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IRAN: 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.

PAKISTAN: Teenage girls shot dead by relatives over online footage

Father of one victim and brother of the other arrested in connection with the murders.

By Hannah Ellis-Petersen

The Guardian (17.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3bKqyOA> - Two female teenagers in Pakistan have been murdered by family members after a video emerged online of them associating with a man.

The pair, said to be aged 16 and 18, were shot dead by male relatives in their remote village in North Waziristan this week after footage was posted online of them in the company of a young man in a secluded area.

After they were shot, the pair were then buried in the village by their family members.

Local police confirmed they had arrested the father of one of the victims, and the brother of the other victim, in connection with arranging and carrying out the murders, and they were now being held in custody.

The police are searching for two other family members believed to have been involved in the killings.

The footage of the women, which is less than a minute long, was said to have been filmed last year but only appeared on social media a few weeks ago. The police said they were still searching for a third young woman who also featured in the video to ensure she did not suffer the same fate.

The tribal areas in North and South Waziristan, which borders Afghanistan, are known for the strict "honour code" imposed on women, whose movements are heavily restricted and who are often not allowed out of the house unaccompanied.

So called "honour" killings remain common in Pakistan's tribal areas, mainly against women who are believed to have brought shame on a family, and activists say up to 1,000 such killings are still carried out every year.

The issue was brought to the fore in Pakistan in September after three men were found guilty and sentenced to life behind bars for the killing of three women in Kohistan who had been caught on video singing and clapping at a wedding in 2011. The women's bodies were never found.

Though against the law, "honour" killing cases were previously difficult to convict owing to a loophole in the law that allowed perpetrators to walk free if they were given a pardon by the victim's family member.

However, the crimes now come with a mandated life sentence.

AFGHANISTAN: Afghan soldier stabs sister in 'honour killing'

Former politician from Badakhshan blames police for mishandling the case.

The National (05.05.20202) - <https://bit.ly/2AjkzmQ> - An Afghan soldier stabbed his teenage sister to death after she rejected a marriage proposal arranged by her family, police said on Tuesday.

The woman, 18, was killed Monday in Baharak district of the north-eastern province of Badakhshan.

Her brother later fled to a Taliban-controlled area, provincial police spokesman Sanaullah Rohani said.

Mr Rohani said the victim was first throttled with a rope then stabbed to death.

He said police had launched a search operation to arrest her brother.

The victim wanted to marry a man she loved but her family wanted her to marry someone else, Badakhshan activist Asifa Karimi said.

"She rejected her family's proposal and handed herself in to the police, but the police gave her back to her family," Ms Karimi said.

"Her brother, a soldier, took her home and killed her brutally in a case of 'honour killing'."

Parts of Afghan society operate under a strict code of "honour" that gives women little or no say in matters such as who they can marry and whether they can get an education.

Fawzia Koofi, a former politician from Badakhshan, blamed the police for mishandling the case.

Many in Afghanistan, including some in the police and judiciary, believe killing is a suitable punishment for women who elope, Ms Koofi said.

"Women in Afghanistan are still the most vulnerable part of society, not only under the Taliban-controlled areas," she said.

During their rule in the late 1990s, the Taliban banned women from working and going to school, and ordered them to be fully covered when leaving their homes.

Activists say violence against women remains common across Afghanistan.

Last year, the country's Human Rights Commission recorded more than 2,700 cases of violence against women in Afghanistan, a 9 per cent increase from 2018.

CANADA: Muslim organisation against "honour" crimes

By Marc Montgomery

RCI (07.03.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Czola1> - Just released is a new study on gender-based violence (GBV) called, "Dishonourable Violence: Changing the Narratives on Honour and Shame Among Muslim Canadian Communities".

It is the product of Islamic Relief Canada a non-profit humanitarian aid group and came following a year of study of GBV within Canadian-based Muslim communities.

It is an analysis of the concepts within the Muslim community (and other patriarchal cultures) of "honour" and "shame".

The report notes that many Muslim women may be reluctant to speak about any violence or intimidation because of how that might reflect on the Muslim community, or on the family itself within the community, itself a form of bringing "shame" onto both. There is also the fear they might become isolated from their family if they expose violence.

