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EGYPT: Women with hijab found to face bias in Egypt

Women wearing hijabs (Muslim headscarves) are being discriminated against by businesses in Egypt, a BBC Arabic investigation has discovered.

By Ahmed Elshamy

BBC News (27.08.2022) - <https://bbc.in/3QDYWiR> - The evidence appears to violate Egypt's constitution, which bans discrimination based on religion, sex, race or social class.

Since 2015, some Egyptian women wearing a hijab have taken to social media to complain about such treatment.

Mayar Omar, a 25-year-old research executive from Cairo, says she has faced repeated problems going to some high-end restaurants.

"You want to feel that you can be yourself when you enter a venue and no-one is forcing you to do something, or make you feel that you are the cause of a problem for the venue or your friends."

On hijabi lifestyle social media groups, BBC News Arabic found what appears to be a growing trend, with women accusing numerous venues of refusing them entry if they are wearing a hijab.

"In most cases the main cause is classism," Nada Nashat, a lawyer and women's rights activist, said. "So we find discrimination against hijabi women in venues that like to present themselves as upper-middle or upper class.

"But we also find discrimination against non-hijabi women in lower and middle classes."

BBC News Arabic tried to make a reservation at 15 upmarket venues across Cairo that had been accused online of discriminating against hijab-wearing women.

Most of the venues asked for the social media profiles of all guests and 11 venues stated that head coverings were not allowed.

We sent an undercover married couple, with the woman wearing a hijab, to some of the venues that told us that hijab-wearing women were not allowed entry.

At L'Aubergine in the upmarket neighbourhood of Zamalek, the doorman immediately told the couple that the headscarf was forbidden as they had a bar inside, and that this might offend women wearing a hijab.

The manager too was adamant, saying: "The headscarf is forbidden."

When presented with our recorded evidence, L'Aubergine told us it was "inaccurate" and that refusing women who wear the hijab is not a house rule, adding: "We denounce it."

The venue also told us: "We have reiterated our house policies to staff to avoid any confusion in the future."

At Kazan, in the same neighbourhood, the couple was once again told by the doormen: "The problem is the headscarf." When asked why, they simply stated: "This is the house rules."

At the final venue, Andiamo in Heliopolis, the couple was initially refused entry. After appealing, they were told they could enter but would have to sit in a corner as the manager said: "It's a ministry of tourism instruction, and if they find any hijabi woman beside the bar, they'll fine us."

Neither Kazan nor Andiamo responded to requests for comment.

'Find an alternative'

BBC News Arabic presented the evidence to Adel El Masry, chairman of the Chamber of Tourism Establishments and Restaurants.

"Never in any era of the ministry of tourism has a decision been issued banning veiled women [from leisure venues]," he said. "This is not acceptable. Discrimination is unacceptable, these are public places."

BBC News Arabic also gathered evidence suggesting that hijab-wearing women were being restricted from buying holiday apartments by a major developer, La Vista. The company has projects in Cairo as well as several high-end coastal developments.

In the past it has sold properties to women with hijabs, but our investigation found many social media posts accusing La Vista of changing its policy and now placing restrictions on them.

An executive at a multinational company told BBC News Arabic how he had contacted several property brokers to buy a property at La Vista, but that they told him: "Sorry, La Vista are a bit difficult regarding the hijab."

BBC News Arabic contacted six property brokers, posing as a buyer whose wife wears a hijab and who wanted to buy a unit at a La Vista coastal project. They told us it would not be possible to purchase a unit.

One told our undercover reporter: "Can I speak to you frankly? Definitely look for an alternative."

Another went even further, stating: "To be frank with you, regarding the North Coast and Sokhna projects, they are discriminatory."

One broker explained how the process worked. "They will not say that we won't sell you a unit, but they will say that this project you have selected is closed now and when it's open, we will call you, and they won't."

When our undercover reporter phoned La Vista stating that his wife wore a hijab, he was told he would be put on a waiting list and there were no properties available.

Several weeks later he visited the La Vista office but this time didn't say that his wife wore a hijab. He was told there were property units available immediately and when he asked what kind of people lived there, the agent told him: "The idea is that all the people we have look like each other."

She stated that one La Vista development "has no veiled women at all".
La Vista has not yet responded to requests for comment.

Amira Saber, an Egyptian MP who has campaigned for women's rights, said the Egyptian constitution was clear that discrimination of this kind was not allowed.

"I will certainly use one of my parliamentary tools to ask the officials in the government how we can ensure that this does not happen again, and if it does happen, the perpetrator must be punished," she said.

SAUDI ARABIA: The case of Salma al-Shehab sentenced to 34 years in prison to be raised at the UN

Two NGOs have submitted a written statement to the 51st session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva

HRWF/ CAP (23.08.2022) – Text of the written statement about the sentencing of Salma al-Shehab and the male guardian system in Saudi Arabia:

"CAP/ Conscience et Liberté (Paris) and Human Rights Without Frontiers (Brussels) are deeply concerned about the sentencing of a Saudi PhD student to 34 years in prison and the deterioration of women's rights in Saudi Arabia.

