

Yemeni minister seeks law to end child marriage

Yemen's human rights minister has asked parliament to pass a law setting a minimum age for marriage.

Hooria Mashhour told the BBC she believed there was more chance of making progress on the issue of child marriage in Yemen than ever before.

It comes amid an international outcry over reports that an eight-year-old girl died of internal bleeding on the night she wed a 40-year-old man.

The details of the case are unclear, with officials denying it happened.

But an adviser to the prime minister says an investigation will be carried out and anyone responsible brought to justice.

'Obligations'

Poor families marrying underage girls off for money remains common in Yemen, but pressure to ban the practice intensified this week after a Yemeni human rights campaigner said the eight-year-old girl, identified only as Rawan, had died last week after being married to a man five times her age in Meedi, a town in the north-western province of Hajjah.

I urge the Yemeni authorities to investigate this case without delay, and to prosecute all those responsible for this crime"

Baroness Catherine Ashton EU foreign policy chief

"On the wedding night and after intercourse, she suffered from bleeding and uterine rupture which caused her death," Arwa Othman told the Reuters news agency. "They took her to a clinic but the medics couldn't save her life."

Ms Othman said no action had been taken against the man.

A security official denied that any such incident had taken place, but two Meedi residents told Reuters that it had and tribal chiefs had tried to prevent it being reported.

On Friday, the European Union's foreign policy chief, Baroness Catherine Ashton, [said in a statement](#) that she had been "appalled" by reports of the girl's death.

"I urge the Yemeni authorities to investigate this case without delay and to prosecute all those responsible for this crime," she added.

"I call on the Yemeni government to abide by its obligations under international law, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Yemen is a member, and to immediately reinstate legislation setting a minimum age for marriage, in line with international norms, to prohibit such abuse of children."

An aide to Yemeni Prime Minister Mohammed Salem Basindwa said the government was "dealing seriously" with Ms Othman's allegation.

"It will investigate it and those responsible will be brought to justice," Rajeh Badi told Reuters.

Ms Mashhour meanwhile said that she had asked parliament to set a minimum age for marriage.

But BBC Arab affairs analyst Sebastian Usher says it seems unlikely to propose any new legislation.

A National Dialogue Conference has been meeting to try to reconcile Yemen's different factions following the uprising that forced President Ali Abdullah Saleh from power, but the issue is not on the agenda, he adds.

Those against setting a minimum marriage in Yemen say that it goes against the country's tradition, culture and religion. But some prominent religious clerics have supported the move, citing Islamic sources.