The book says violence can take a variety of form including:

-psychological/emotional: coercion, insults, belittling, shaming, threats of violence divorce or exclusion

-physical: hitting, slapping, genital mutilation, severe dress codes, limiting access to sufficient food, locking women inside the home

-sex: forced sex, violent sex, forced marriage, denied control over reproductive matters

-isolation/neglect: locking woman inside home, restricted activities (eg phone calls, movement outside home), restricted social contacts,

-economic: withdrawal of financial support, denial of access to finance, given a strict "allowance", forced handover of earnings, excessive scrutiny of expenses

-spiritual/religious: misinterpretation of Qur'an to encourage and/or justify abuse, reinforcing climate of control and fear, chastisement using religious/spiritual language
-control of legal/migration status: forced marriage, confiscation of legal documents eg-passport, threats to "send back to home country" if abuse not tolerated or male demands not met, woman returned to home country and abandoned

The document also notes that the stresses of immigration to a new and much different society, employment issues, and the fact that some people and families arrive from conflict zones perhaps already suffering from degrees of trauma, any and all of which may play out in violence against close family members.

More importantly however, the study shows how religious texts are being misinterpreted to justify domination and gender-based violence.

The organisation says they are clearly against gender-based violence in all forms and document is designed to shed light and direction on the issue.

PAKISTAN: Young man, woman slain in suspected honor killing

Fox13 Memphis (23.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Yf8NBI> - Pakistani police say a young man and a woman have been killed in the country's commercial hub, Karachi, allegedly by relatives over a perceived affront to family honor.

Officer Idrees Bangash says Saturday that Naseeb Khan, 25, and Bibi Dakhtar 20, were found dead with slit throats in the city's western suburbs three days ago.

Bangash said initial findings revealed that they both belonged to the conservative Pashtun tribe and resided in the same neighborhood. They went missing last year. He suspects they were killed on the orders of an elders' council. He added that the woman family's has absconded, and no arrests have yet been made.

More than 1,000 women are slain every year by relatives in so-called "honor killings" in the conservative, Muslim-majority country.

JORDAN: 'Honour killing': "I wasted my life in prison"

By Rana Hussein

Sisterhood.com (08.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2sLSw8M> - Shrouq was in her late 20s when her brothers had attempted to kill her for reasons related to family honour. She had tried to shield her sister from their axes and knives.

Shrouq, now in her mid-50s, recalls as if it were yesterday the horrific attack against her and her sister, who had delivered a baby out of wedlock.

'I still remember to this day how my brothers asked my parents and other family members to leave the house, and then brought a trolley to our room that carried several knives and axes', she said.

The result of the vicious attack by her brothers was the death of her 18-year-old sister. Shrouq herself ended up in hospital under tight security.

Six months later, Shrouq was discharged from hospital, only to be promptly sent to the women's correctional facility under the orders of the administrative governor as a means of protecting her from a possible second attempt on her life by her family.

'I spent 15 years of my life behind prison walls so I could be protected from my own family. I cried every day. For me the days were bitter and dark', she said. 'I wasted most of my life in prison. I grew very old. I went into prison looking like a doll and I left looking like a very old lady', Shrouq added.

While sitting and thinking about every moment of the day inside prison right up to the date she was released, Shrouq wished that neither she, nor any other woman would face the same bleak destiny she and hundreds of other women suffered over the past years.

'My experience was so depressing and horrible – I wish every day that the top officials in the country would not send women to prison, no matter what they have done, because it deprives us of our freedom, and forces us to live in tough conditions and to mix with criminals', Shrouq added.

Shrouq's wishes turned into reality when in July 2018 the first guesthouse for women whose lives are in danger from their families for reasons related to family honour started to accept them. The state-of-the-art guesthouse called 'Amneh House' (which means 'safe' in Arabic), which operates as a guest and rehabilitation house for women whose lives are threatened for reasons related to family honour, was opened by former Minister of Social Development Hala Lattouf.

'This is an important day for Jordan. Human rights and the dignity of women have always been our priority. We decided to open this house because we believe it is the right thing to do', Lattouf told diplomats and representatives of local and international organisations and various government agencies on July 31 as she inaugurated the facility on behalf of Prime Minister Omar Razzaz.

The imprisonment of women to protect them from their families has become a relic of the past in Jordan, Lattouf stressed. Any new cases will be sent to the guesthouse by the relevant authorities and not to the Jweideh Correctional and Rehabilitation Centre (JCRC). This will be their new temporary home until their cases are resolved in the appropriate manner, Lattouf said.

