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Al Jazeera

Afghan partygoers beheaded by Taliban

Officials report 15 men and two women were found murdered after mixed-gender dance party in southern Helmand province.

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Fifteen men and two women were found beheaded in Afghanistan's southern Helmand province on Monday, punishment meted out by Taliban insurgents for a mixed-sex party with music and dancing, officials have said.

The bodies were found in a house near the Musa Qala district, an estimated 75km north of the provincial capital Lashkar Gah, said district governor Nimatullah, who only goes by one name.

"The victims threw a late-night dance and music party when the Taliban attacked" on Sunday night, Nimatullah told the Reuters news agency.

There were no immediate claims of responsibility.

In ultra-conservative Afghanistan, men and women do not usually mingle unless they are related, and parties involving both genders together are rare and highly secretive affairs.

'Wild' parties

For the Taliban, open displays of affection and the mixing of men and women are vehemently condemned.

According to witnesses of a major attack that killed 20 near Kabul in June, Taliban gunmen

stormed a high-end hotel demanding to know where the "prostitutes and pimps" were.

The Taliban said it launched that attack on Qarga Lake because the hotel was used for "wild parties".

During their five-year reign, which was ended by US-backed Afghan forces in 2001, the Taliban banned women from voting, most work and leaving their homes unaccompanied by their husband or a male relative.

Although those rights have been painstakingly regained, Afghanistan remains one of the worst places on earth to be a woman.

Daud Ahmadi, spokesman for the Helmand governor, said a team had been sent to the site of beheadings to investigate.