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'Eight-yr-old Yemeni girl wins divorce

Sanaa: A Yemeni court has granted a divorce to an eight-year-old girl whose unemployed father forced her into an arranged marriage.

"I am happy that I am divorced now. I will be able to go back to school," Nojud Mohammed Ali said, after a public hearing in Sanaa's court of first instance.

Her former husband, 28-year-old Faez Ali Thameur, said he married the child "with her consent and that of her parents" but that he did not object to her divorce petition.

In response to a question from Judge Mohammed al-Qadhi, he acknowledged that the "marriage was consummated, but I did not beat her".

Yemen, one of the world's poorest countries, has no law governing the minimum age of marriage.

TAKING CHARGE

Nojud Mohammed Ali was a second grader in primary school when her unemployed father forced her into an arranged marriage two and a half months ago. Nojud's father maintains she had consented to the wedding

Nojud was a second grader in primary school when the marriage took place two and a half months ago.

"They asked me to sign the marriage contract and remain in my father's house until I was 18. But a week after signing, my father and my mother forced me to go live with him."

Nojud's father, Mohammad Ali Al-Ahdal, said he had felt obliged to marry off his daughter, an act he said she consented to.

He said he was frightened after his oldest daughter had been kidnapped several years ago and later married to her abductor. He said the same man then kidnapped another of his daughters who was already married and had four children, resulting in him being jailed.

Dressed in traditional black, Nojud said she would now go to live in the home of her maternal uncle and did not want to see her father.

The girl's lawyer, Shadha Nasser, said Nojud's case was not unique. "I believe there are thousands of similar cases," she said. Civil society groups were pressing parliament to set the minimum age for marriage at 18, she said. AFP

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