

Women's Driving Ban of Motor Vehicle in Saudi Arabia

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I am a Saudi woman who lived and was raised in the only country in the world where women are not allowed to drive. As a witness to women's effort to change this policy since 1990, as well as to effect change in the society and the cultural perspective on this subject, I want to clarify the misconception about women driving in Saudi. Women's driving is one of the issues that have recently fallen under the spotlight. Women have proceeded to resist this policy with the hope of persuading Saudi officials to permit women to drive in the near future. As matter of fact, I am providing this statement after being a student in the US, where I have been allowed to drive a car during my visit here, I am looking forward to returning to my home country and driving my car in Saudi Arabia. Driving a car has many benefits, such as taking care of my own interests and needs, saving my personal income as opposed to paying a driver for transportation, being able to socialize with my female friends, and would likely be an economic boost for the country.

Currently, more than 13 million Saudi Arabian (SA) women are banned from driving a motor vehicle in their home country. Such a policy is exclusive to SA and most people believe the ban is based on religious guidance and laws associated with the Islamic faith, considering that nearly 100% of the native population is Muslim. However, this is a misconception.

Saudi Arabian law has several levels. These levels range from *Qur'anic injunctions* that clearly delineate right from wrong; *Hadith and Sunnat*, which include the actions, sayings, tacit approvals, and behaviors of Prophet Muhammad, to whom the *Qur'an* was revealed more than 1435 years ago; *fatwas*, which are rulings given by a recognized authority on an issue or behavior that requires immediate action; and *shura*, the collective decisions of a group of scholars on specific matters that require consultation and collaboration in order to determine the most effective course of action, and where no other clear prohibition or permission has been issued.

For the last twenty-one years Saudi women have requested driving privileges in the conservative society and participated in several actions in support of their request. Even though there are different groups who are against this proposal, there are also those that are supportive of women driving. Some groups of Saudi women have even taken it into their own hands to try to push forward this issue by protesting this ban publicly in the streets of Saudi Arabia.

Those women are claiming their right to freedom and propose to implement the driving right as a human right without discriminating due to gender. They too desire to serve the needs of their families, and chose to exercise their free will socially, economically, and globally. But, there is no wonder as to why there is resistance to change since this ban as a social problem stands on the customs and traditions of the people of Saudi Arabia, which, being a patriarchal society does not prefer women to function independent of male supervision.

Women certainly have an idea about their most immediate needs, of which driving may not be the most important. However, it is a common courtesy to have their voices heard. Although Saudi Arabia has included women in the *Shura* council, who discuss and make decisions on internal policy and offers guidance about non-specific religious questions, they have failed to grant permission for women to obtain driver's licenses and operate a motor vehicle within the country. Those who deny women this right with the opinion that it is prohibited in Islam have forgotten that women have participated in battles, reached high levels in education, become prominent religious authorities, and even offered sound advice to the Prophet of Islam, which resulted in major social change within the country.

Based on all the transformations that women have undergone until this day, they at least deserve the opportunity to discuss whether it is better for them to drive their vehicle themselves rather than having foreign drivers, who have caused a lot of problems to the country for families and children.