

Iran's Rohani calls for stricter laws on 'honor killings' after beheading of 13-year-old girl

RFE/RL's Radio Farda (27.05.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3czVW2G> – Iranian President Hassan Rohani has called for harsher laws to tackle so-called “honor killings” after the particularly shocking slaying of a teenage girl, allegedly by her father, prompted a nationwide outcry.

Rohani on May 27 pushed for the speedy adoption of relevant bills, some which have apparently circulated for years among various Iranian decision-making bodies without any tangible results.

The call comes after 13-year-old Romina Ashrafi was killed last week in Hovigh, some 320 kilometers northwest of Tehran.

Local media reported that the teenager was beheaded while she slept by her father, who used a farming sickle.

The father, Reza Ashrafi, was said to be enraged after Romina fled the family home to marry a 35-year-old man she loved.

Both of their families complained to the authorities, and security forces detained Romina and her boyfriend, Bahamn

Khavari, following a five-day hunt.

Although Romina reportedly told police she would be in danger at home and feared for her life, the girl was handed over to her father as required by Iranian laws.

After the killing, the father allegedly turned himself in to police and confessed to the crime.

Hovigh district Governor Kazem Razmi said the man was in custody, charged with murder. He said the investigation into the case was still under way.

Meanwhile, the vice president for women's affairs, Masoumeh Ebtekar, was quoted as announcing a "special order" from Rohani to investigate the killing.

Under current law, her father faces a prison sentence of up to 10 years if convicted.

According to the Islamic Penal Code, he was Romina's "guardian," so he is exempt from "retaliation in kind," meaning the death penalty in this case.

Iranian media occasionally report on cases related to honor killings carried out by relatives, usually male family members, when the actions of women and girls are perceived as

violating conservative traditions on love, marriage, and public behavior. It is not known how many women and girls die from such killings.

In 2014, a Tehran police official reported that 20 percent of all murders in the country were "honor" killings.

Romina's boyfriend apparently faces no penalty since under Iran's laws, girls can marry after the age of 13, though the average age of marriage for Iranian women is 23.