Child bride, 13, dies of internal injuries four days after arranged marriage in Yemen

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<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1264729/Child-bride-13-dies-internal-injuries-days-arranged-marriage-Yemen.html>

A 13-year-old Yemeni girl died of internal injuries four days after a family-arranged marriage to a man almost twice her age, a human rights group said.

Ilham Mahdi al Assi died last Friday in a hospital in Yemen's Hajja province, the Shaqaeq Arab Forum for Human Rights said, quoting a medical report.

She was married the previous Monday in a traditional arrangement known as a 'swap marriage', in which the brother of the bride also married the sister of the groom, it said.

Sigrid Kaag, regional director for UNICEF, said in a statement that the United Nations child agency was 'dismayed by the death of yet another child bride in Yemen'.

'Elham is a martyr of abuse of children's lives in Yemen and a clear example of what is justified by the lack of limits on the age of marriage,' SAF said in a statement.

A medical report from al-Thawra hospital said she suffered a tear to her genitals and severe bleeding.

The Yemeni rights group said the girl was married off in an agreement between two men to marry each other's sisters to avoid having to pay expensive bride-prices.

The practice of marrying young girls is widespread in Yemen and drew the attention of international rights groups seeking to pressure the government to outlaw child marriages.

Legislation that would make it illegal for those under the age of 17 to marry is in serious peril after strong opposition from some of Yemen's most influential Islamic leaders.

The group said that was a common arrangement in the deeply impoverished country.

Yemen's gripping poverty plays a role in hindering efforts to stamp out the practice, as poor families find themselves unable to say no to bride-prices in the hundreds of dollars for their daughters.

More than a quarter of Yemen's females marry before age 15, according to a report last year by the Social Affairs Ministry.

Tribal custom also plays a role, including the belief that a young bride can be shaped into an obedient wife, bear more children and be kept away from temptation.

Last month, a group of the country's highest Islamic authorities declared those supporting a ban on child marriages to be apostates.

A February 2009 law set the minimum age for marriage at 17, but it was repealed and sent back to parliament's constitutional committee for review after some politicians called it un-Islamic. The committee is expected to make a final decision on the legislation this month.

Some of the clerics who signed the decree against a ban sit on the committee.

Further imperilling the effort is the weak government's reluctance to confront the clerics and other conservative tribal officials, whose support is essential to their fragile hold on power.

The issue of Yemen's child brides got widespread attention three years ago when an eight-year-old girl boldly went by herself to a courtroom and demanded a judge dissolve her marriage to a man in his 30s.

She eventually won a divorce, and legislators began looking at ways to curb the practice.

In September, a 12-year-old Yemeni child-bride died after struggling for three days in labour to give birth, a local human rights organisation said.

Yemen once set 15 as the minimum age for marriage, but parliament annulled that law in the 1990s, saying parents should decide when a daughter marries.