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## IRAN | CSW Concerned About Iranian Murder

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is concerned to learn of the murder on Aug. 24 of Ataollah Rezvani, a prominent member of Iran's Baha'i community, in what the Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom (UK) said may be the first religiously motivated murder of an Iranian Baha'i in 15 years.

Rezvani's body was found in his car in his hometown, the southern city of Bandar Abbas. Reports indicate he was shot in the back of the head after being forced to drive to a remote area by his assailants.

According to the Baha'i Community of the UK, the murder was preceded by a campaign of intimidation and harassment by Iranian authorities against Rezvani and his family designed to force them to leave the city. Prior to his murder, Rezvani came under pressure from the Ministry of Intelligence, which later colluded in his dismissal from his job in water purification. Rezvani also received several threatening telephone calls from unknown persons.

Rezvani's murder also comes at a time of increased pressure on Iran's religious minorities and a surge in anti-Baha'i rhetoric by various clerics. On July 31, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khameni issued a fatwa (religious edict) against the community in which he called on Iranians to avoid Baha'is and labeled them a 'deviant and misleading sect'.

Despite the Baha'i Community being the largest religious minority group in Iran, it is not officially recognized and is refused legal status. Since 1979, over 200 of its leaders have been killed or executed and thousands more imprisoned. Baha'is are barred from accessing further education and employment in the public sector, with over 10,000 having been dismissed from university and government jobs. In 2008, seven Baha'i leaders were arrested and were each sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in 2010 for 'forming an illegal cult'. According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, as of February 2013, at least 110 Baha'is are being held in prison solely on account of their religious belief, twice the number held in early 2011.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of CSW, said, "We are shocked to hear of the murder of Mr. Rezvani and are deeply concerned at assertions that it may have been religiously-motivated. His murder followed a campaign of official harassment and occurred against a backdrop of increasing anti-Baha'i rhetoric, not least the recent fatwa against the community issued by the Supreme Leader. History shows that such rhetoric and hate speech increases the vulnerability of targeted communities and can be a precursor of violence because it appears to grant official sanction for it. CSW urges the Iranian authorities to end the use of inflammatory rhetoric against minority religious communities that merely seek to practice their faith peaceably and pose no threat to the state. CSW also urges Iran to ensure the killers of Mr. Rezvani are swiftly brought to justice, to return full citizenship rights to the Baha'i Community and to guarantee freedom of religion and belief for all religious communities, in accordance with the nation's obligations as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."