

Human Rights: After Years of Tragedy, Pakistan Criminalizes Honor Killings

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In recent years several countries in the region have been cracking down on the practice, which the U.N. says kills over 5,000 women a year.

Pakistan's parliament unanimously passed legislation against "honor killings" Thursday, three months after the murder of an outspoken social media star.

A joint session of the lower and upper houses of parliament, broadcast live on television, approved the new anti-honor killing law, removing a loophole in the existing law that allowed killers to walk free after being pardoned by family members.

"Laws are supposed to guide better behavior, not allow destructive behavior to continue with impunity," said former senator Sughra Imam, who initially put forward the bill.

Some 500 women are killed each year in Pakistan at the hands of family members over perceived damage to "honor" that can involve eloping, fraternizing with men or any other infraction against conservative values relating to women.

In most cases, the victim is a woman and the killer is a relative who escapes punishment by seeking forgiveness for the crime from family members.

Under the new law, relatives can forgive convicts in the case of a death sentence, but they would still have to face a mandatory life sentence.

An anti-rape law, which makes it mandatory that a perpetrator gets 25 years in jail, was also passed in the same parliamentary session.

"These bills are hugely important for Pakistani women, where rape conviction rates were almost non-existent, due in large part to various technical obstacles to accessing justice," said Yasmeen Hassan, Global Executive Director at Equality Now.

"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," Hassan told Reuters.

Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, whose documentary on honor killings won an Oscar this year, posted on Twitter: "Thank you to PM Nawaz Sharif for keeping his promise".

The government of Prime Minister Sharif has faced mounting pressure to pass the law after the brother of social media star Qandeel Baloch was arrested in connection with her death. The brother said he was incensed by her often sexually suggestive posts on social media.

Several countries in the Middle East have modified their legal code to make honor killings illegal, such as Jordan, Turkey and Syria, where males were once protected by the legal system against

prosecution.

The most recent available data by the United Nations indicates that more than 5,000 women are victims of honor killings around the world every year. PaThe practice is most common in South Asia and the Middle East, the U.N. says, and thus it has falsely been labeled an Islamic tradition despite it existing long before Islam came about through its roots in tribal practices across the world.

Telesur

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<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/After-Years-of-Tragedy-Pakistan-Criminalizes-Honor-Killings-20161006-0020.html>

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