

Saudi women challenge driving ban

A group of women in Saudi Arabia is for the first time to lobby the kingdom's government for the right to drive cars.

Members of the Committee of Demanders of Women's Right to Drive Cars plan to deliver a petition to King Abdullah by Sunday, Saudi Arabia's National Day.

Correspondents say the demand is likely to be rejected, as conservatives argue if women are allowed to drive, they will be able to mix freely with men.

The issue of women driving has recently become the subject of public debate.

This is a right that has been delayed for too long
Fawzia al-Oyouni

Two years ago, a member of the Consultative Council sparked a heated debate when he pointed out there was nothing under Islamic law or the constitution that justified the ban, and that the council ought to discuss ways of lifting it.

Mohammed al-Zulfa's comments later prompted the Saudi interior minister to dismiss calls for the ban to be lifted, saying the country had other priorities.

'Social issue'

The current driving ban applies to all women in Saudi Arabia, whatever their nationality.

It was originally unofficial, but became law after an incident in 1990, when 47 women challenged the authorities by taking their families' cars out for a drive.

After strong criticism from the Saudi religious authorities, the women were jailed for one day, their passports confiscated and many lost their jobs.

A founding member of the Committee of Demanders of Women's Right to Drive Cars, Fawzia al-Oyouni, said its electronic petition would highlight what many Saudi men and women consider a "stolen right".

"We would like to remind officials that this is, as many have said, a social and not religious or political issue," she told the Associated Press. "Since it's a social issue, we have the right to lobby for it."

"This is a right that has been delayed for too long."

King Abdullah has in the past said that he thought a day would eventually come when Saudi women were allowed drive.

Do you live in Saudi Arabia? Do you think women should be allowed to drive in the Kingdom?

Name
Your E-mail address
Town & Country
Phone number (optional):
Comments

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