Hundreds of women have been imprisoned at the JCRC for indefinite periods in the past without any charges, under what is termed 'protective custody', including some for periods that have exceeded ten years, during which they could not leave the facility without the administrative governor's permission, or unless a male guardian signed a guarantee undertaking that he would not harm them if they were released. Dozens of women who had been imprisoned at the JCRC for their own safety were moved gradually to the newly-established guesthouse to ensure a smooth and successful transition. 'Our main concern now is to ensure the safety and security of these women and to help them get accustomed to this new situation', said Raghda Azzeh, the director of the new guesthouse. Azzeh said that 'the basic idea is to provide more fair alternatives for women whose lives are in danger.'

Around 40 female employees affiliated with the ministry underwent special capacity-building training in May so as to be ready to deal with newcomers and to manage the facility.

The guesthouse will provide meals and other necessary items for the women and their children. It is also equipped with several private rooms for women with baby cradles, a play area for children, as well as rooms that include sewing machines, computers and hair salon equipment for residents to learn new professions.

The facility also includes several kitchens, balconies, a health clinic, sports equipment, a garden and special rooms to receive the cases. It will be protected by male and female plainclothes police officers. 'We will receive any cases that qualify in our guesthouse. We will never turn our backs on anyone, even if we have to bring extra beds to accommodate the additional cases', Azzeh stressed.

Most of the women in protective custody were detained due to involvement in cases of rape, adultery and being victimised through incestuous abuse, or for leaving the family's home without parental permission.

On some occasions, women were reportedly killed after being bailed out by family members, even after their relatives had signed guarantees to inflict no harm to them. Around 20 women are murdered annually for reasons related to 'cleansing family honour' in Jordan.

The executive director of the MLG, lawyer Eva Abu Halaweh, who has partnered with the ministry to train employees and help women who are in protective custody described the facility as a 'temporary safe house for women until their cases are solved in a peaceful manner.'

'We have been working with civil society, government entities, and activists since 2005 in order to find a decent and humane solution for these women rather than spending many years of their lives behind bars. We are pleased that this day has finally come with this guesthouse', Abu Halaweh said. 'The new guesthouse will bring new hope and better protection for these women since in the past they were imprisoned despite not committing any crime.'

Regulations for the guesthouse stipulate that women whose lives are in danger are entitled to be admitted to the guesthouse willingly at any time, even during holidays, after being referred by the administrative governor. The guesthouse will be obliged to receive women, document their cases under strict security and provide them with necessary legal, psychological, social, medical and recreational services. The guesthouse can also receive children accompanying their mothers who are six years old or younger.

The services will be terminated in the event that women do not wish to stay, threaten other women residing in the guesthouse, or if the problem of a given guest is resolved and there is sufficient evidence that her life is no longer in danger.

Shrouq said, 'During my 15 years in prison I was always dreaming of smelling the soil and planting trees and roses. I am glad that I know that no other woman in Jordan will ever be deprived of these small but important desires. Thanks to the new guesthouse that has recently opened we now know for sure that women in Jordan will no longer be imprisoned to protect them from their families... and that there is a better place for them to start over.'

PAKISTAN: Two killed in alleged honor killing incident in Karachi

Dunya News (09.09.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2p2NC5s> - KARACHI (Dunay News) – At least two dead bodies were found on Sunday, in a house of Federal-B area in Karachi, in another alleged honour killing case.

After information, police and rescue services reached the spot and recovered two corpses with signs of torture on them.

The deceased were identified one as Asmat while other as Umair, SSP central confirmed.

As per details of police, twin murder was committed by the husband of the woman, Sabir who fled the area after committing crime.

Police had shifted the bodies to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital for postmortem while further investigation is underway.

AFGHANISTAN-AUSTRIA: Afghan refugee gets life sentence for so-called 'honor killing' of sister

RFE/RL (22.08.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2Lim2JT> - A young Afghan refugee in Austria has received a sentence of life in prison for stabbing his sister to death in a so-called "honor killing."

A court in Vienna issued the sentence on August 22 against the Afghan man, who said he stabbed his sister 28 times "because of culture" in order to protect what he said was his family's sense of honor.

Authorities have not released the name of the killer or his sister, who was 14 years old when she was bludgeoned to death on her way to school in September 2017.

The victim had moved into a crisis center in Vienna about a week before she'd been killed, saying that she felt cornered and "pressured" by her family because she was not allowed to go out and meet with her girlfriends.

