenda of Massoud Khodabandeh, Anne Singleton and 'Iran-Interlink'. This is illustrated by document 51 in the open exculpatory material disclosed by the Secretary of State. The document is described as an FCO file note dated September 2006. In that document it is stated, *"29 July 2003: The anti-MeK organisation 'Iran Interlink' suggested that MEK was implicated in an arson attack on a French school in Australia"*. The report describes this ludicrous allegation made against the PMOI as circumstantial and lacking in credibility.
14. It is clear from the content of the emails recently disclosed by the Secretary of State and Anne Singleton's involvement in the previous proceedings before the

Commission, that Massoud Khodabandeh and Anne Singleton have close contacts with the Foreign Office. In light of the fact that the Foreign Office refuses to have any form of contact with Iranian individuals or organisations who express any form of a positive view about the PMOI, the contacts between the Foreign Office and Massoud Khodabandeh/Anne Singleton is peculiar to say the least, especially if it is correct that these individuals are associated with MOIS.

15. Moreover, in light of what we have learned since Coalition forces have been responsible for the security of Ashraf City and the safety of its residents, as well as the evidence provided on behalf of the Appellants, the allegations made by 'Iran-Interlink' and Anne Singleton have been proven to be false. Yet, these allegations continue to be made by the website. They include allegations of mistreatment of PMOI members and the allegation that PMOI members are not free to leave the organisation. In an interview with Newswire, Mr Khodabandeh, referring to the December 2006 judgment of the Court of First Instance, stated,

“The main victims of this court ruling are the individual cult members interred in Camp Ashraf. They are now unable to leave the cult. Unable to make contact with their families and unable to return to their homes...”

16. This is in direct conflict with the statement by Lieutenant Colonel Julie Norman who said in her letter of 24 August 2006,

“Normally, PMOI members invite their families, friends and colleagues who live in Iran or foreign countries to Ashraf for visits. These visitors are welcomed to a secure environment and hosted by the PMOI...There exists no prison or any obligation to stay in Ashraf; everyone is free to leave PMOI anytime he/she wishes to.” (See pages ... to ... of exhibit “WJG1”)

17. Apart from the fact that US military officials have confirmed the above in writing, in paragraph 40 of his witness statement, Mr Fender confirms that the PMOI in Ashraf City are free to leave. He goes on to explain how, in conjunction with the Iranian regime, the Foreign Office and others have encourages PMOI members to return to Iran.

18. Both in interviews and articles in the media and on their websites, the pair have made wild and unsubstantiated allegations against the PMOI. By way of one example, they regularly claim that the PMOI were responsible for the suppression of Iraqi Kurds in the 1990s. At paragraphs 20 to 24 of his witness statement, Lord Alton of Liverpool proved this allegation to be false and produced evidence to show that the source of this allegation, as with many other allegations against the PMOI, was the Iranian regime.

19. By way of further example of the misinformation spread by Mr Khodabandeh, in an interview with Newswire, Mr Khodabandeh alleges,

“There is clear evidence to show that MKO military activity continued right up to the allied invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Even right now they are openly promoting terrorism and threatening their critics in the EU and US. These critics have been “condemned to death” by MKO’s Revolutionary Court pending the execution of their sentences in Europe and the USA.” (See pages ... to ... of exhibit “WJG1”)

20. Mr Khodabandeh’s assertion that he has clear evidence of PMOI military activity up to March 2003 is in direct conflict with the view expressed by the Secretary of State that the PMOI’s military activity ended in August 2001 (see Response to Request for Further Information).

21. It is also telling that Massoud Khodabandeh, Anne Singleton and Iran-Interlink have nothing adverse to say about the Iranian regime. Moreover, they give interviews to the Iranian regime’s media which identifies them as "Iran experts" and "academics."

