

This is Nature's translation of Omid Kokabee's letter from the original Farsi.

Dear Dr Ali Sharifi,

My dear friend and roommate during student years in Sharif University.

First, I hope you and your respected members of family are of good health and joy, and immersed in God's blessings. I am writing this letter to you from the section 350 of the Evin Prison – the section for political and security prisoners – on the second month of the third year of my imprisonment. You are well aware that I was arrested under the accusation of “gathering and conspiring against the national security of the country” on 30 January 2011 and was eventually sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment for ‘relationship with the hostile State of USA’. I would also like to remind you that in these instances where a case is being fabricated against a person, and especially in my case being accused of spying, other individuals avoid me as they may be accused of conspiracy themselves. In Iran usually no one can object to these arbitrary security measures, especially when they attempt to fabricate cases against a person. However, no evidence or witnesses have been presented neither to me nor to my lawyer nor in the court (Division 15 of the Islamic Revolution Tribunal, headed by Judge Salawati), supporting either of the abovementioned two accusations. Obviously as there has been no relationship between me and the USA, no evidence actually exists and they will never be able to supply evidence.

This sentence for ten years of imprisonment is, in essence, not a reaction to a mistake I have not made, but a punishment for someone who refused to work in the security and military system despite financial and technical incentives, following my belief in “personal freedom for choosing one's path in life”.

Since 2005, on several occasions I have been invited to project manage and work in projects being carried out in security and military centres and there are many witnesses and evidences available to confirm this fact. For example I was invited to work in the Research Centre of Malek Ashtar University in Isfahan, I was offered a doctorate scholarship by the Iranian Nuclear Energy Organisation, and I was invited to produce proposals for the projects led by the Military Industries Organisation. On the last occasion, on the morning of the day on which I was arrested later at night, I was invited to the Iranian Nuclear Energy Organisation and after being chased incessantly. I was obliged to attend a meeting in the office of the Vice President of the organisation. My answers were the same answers I had given before, and fortunately I still have a copy of the meeting authorisation on that day.

During interrogations which were conducted in solitary confinement, while all my communication with my family and the outside world was cut off, and while I was constantly being put under pressure and threats by receiving news about the horrible physical and mental state of my family, I was asked again and again to write up various versions of my personal history after 2005 (times, places, people), which mostly involved my scientific and research collaborations with Dr Sediqi Bonabi in the Physics faculty of Sharif University, and my stay abroad (Europe and the US), for research and study. You have witnessed yourself my enthusiasm while working in Dr Sediqi Bonabi's research teams, which resulted in several scientific outputs, including

international papers, large-scale academic projects on Laser and its application, and the flourishing of his research teams even after I left them.

You were also well aware that after finishing my studies in Iran, following my deep interest in my research and educational field, I succeeded in rising to the highest peaks of global science, and successfully received scholarships from the Centres at which I was studying.

After the interrogation period, at least on 3 specific occasions I was encouraged to collaborate with them. The first time was in June 2011, after I was transferred from the Section 350 of Evin Prison to the national security section of the Ministry of Intelligence (209). Someone who introduced himself as a delegate from the Nokhbegan Organisation proposed that if I accepted their offer, I would be released the day after. But as my answer was negative, this did not happen.

The second time, two months later, a delegate group from Tehran, arranged by the governor of the city, visited my parents at our home in Gonbad Kaavos, and asked them to visit me in Tehran and convince me to collaborate with them in a meeting that was held in the presence of experts on my file.

The last time, and before my first court session, in October 2011, an inmate in the prison who had been there for only a few days and left the prison shortly after, invited me to collaborate in military and security labs. This time in much more detail. I was supposed to work in these labs under supervision, in lieu of my imprisonment, and I would have had received even a salary. This was nothing but a hostage-taking situation and abusing my file information. Interestingly I had not even been tried yet when he offered me to spend my 'term in prison' in a lab instead of the Evin Prison.

I was informed that unfortunately the efforts of you, my dear friends, who tried to help me, had the same conclusion: Either collaborate or spend 10 years of imprisonment.

Dear Doctor, firstly, you were my roommate and having lived together for four years, you know my personality, my dreams, my family's scientific, cultural and academic background very well. You are deeply aware of how hard I worked and how much pain I have caused my family, my professors and myself, in order to reach the highest levels of science. Secondly, from the numerous reactions from my friends and colleagues in the universities and scientific societies abroad, you must have realised that while abroad, I still strived to grow in my scientific efforts. I can refer to the letter from the Scientific Olympiads, various reports in the most prestigious scientific journals of the world such as *Nature* and *Science*, the letter from eight Nobel laureates to the Supreme Leader of Iran, and correspondence from societies such as ASP, IOP, OSA, IEEE, SPIE, American Society for Photobiology, ACS, ISOP, EOS, University of Texas, University of Oslo, State University of Ohio, Campina University, State University of New York, etc.

The third phase has been my function in the Evin Prison, as an individual striving to increase the knowledge and skills of my co-inmates via educating them. You can investigate this with all the inmates here, or those who have already left or will shortly be released.

During my studies and work, I have done everything in my power to help my country and people; I have always loved my country and believed in it, especially in its educational and scientific capacity. And now, after I have finished my postgraduate studies, instead of entering the academic world without any concerns (like yourself and a few other common friends), I am an inmate here, in the Evin Prison, having another 8 years of prison in front of me, and I ask myself why I was treated so. Did I do wrong in choosing to study Nuclear Physics? Has it been a mistake to perform research on a strategic and applied discipline such as Laser Physics and its nuclear, medical and industrial applications with well-respected professors in prominent international research centres? Is a sin to come from the Turkman ethnic minority and the Sunni religious minority (I prefer not to use this fact in my arguments, and my interrogator too warned me in my last interrogation session not to discuss this after I am transferred from the Section 209 of the Ministry of Intelligence to the Evin Prison).

Is it a sin that I don't want, under any circumstances, to get involved in security and military activities? Am I mistaken to wish to work in the academy or in industrial and non-military research centres, so I can transfer my experience and knowledge to my compatriots?

I hope, with the opportunities available to you outside the prison, in collaboration with our other friends, and for the sake of our common view on using science to help the society, tell me what I should do in this period (I have just turned 30 after spending two years in prison), when I am thirsty for performing scientific research.

Omid Kokabee
Political and Security Section 350
Evin Prison

PS. In another letter to my professor Dr Sediqi Bonabi, I have included details of my discussions. I have enclosed a copy of that letter for you.