The court hear that when the killer confessed to police, he told authorities: "It is good that she is dead. She stained our family's honor."

The killer claimed that under Austria law, he should not receive a life sentence because he is now only 19 years old.

But the court rejected that claim after a panel of experts testified that he is 21 years old.

IRAQ: Bride's killing shows new law needed

Iraq's new parliament should prioritize passage of domestic violence law

By Belkis Wille

HRW (08.08.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2B0o5Td> - The horrific case of an Iraqi woman apparently murdered at home should prompt Iraq's new parliament, once formed, to finally pass a draft domestic violence law which has been pending since 2015.

According to Iraqi media and BBC Arabic, one day last week a bridegroom returned his bride to her parents the day after their wedding, complaining that she was not a virgin. Media reports claim that upon hearing the accusation, a family member beat her to death. Media reports say that police have arrested a male relative.

While the man will likely now face trial for murder, it is possible that he may benefit from a reduced sentence under a provision in Iraq's penal code allowing for shorter sentences for violent acts – including murder – for so-called “honorable motives.” But there is no “honor” in such brutal and needless killing. Moreover, the murdered bride would be just one of hundreds of women and children who suffer violence at the hands of their families in Iraq each year.

If passed, Iraq's new domestic violence law would oblige the government to protect domestic violence survivors, including with restraining orders and penalties for breaching them, and the creation of a cross-ministerial committee to combat domestic violence. It would also require the government to provide shelters so women at risk of violence have a safe place to go if they are forced to flee their home.

The draft law is not perfect. It contains several flaws, including a preference for families to address violence through “reconciliation committees” rather than prosecution, and could be improved. Iraqi authorities should also set clear penalties for the crime of domestic violence, and close the loophole that lets abusers receive reduced punishments for so-called “honor” crimes, both not addressed in the draft law.

If improved, this draft law is the best chance Iraq's new parliament has to tackle the scourge of violence in the home, fulfill its international legal obligations on domestic violence, and save the lives of countless Iraqi women and children.

LEBANON: Nine Lebanese women murdered by partners in single month

By Florence Massena

Al-Monitor (26.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2EyNPUH> - Nada Bahlawan was shot and killed by her husband at dawn Jan. 22 in Beirut. The same day, a man stabbed his wife in south Lebanon after a dispute over doing the dishes. On Dec. 16, British diplomat Rebecca Dykes was raped and murdered.

Nine women were killed in December and January by their fiances or husbands. There seems to have been a rise since Dykes was killed, feminist activist Maya Ammar told Al-Monitor. She and others held a vigil in front of Beirut's National Museum on Jan. 23.

“In the last week of December, four women were killed. The night we organized the vigil about violence against women, we learned about Malak Moukdad, who was stabbed to death by her husband. Two days later, a woman killed herself because she couldn't handle the violence at home,” Ammar added.

On Jan. 6, Zarifa Z. was stoned to death and her body was found on a beach in south Lebanon five days later. Her husband admitted to having committed an honor killing. A woman and her baby were found dead on Jan. 12, killed by repeated blows to the head.

Ghida Anani, the director of ABAAD, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that fights for gender equality, told Al-Monitor, "With the absence of national statistics on domestic violence in Lebanon and monitoring mechanisms, we cannot confirm for sure if domestic violence crimes are rising."

She added, "What can be confirmed for certain is a rise in women's awareness about reporting domestic violence incidents, seeking help outside their social and family spheres and disclosing [what happened to them], as the stigma around gender-based violence has been broken thanks to the persistent efforts of women's movements and campaigns in the last decade."

However, Minister of Women's Affairs Jean Ogasapian told Al-Monitor, "The people working in specialized associations and NGOs say that at least 12 women die annually as a result of their husband's violence."

"It was not the first time that we've had no cases for two months and then five in a week," Ammar said. "Because people can now see the situation is changing, women no longer accept violence and discrimination. There is some resistance and backlash from some men who want to prove they still have power in an extreme way."

Women are seeking support from the ABAAD-affiliated Model Community Holistic Care Unit, which provides safe spaces for women in the north, Bekaa Valley, south, Beirut and Mount Lebanon provinces. The centers were established in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Based on that and on the number of women turning to these emergency safe houses, Anani observed that violence against women in 2017 seems to be changing in nature. There is more sexual violence reported than physical and psychological violence and murders are more common than in previous years. The civil society NGO Lebanon Support and the feminist organization Kafa (Enough) developed a map to display statistics on violence against women per year. In 2017, 12 women have been killed, five more than in 2016, most of them victims of their husband, ex-husband, fiancé or boyfriend.