Trip to Iran

22. Between 14 and 17 June 2004, I visited Iran on a humanitarian trip to meet two NCRI members who had been kidnapped in Syria and forcibly, and in breach of international law, sent to Iran. One of these individuals was Abraham Khodabandeh and the other was Jamil Bassam. They were both being kept in Iran’s notorious Evin prison.

23. Evin prison is recognised as one of the most secretive and brutal prisons in the world. Tens of thousands of political prisoners have been tortured and executed in the prison. Evin prison is where Canadian-Iranian photojournalist, Zahra Kazemi met her brutal death in July 2003. She was taking photographs of Iranian families who had gathered outside Evin prison to learn of the fate of their relatives – students arrested in widespread anti-regime protests in Tehran. In 2004, Shahram Azam, a former military staff physician who left Iran and sought asylum in Canada confirmed that he examined Kazemi's body and observed evidence of rape and torture, including a skull fracture, broken nose, crushed toe, broken fingers, and severe abdominal bruising.
24. I was surprised to see Anne Singleton in Evin prison. She even had her young son with her. She was moving around freely and was in direct contact with Iranian officials in the prison. This is surprising when it is a known fact that the relatives of political prisoners find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to visit their relatives who are incarcerated. Zahra Kazemi's body was not even returned to her family. Moreover, international human rights organisations are denied access to Evin prison.
25. Apart from meeting Abraham and Jamil in Evin prison, I met Abraham for three meals and Jamil once. On arriving at the prison, I expected to be taken to meet Abraham and Jamil privately (while Teddy Taylor, MP, looked at some other parts of the prison). I was surprised however to be taken into a large room where some PMOI members/sympathisers who had been captured in Iran had just begun to make "confessions" before a TV crew. Whilst listening to the "confessions" of these PMOI members/sympathisers, I asked Abraham quietly whether he felt the "confessions" were true and whether he had been prevented from meeting members of his family or being restricted on what he read or watched on television in the UK. He replied that they were not true and he had not been prevented from seeing his family, reading newspapers or watching television. I was expecting this answer because from conversations we had had previously in the UK, he had told me about taking a month off from NCRI activities while his mother had visited the UK.

26. I understand that some time after my visit, Abraham and Jamil made similar “confessions” to the ones I heard in Evin prison from PMOI members/sympathisers. I can only underline that the conversations I had with Abraham and Jamil during my visit showed they rejected the line put forward in the “confessions” I heard in Evin prison. Moreover, Abraham was not comfortable with the presence of Anne Singleton and I cannot recall a single instance when they spoke to each other.
27. Anne Singleton and the Iranian regime had ulterior motives for my visit and hoped to turn it into a propaganda opportunity for the Iranian regime. Following my return from Iran, I had to spend a considerable amount of time rebutting false and misleading reports of my visit made by Anne Singleton, "Iran-Interlink" and "Iran-Didban".

The Khodabandehs' attempt to hold a meeting in Parliament

28. In 2005, through Massoud Khodabandeh and Anne Singleton, the Iranian regime attempted to hold a meeting in Parliament to spread misinformation against the PMOI. They were not ultimately permitted to hold the meeting in Parliament and had to move their meeting to a hotel.
29. In a statement released at the time, I wrote:

"The press conference is due to be addressed by Massoud Khodabandeh and Anne Khodabandeh (nee Singleton). Some three years ago, Massoud's brother, Ebrahim (currently being illegally held by the Iranian regime), made allegations about the involvement of his brother and sister-in-law with the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence in a statement given to the Courts in London. In a trip to Iran last year seeking the return to Britain of two Iranian refugees illegally sent to Iran by the Syrian authorities, one of whom was Ebrahim Khodabandeh, the brother of Massoud Khodabandeh, I was surprised to see Anne Khodabandeh in Evin prison. After this visit I had to engage in lengthy correspondence with Anne Khodabandeh about this matter because of misleading and inaccurate statements that she and her website, Iran-Interlink, had made about my trip to Iran.

