

Ghor (Afghanistan): A woman stoned to death after 'attempting to flee a forced marriage'

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19-year-old Rokhshana was accused of trying to elope with another man but was arrested, tried and executed in a Taliban-controlled area.

[Photo: Radio Liberty: A still from a video purporting to show the execution of 19-year-old Rokhshana, who was accused of trying to elope with another man]

The Taliban has stoned a young Afghan woman to death for attempting to flee a forced marriage and elope with another man, according to Afghan officials.

The 19-year-old, identified only as Rokhshana, was arrested, tried and executed in an area "under Taliban control" confirmed Ghor's governor, Seema Jowenda, to *The Telegraph*.

A graphic video purporting to show the execution has been released, but has not been verified. The killing took place about a week ago.

The footage shows a woman, buried up to her neck in a dirt pit, surrounded by a large group of men, who according to local sources, include Taliban and local elders sympathetic to the militant group.

Several men methodically hurl stones, one-by-one, at the defenceless woman. Other men impassively watch as she wails in pain before the video cuts out.

The Taliban, local elders, and clerics reportedly tried Rokhshana and a man in Ghalmin, a village just 25 miles from Ghor's capital.

Ms Jowenda said Rokhshana had been engaged against her will to a much older man, and attempted to elope with another man with whom she had fallen in love. The man received a lesser punishment of flogging.

"They were both arrested [by the Taliban] while they were on the run," Ms Jowenda said.

The Taliban have a strong presence in Ghor, a desolate province in central Afghanistan.

In recent years, the militant group has capitalised on the drawdown of international troops and desperate poverty in the province, bolstering their ranks with disaffected young men.

Throughout Afghanistan, the Taliban represent the rule of law in areas under their control, freely running their own courts where they hand out justice based on their interpretation of sharia law.

Taliban courts often "implement the horrific style of punishment they were notorious for when they were in power," according to Ahmad Shuja, a researcher with Human Rights Watch.

While the Afghan government officially outlaws stoning, there is still some public support for the

grim penalty.

In 2013, a leaked draft proposal to reintroduce stoning into Afghanistan's penal code was withdrawn, but only after widespread international condemnation.

While Ms Jowenda condemned the stoning, in August this year, the controversial governor endorsed the public flogging of an Afghan man and woman found guilty of adultery by a local judge in her province.

She defended the punishment on the basis that it was in line with sharia and it "would teach others a lesson".

While foreign governments often cite human rights as measure of success since the toppling of the Taliban in 2001, activists have long warned the drawdown of international troops could result in an erosion of the progress made.

"There is real concern that the influence of the so-called courts will grow as the Taliban take over more areas," said Mr Shuja.

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P.S.

* "Afghan woman was stoned to death after 'attempting to flee a forced marriage'". The Telegraph. Kabul 4:15PM GMT 03 Nov 2015:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/11972749/Afghan-woman-was-stoned-to-death-after-attempting-to-flee-a-forced-marriage.html>