Law 293 was adopted in April 2014 to address domestic violence, but several organizations have criticized it for being incomplete. Human Rights Watch said after the law passed that it "has serious flaws and the parliament should consider amendments to fully protect women from domestic violence." The law defines domestic violence very narrowly, doesn't criminalize marital rape except if physical violence can be proven. Protection orders are a difficult and lengthy process to obtain.

"According to recent NGO reports on the Lebanese judicial system, the number of unofficial documented cases of women killed as a result of family violence crimes since Law 293 was passed reached 40, and the number of official protection orders issued to date exceeds 500," Ogasapian said. The data shows that a growing number of women know they can be protected and don't hesitate to ask for help.

"The work done by the judges is very encouraging since the law passed, they answer to these women with efficiency," Kafa media and communication officer Diala Haidar told Al-Monitor. "We have been campaigning in the media and social networks for years and now women are becoming more aware. But the media shouldn't hesitate to call these crimes femicides and should stop being apologetic toward the killer, like we see sometimes."

Kafa has been collaborating with the Ministry of Justice to amend Law 293 with a draft proposition that was accepted by the government in August 2017. They are now waiting for the vote by Lebanese parliament. "In light of all these recent crimes, we hope the vote will be pushed forward," Haidar said. The draft amendments will improve the implementation of the law, for example with a faster process for a protective order, stricter penalties and immediate custody rights for the mother in cases of domestic violence.

The Ministry of Women also started to develop an action plan for gender equality. "We are in the process of developing a national strategy on gender-based violence," Ogasapian said. "It will be developed with an action plan and a monitoring process and be submitted for implementation with the relevant stakeholders."

He added, "We are conducting a study on the economic cost of gender-based violence in Lebanon. It will result in the development of policies to prevent violence against women."

Ogasapian insisted that the ministry is taking the issue of women's rights very seriously, with seven draft laws processed in a year. "Three draft laws were approved by the council of ministers and now sent to the parliament for approval: one against sexual harassment, one granting paternity leave and another for equal privileges in Social Security funds. We are also supporting all the amendments proposed to Law 293."

Even if the draft amendments are passed and applied quickly, some fear the Lebanese justice system is too slow to prosecute these crimes fast enough for the victims' families. "Roula Yaacoub's murderer still hasn't faced a judge since 2013," Haidar pointed out. "This needs to change."

UK: MP Nusrat Ghani bids to ban 'honour killing' term

An MP is attempting to ban authorities from describing murders as "honour killings".

BBC (31.01.2017) - <http://bbc.in/2kUbnIA> - Conservative Nusrat Ghani said the term was used by abusers as a "pathetic self-justification" for their violence.

She proposed a bill in the House of Commons that would ban the use of the description in official publications.

The move would make it clear that "cultural and religious sensitivities are not a barrier to justice", the MP for Wealden in East Sussex said.

There is no specific offence of "honour-based" violence.

The Crown Prosecution Service describes it as a "collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour".

'Clear message'

Ms Ghani said police had been put off investigating such crimes because they fear being branded "racist".

"Language matters," she told the Commons.

"The use of the term 'honour' to describe a violent criminal act - sometimes committed against a man, but more often against a woman - can be explained only as a means of self-justification for the perpetrator.

"It diminishes the victim and provides a convenient excuse for what in our society we should accurately and simply call murder, rape, abuse or enslavement.

"I want us in this House to send a clear message that the excuses end here."

Her Crime (Aggravated Murder of and Violence against Women) Bill would also require the UK authorities to fund assistance for British women attacked in other countries and for the bodies of those murdered to be repatriated.

UK nationals guilty of such offences towards other UK nationals overseas would also face prosecution in British courts, her bill states.

MPs agreed the bill should be able to proceed, although Conservative MP Philip Davies - who said it was too focused on women and did not mention honour crime towards men - objected.

Mr Davies said he would continue to oppose legislation "unjustifiably aimed at dealing with just one gender", adding: "Yes, of course women are far more likely to be the victims of honour-based crimes than men, but they are not exclusively the victims of these crimes.

"As far as I am concerned, all these things are just as bad as each other."

The bill will be heard again on 24 March, although it is unlikely to become law without the government's support.