At the same time as wishing to make clear my concern about the activities of Massoud Khodabandeh and his wife, Anne, in trying to divert attention away from the dangerous dictats of the mullahs' regime and the activities of the Iranian regime in democratic countries like the United Kingdom, I believe that these acts are a sign of weakness on the part of Iran's medieval and theocratic regime, which knows it has no place in the 21st century."

Other private individuals

30. Massoud Khodabandeh is part of a network with Gary Sick and others, who are in contact using the Gulf 2000 list. Foreign Office officials also appear to have access to Gulf 2000 and comments that appear thereon.
31. The nature of the language used by the other 'private individuals', as well as the wild and unsubstantiated allegations made by them is illustrative of their agenda against the PMOI.
32. By way of example, in his email of 20 January 2005, William Beeman (please also see his email referred to below), makes, in the space of two paragraphs, many unsubstantiated allegations against the PMOI. He alleges that (i) US Presidential candidate, Senator Sam Brownback, allows his office to be used as a lobbying centre for the PMOI, (ii) expresses disappointment that the PMOI, who are 'protected persons' under the Fourth Geneva Convention were not, in breach of international law, traded for Al-Qaeda leaders in Iran, and (iii) the Iranian people "*hate the MEK with an enormous vengeance*". One might ask the obvious question, how can a Professor of Anthropology, Theatre, Speech and Dance at Stanford University in the US make statements about what the entire Iranian population think about any topic?
33. By way of further example, in his email of 20 January 2006, Nader Entessar refers to the PMOI using the term "terrorist cult".

Human Rights Watch Report

34. On 18 May 2005, Human Rights Watch issued a 28-page report entitled 'No Exit: Human Rights Abuses Inside the MKO Camps'. Based on telephone interviews with 12 individuals, HRW alleged that the PMOI were involved in human rights abuses. Following a lengthy investigation, which included a trip to Ashraf City, a delegation from the European Parliament published a report in response in which they showed the allegations to be false.

35. The European Parliament delegation disclosed an email sent by Gary Sick, Chair of HRW's Middle East Advisory Committee, to the recipients of the Gulf 2000 mailing list the day after the report was published. This e-mail, written originally by William Beaman reads,

"The Human Rights Watch report on MKO (MEK) abuse comes just in time for the consideration of H.R. 282/S. 333--The Iran Freedom Support act, sponsored by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida) and Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pennsylvania). Aside from renewing the ineffective economic sanctions against Iran, Section 302 of the bill provides for support for groups opposing the current Iranian regime. Since Representative Ros-Lehtinen is one of the strongest supporters in Congress of the MKO/MEK, one assumes that this proposed appropriation is designed to go to them, at least in part. The Human Rights Watch report on the MKO/MEK would seem to disqualify them from funding under the provisions of the bill." (please see pages ... to ... of exhibit "")

36. A day later Gary Sick distributed another email, this time from Massoud Khodabandeh. This email reads in part,

"There is enough, as yet unverified, information to suggest that the MEK in Camp Ashraf is currently in severe crisis and on the point of collapse, and that the camp is only held together by an atmosphere of fear and repression at the hands of the MEK's leaders. The most recent reports suggest that if the flag of the US army is replaced by the flag of the Red Cross more than 80 percent of the people in the camp will go to the North camp". (please see pages ... to ... of exhibit "")

37. As I have said above, this statement by Massoud Khodabandeh has clearly been proven to be wrong.

Conclusion

38. There is no doubt in my mind that both Massoud Khodabandeh and Anne Singleton are running a systematic campaign of falsifying information about the PMOI. This places serious doubt on their credibility and places serious question marks around contacts between these individuals and the Foreign Office. More importantly, it undermines attempts by the Secretary of State to reject information advanced by the Appellants based on information provided by these individuals.

I believe that the contents of this statement are true.

Signed... 
Winston James Griffiths

Dated... 4.7.07.....