

Saudi Arabia, women and the male guardianship system: Open letter to President Obama

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Dear Mr. President,

Allow me to introduce myself: I am Wajeha Al-Huwaider, Saudi writer and women's rights activist in the Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia.

When you meet with King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz next week, we kindly request that you bring to his majesty's attention the issue of reforming the Saudi male guardianship system.

As I'm watching the Gulf of Mexico birds which are totally covered with black oil stain I can relate to their suffering as a Saudi woman. These birds can hardly move: they have no control over their lives, and they cannot fly freely to go to a place where they can feel safe. This describes Saudi women's lives. I know that kind of pain. I have been living it most of my life.

For decades, women in Saudi Arabia under the Saudi male guardianship system live like these hapless birds that are keeping you worried days in and days out. Saudi women have been deprived of their rights to be treated as full citizens. That system prevents mature women from living a normal life. It prevents a woman even from receiving medical care, or to travel without getting permission from a male guardian—a guardian who may even be her own 16-year-old son. Saudi women have no right to take any decision regarding their own personal affairs; a man has to do that for them.

Birds of the Gulf of Mexico and women in Saudi Arabia suffer similar circumstances; they have been trapped in their own habitat under very harsh circumstances and they need help to gain their lives back.

When you meet with King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz, please help his majesty see the effect the Saudi male guardianship system has on Saudi women. Children need guardians; mature women do not.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

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P.S.

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