JORDAN: Calls for action as 'honour' killings show sharp increase

As part of 16-day campaign against gender violence, activists demand stronger penalties for 'honour' crimes and an end to imprisonment of at-risk women

By Olivia Cuthbert

The Guardian (09.12.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2gHNJkX> - On 8 October, an 18-year-old man from the Jordanian city of Madaba was charged with killing his sister as she slept after allegedly finding her with a mobile phone the family didn't know about. Five days later, two brothers were charged with murdering their sisters aged 27 and 34 at a farm on the outskirts of Jordan's capital, Amman.

The victims were among five women killed during one week in Jordan for reasons related to family "honour". Thirty-eight women have been victims of "honour" killings this year. The country typically reports between 15 and 20 such crimes a year, according to Human Rights Watch.

Women's rights activists have used the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, which ends on Saturday, to call for stronger penalties against the perpetrators

of “honour” crimes and to end the practice of imprisoning women at risk of being killed for their own protection.

In Jordan, women considered to be at risk can be detained indefinitely under the country’s 1954 Crime Prevention Law. Some spend years in prison before being granted release, which usually requires signed assurances from their families that they will not be harmed.

“It’s actually a violation of the constitution because freedom of movement is a constitutional right,” said Hadeel Abdul Aziz, executive director at the Justice Centre for Legal Aid in Jordan.

A 2014 report by Dignity, the Danish Institute Against Torture, on Conditions for Women in Detention in Jordan described how some women have resorted to “extreme and degrading measures, such as marrying men who have raped them in order to be released”.

“These are the saddest stories of all,” said Asma Khader, executive director of the Sisterhood Is Global Institute’s (Sigi) Jordan chapter, which provides legal, financial and psychosocial support to women in administrative detention. “Instead of protecting and supporting her, she is threatened [by relatives] as a person who has brought shame on the family and, in some cases, forced to marry her attacker.”

For many women in protective custody, marriage is the only route to release. Asheel, 30, spent seven months in detention after fleeing violent abuse at home. “At first being in prison seemed better than the beatings, but I was always afraid and there was nothing there to distract me from the worry. My options were to stay in prison or be married, so I preferred to marry. A lot of other girls did the same.”

Asheel’s husband is poor and they have little to live on, but he treats her and their children well. “I am happy now but I want all this to be deleted from my memory. I don’t wish any woman to face what has happened to me in my life.”

Sigi regularly visits women in protective custody at the Juweida women’s correctional and rehabilitation centre, to try to broker their release. This involves working with government bodies and families.

If the risk is from the father or brother, Sigi approaches family members who can influence them and prevent any attack.

“Unfortunately, we are not a forgiving society. For men particularly, the sense of shame lingers,” said Rana Sundos, programme and activities manager at Sigi. She added that “honour” crimes have sometimes been committed many years after a woman’s release. She recalls the sad outcome of a case involving a teenage girl who was placed in protective custody after the family threatened to kill her. She had become pregnant following an alleged assault.

“While she was in prison, the family came to the governor and signed a letter promising not to kill her, and she was released into their care. Within a few days, the brother had carried out the crime.” He bowed to pressure from relatives, said Sundos. “He told us: inside I loved my sister, she was the youngest, the fruit of our family. I didn’t want to kill her, but they said if you want to be a man, you must.”

A petition launched by the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) last month to “stop murder crimes committed against women and girls” outlined the need for legal reform. It highlighted articles 340 and 98 of the penal code, which grant judges

discretion to reduce sentences for the perpetrators of "honour" crimes in mitigating circumstances – including adultery and crimes committed in a fit of anger. The petition also called for an end to the detention of women for protective purposes.

"The presence of these articles contributes to the continuation of social attitudes that view the body of women as a vessel for family honour," said Salma Nims, the JNCW's secretary general.

Last week the country's Iftaa' Department, which is responsible for religious decrees, issued a fatwa for the first time, prohibiting the murder of women in the name of "honour".

The government has also announced plans to open a shelter in which women can stay for protection, rather than go to jail. "We realise that these women deserve a better place to stay in than prison, and that is why we are opening a shelter for them," Mohammad Ensour, director of the human rights and family affairs department at the justice ministry told the Jordan Times.

"We welcome this development, but the most important thing is to keep the location secret," said Khader. While lives have been saved and many women released as a result of Sigi's efforts, these women, she said, "are only partly free, because they can never walk outside without the fear that someone who knows them will be in the street".

