

Americans for Democracy



& Human Rights in Bahrain

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BAHRAIN INSTITUTE FOR  
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European Saudi organisation for Human Rights

المنظمة الأوروبية السعودية لحقوق الإنسان

Distinguished Independent Expert Ms. Kornfeld-Matte,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, together with Bahrain Institute for Rights & Democracy, and the European-Saudi Organisation for Human Rights would like to call your attention to the level of oppression faced by many women due to some states' continued implementation of male guardianship programs. This has a considerable impact on the lives of older women.

In Saudi Arabia's male guardianship system, all women are legally required to have a male guardian from whom they must obtain permission before making many critical decisions. Thus, women lack many rights essential to establishing autonomy and control over life choices.

A key area of concern for elderly women in Saudi Arabia is health. Many health institutions will not provide critical care to women until they obtain permission from her male legal guardian. This has positioned elderly women in Saudi Arabia in the face of life-threatening situations, where in cases of stroke or heart attack, the immediate medical attention that is required- is often delayed.

Moreover, for divorced and widowed older women in Saudi Arabia, life is also particularly difficult. These women face difficulty in accessing housing or care. Additionally, interactions with non-related males are scrutinized and sometimes criminalized, even when they relate to the kind of special assistance that is often required by older persons. For example, in 2009 Saudi Arabia sentenced a 75-year old widow to 40 lashes and 4 months in prison for allowing two men to help her bring groceries into her home. Such absurd measures accurately capture the discriminatory system of male guardianship and its damaging effects on older persons.

In this context, what measures would the Independent Expert recommend the Government of Saudi Arabia to adopt in order to better protect the rights of older women?

Thank you.