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**NEWS RELEASE**

Baha'i International Community

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**Murderers of Iranian Baha'i must be brought to justice, says Baha'i International Community**

NEW YORK – The murder of a well-known Baha'i on Saturday in the southern Iranian city of Bandar Abbas should be treated as a hate crime and must be investigated immediately, said the Baha'i International Community today.

“There is little doubt that the killing of Mr. Ataollah Rezvani was motivated by religious prejudice,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations. “Therefore, it is essential that the government at the highest levels investigate this without delay under its international obligations.

“In recent years, clerics and the authorities in Iran have sought to create an atmosphere of anti-Baha'i hatred, using the pulpit and state-sponsored media.

“The newly instituted government of President Hassan Rouhani now has a clear choice. It can continue as his predecessors have, allowing such incidents to take place with impunity, indicating to the world that nothing has changed. Or it can show the world that it is committed to upholding justice and human rights for all Iranians.”

Reports from Iran indicate that Mr. Rezvani was shot in the back of the head, by assailants who apparently forced him to drive to a isolated location near the railway station on the outskirts of Bandar Abbas. His body was discovered on Sunday after he failed to return home.

His killing comes after a series of incidents that were apparently designed to force him and his family to leave the city. Recently, he had come under pressure from agents of the Ministry of Intelligence, who instigated his dismissal from a job in water purification. More recently, he had begun to receive menacing telephone calls from unknown persons. This came against a backdrop of attacks on Baha'is from the pulpit by local clerics in the past several years.

Since 2005 in Iran, at least nine Baha'is have been murdered or died under suspicious circumstances, and another 52 have been physically assaulted, both by government agents and plainclothes or unidentified attackers – all without prosecution.

“Mr. Rezvani had been well-known and respected by ordinary citizens in Bandar Abbas as a man of honesty and helpfulness,” said Ms. Dugal, noting that he is survived by a wife and two children.

“Yet sinister forces sought to drive him from the city he sought only to serve, leading ultimately to his untimely death,” she said.