** Names have been changed to protect identities*

PAKISTAN: Toughens laws on rape and 'honor killings' of women

By Salman Masood

NY Times (06.10.2016) - <http://nyti.ms/2dJzglS> - The Pakistani Parliament on Thursday passed laws to increase sentences for rapists and those who commit so-called honor killings of women, and closed a loophole that allowed many of the killers to go free, after hours of heated opposition from Islamist lawmakers.

Each year, hundreds of Pakistani women are killed by relatives angered by behavior they believe has impugned the family's reputation, according to human rights activists, who have campaigned against the practice and called for tougher laws for years.

Most of those killings have gone without punishment because of a tenet of Islamic law that allows killers to go free if they are forgiven by the woman's family — something that usually happens because the killers are usually family members.

"Under the new law, relatives of the victim would only be able to pardon the killer if he is sentenced to capital punishment," Zahid Hamid, the law minister, said on the floor of the National Assembly. "However, the culprit would still face a mandatory life sentence."

The Parliament was divided in a debate that lasted hours, with particular opposition from Islamist political parties that insisted the bill must be approved by a clerical panel before being passed. That requirement has been a sticking point in past attempts to enact legal protections for women.

This time, the government and supporters of the bill from the opposition benches ruled that step out.

In the other legislation passed on Thursday, Mr. Hamid, the law minister, said that verdicts in rape cases would have to be given within three months, and that sentences would increase.

"We have made it mandatory that the culprit must be imprisoned for 25 years," he said, adding that the rape of minors and the mentally and physically disabled has also become punishable under the law.

"These bills are hugely important for Pakistani women, where rape conviction rates were almost nonexistent, due in large part to various technical obstacles to accessing justice," Yasmeen Hassan, the global executive director of the rights group Equality Now, said in a statement. "We hope that these new laws will help generate a cultural shift in Pakistani society and that women will be able to live their lives in safety."

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif hailed the passage of the legislation, saying that there was "no honor in honor killings."

"I congratulate the Parliament, the NGOs, civil society, academia, media and all those who worked hard and supported us in the passage of this legislation," Mr. Sharif said, referring to nongovernmental organizations.

He said his government would ensure enforcement of the legislation.

"I feel so relieved," said Sughra Imam, a former senator, who had originally pushed for legislation against the honor-killing practice. "I hope they will help," Ms. Imam said in an interview, referring to the new laws.

"No law will completely eliminate crime," she said. "But at the very least, it should hold those who violate the law and principles of justice to account."

PAKISTAN: Honour killings on the rise, report reveals

Nearly 1,100 women were killed in Pakistan last year by relatives who believed they had dishonoured their families, the country's independent Human Rights Commission says.

BBC (01.04.2016) - <http://bbc.in/1RDapdd> - In its annual report the commission said 900 more women suffered sexual violence and nearly 800 took, or tried to take, their own lives.

In 2014 about 1,000 women died in honour-related attacks and 869 in 2013.

Correspondents say a large number of such crimes go unreported in Pakistan.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has said there is no place in Islam for killing in the name of family honour.

"The predominant causes of these killings in 2015 were domestic disputes, alleged illicit relations and exercising the right of choice in marriage," the report said.

Most of the 1,096 victims were shot, the report said, but attacks with acid were also common.

Among the cases highlighted in the report are a man who shot dead his two sisters in Sargodha, Punjab, because he believed they had "bad character" and three teenage girls killed by their male cousin for "dishonouring" their family in Pakpattan, Punjab.

The report said that 88 men were also the victims of honour killings last year.

In February, Punjab, the country's largest province, passed a landmark law criminalising all forms of violence against women.

However, more than 30 religious groups, including all the mainstream Islamic political parties, have threatened to launch protests if the law is not repealed.

Religious groups have equated women's rights campaigns with promotion of obscenity. They say the new Punjab law will increase the divorce rate and destroy the country's traditional family system.

Among the most infamous cases of honour killing in Pakistan was the stoning to death of Farzana Parveen in 2014 outside the High Court in Lahore. She had married against her family's wishes.

Her father, brother, cousin and former fiance were all found guilty of murder. Another brother received a 10-year jail sentence.

The issue of honour killings in Pakistan inspired a documentary film, *A Girl in the River - The Price of Forgiveness*, which won its creator, Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, an Oscar at this year's Academy Awards.

In her acceptance speech, she said it was after seeing the film that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had vowed to change the law on honour killings.
