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**PRESS RELEASE**

Baha'i International Community

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**Baha'is call for the reopening of human rights center in Iran**

GENEVA (23 December 2008) – The Baha'i International Community today expressed grave concern over the closing by the Iranian government of Shirin Ebadi's Defenders of Human Rights Center in Tehran and called for its reopening.

"The closing of Ms. Ebadi's office is a blow to human rights for the whole of Iran," said Diane Ala'i, a representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations in Geneva.

"The spokesperson of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has indicated that the reason behind the closure was that the Center has no license. But it would be a simple matter to give them one. Otherwise, the fact that the Iranian government would shut down the office of its most famous human rights defender, who is Iran's only winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and the first Muslim woman so recognized, can only be perceived by the world at large as further evidence that the government has no regard for rights and freedoms.

"Ms. Ebadi and her colleagues are engaged in defending numerous individuals and groups in Iran, and the closure of the Center will certainly interfere with their efforts and impede the adequate legal representation that they are committed to providing," she said.

Among those being defended by Ms. Ebadi and her organization are the seven Baha'i leaders who are currently being held without charge in Evin prison in Tehran. The seven were arrested in March and May in an ominous sweep that was reminiscent of when Baha'i leaders in the 1980s were rounded up and executed.

"Regardless of the attempts against human rights defenders in Iran, Mrs. Ebadi and her colleagues are courageously pursuing their work. For the good of the country, we call upon the Iranian authorities to resolve the administrative issue, and to allow the Center to reopen immediately," said Ms. Ala'i.

For more information, go to <http://news.bahai.org>