

Saudi Shura Council approves citizenship amendment study

By Habib Toumi

Gulf News (07.2.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2BJPKqS> – History could be in the making in Saudi Arabia after the Shura Council cleared the first hurdle by approving a study of two proposals to amend the citizenship law and allow women to pass on the Saudi citizenship to their children.

The proposals were initially submitted by three members in the previous term – Haya Al Manee', Thuraya Abaid and Wafa Teeba – and taken up by two current members – Latifa Al Shaalan and Atta Al Subaiti.

Following a heated debate at the council on Tuesday, 63 members voted in favour of the amendments, ensuring that they are passed. They now go to the security committee that will present a final report to be discussed by the council at a later stage.

During the discussion on Tuesday, Shura member Fahd Al Enezi, a legal expert, said he vehemently opposed the amendments, resorting to religion to highlight his argument.

“Children must be attributed to their fathers, not to their mothers as is clearly stated in our religion,” he said. “A

Saudi woman has the option to marry a non-Saudi. It is her choice. However, the citizenship is not her option and she is aware that her children will not obtain the Saudi citizenship."

However, Faisal Al Fadil, also a legal expert, said that citizenship is a human right within the religion and is part of the fight against discrimination.

Mohammad Al Ali used economic arguments to call for defeating the proposals.

"Saudi Arabia is basically a desert nation and the quantity of water is limited," he said as he presented virtual statistics about the high population in case Saudi women passed on their citizenship to their children, Saudi daily Okaz reported on Wednesday.

Abdullah Al Harbi warned of a waste of resources.

"Most of those born to Saudi mothers are competent and not giving them the Saudi citizenship is a loss to an efficient segment in the Saudi society, especially that they grew up in the kingdom and were educated here," he said.

"Most countries allow women to pass on their citizenship, including in some Arab countries that have high population figures but whose economic development standards do not keep up with those of Saudi Arabia."

He said that granting the citizenship would alleviate economic burdens for families and ensure promises of a brighter future for the children.

The issue of residency permits and entry visas required from non-Saudis living in the kingdom hampers the academic progress of the sons and daughters studying abroad since they have to go back to Saudi Arabia before their expiry, he said.

“The sons and daughters who are born in Saudi Arabia and grow up here develop strong links to their family and the Saudi society. Such attributes instill in them a sense of allegiance and belonging. However, if they are treated after graduation from colleges as foreigners, they are bound to face a multitude of hurdles even if they are top of their classes,” Al Harbi said.

Iqbal Darandari said she fully supported the amendment proposals.

“True faith is to be fair to all people,” she said. “There are children born here in Saudi Arabia to Saudi mothers. They grew up here and they know no other land. Where will they go if they do not have the citizenship?”

Darandari said that everyone should feel they are accountable before God for not assisting people.

In her argument, Noora Al Musaad said there was a deep need

for endorsing the amendments.

“Most countries across the world allow mothers to pass on their citizenship to their children,” she said. “What we now have is a form of discrimination.”

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