A 34-year old PhD student sentenced to 34 years in prison and a 34-year travel ban afterwards, a cynical and cruel game with this number

At mid-August 2022, **Salma al-Shehab**, a Saudi 34-year old PhD student from the University of Leeds, was sentenced under the kingdom's counter-terrorism and cybercrime laws to a heavy penalty: 34 years in prison and a 34-year travel ban after her release for following and retweeting messages from Saudi women's rights activists, including Loujain al-Hathloul ranked third in the "Top 100 Most Powerful Arab Women 2015" and the winner of the Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize in 2020.

The ruling is the longest prison sentence given to a Saudi women's rights defender, marking an escalation in MBS crackdown on dissent.

She was arrested in January 2021 while on holiday in Saudi Arabia, having been targeted by the authorities. She was held in prolonged solitary confinement for 285 days before she was brought to trial, which violates international standards and Saudi Arabia's Law of Criminal Procedures. She was also denied access to legal representation throughout her pre-trial detention, including during interrogations.

Salma al-Shehab, who was a postgraduate researcher in the final year of her PhD studies in the School of Medicine at the University of Leeds, had used her Twitter account -- of around 2,700 followers -- to follow, like, and share posts from Saudi activists or dissidents in exile.

Initially, the mother of two young sons (six and four years old) was sentenced by a special terrorist court to serve six years in prison -- three of which were suspended -- for "causing public unrest and destabilising civil and national security". But prosecutors requested that

she face new charges, including for "spreading false and malicious rumours on Twitter" and on 15 August, an appeals court handed down the new sentence of 34 years in prison. Salma al-Shehab comes from the Shia Muslim minority, who has long been discriminated against in Saudi Arabia.

CAP/ Conscience et Liberté (Paris) and Human Rights Without Frontiers (Brussels) consider that

- **The verdict is a mockery of justice and a message of threats and intimidation from Crown Prince Mohamed Bin-Salman**
- **The ruling is an egregious violation of freedom of thought and freedom of speech**
- **Her case is being instrumentalized to frighten women's rights activists and human rights defenders**
- **The judgement sets a dangerous precedent for female activists in the country, who are already subjected to unprecedented arrest campaigns, severe torture, and sexual harassment and ask for the immediate and unconditional release of Salma al-Shehab.**

Home detention and male guardianship

A group of Saudi women activists has launched a campaign on Twitter to raise awareness about and protest against the violence many of them still endure amid timid attempts at reform.

Using the [#HomeDetainees](#) hashtag, the Twitter campaign is aimed at raising awareness about the conditions of women "who languish at home", targeting the male guardianship system (husband, father or brother). Women inside and outside the country share experiences of suffering. For many, the home is "a woman's grave and man's paradise".

The heavy restrictions on women's movements, personal development and professional fulfillment – the legacy of an archaic and patriarchal society favoured by a reactionary vision of Islam – are embodied in the male guardianship system, which denies women their freedom.

The initiative allows women to share on social media their personal experiences as "prisoners" in their own homes and highlights the limits imposed on their social life.

The campaign's goal is to abolish altogether the male guardianship system, which places women's lives under men's control, be they fathers, husbands or brothers, who can decide their fate in terms of "education, work and healthcare".

The campaign is also demanding that Saudi women be granted the right to "movement, independence and decision-making" so that they can be free in their personal life and not feel "trapped" in their homes.

"My prison suffocates my passions and aspirations," wrote one user of the hashtag who did not use her real name. "It chokes off my desires, capabilities, ambitions," and "rendered me severely depressed and obsessive, as well as afflicted me with thousands of psychological ailments".

Another user described life as a woman in Saudi Arabia as akin to being "assaulted with all forms of violence on the psychological, physical, and material level".

The constant monitoring denies women “the privacy of closing the door of the room with a key,” said another, making some feel like an “immobile piece of furniture in a living room”, seeing “their age and youth passing while they are trapped between four walls”.

The reforms that the controversial Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) has introduced since 2019 have touched social and religious life, allowing for example women to drive and go to stadiums (albeit under certain restrictions), and boosting the entertainment industry.

However, the arrests of senior officials and businessmen, the crackdown on activists and critics and the Khashoggi affair have raised questions about the extent of change.

CAP/ Conscience et Liberté (Paris) and Human Rights Without Frontiers (Brussels) support the [#HomeDetainees](#) hashtag movement and urge the international community to press the Saudi authorities to abolish the male guardianship.

For interviews in French or English, contact w.fautre@hrwf.org

SAUDI ARABIA: Saudi women activists launch campaign against home detention and male guardianship

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Asia News (01.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/32Z8cLC> - A group of Saudi women activists has launched a campaign on Twitter to raise awareness about and protest against the violence many of them still endure amid timid attempts at reform.

The heavy restrictions on women’s movements, personal development and professional fulfillment – the legacy of an archaic and patriarchal society favoured by a reactionary vision of Islam – are embodied in the male guardianship system, which denies women their freedom.

The initiative allows women to share on social media their personal experiences as “prisoners” in their own homes and highlights the limits imposed on their social life.

Activists chose the hashtag [#HomeDetainees](#) to increase awareness and knowledge about “women who languish at home”, a place that is “a woman’s grave and man’s paradise”.

The campaign’s goal is to abolish altogether the male guardianship system, which places women’s lives under men’s control, be they fathers, husbands or brothers, who can decide their fate in terms of “education, work and healthcare”.

The campaign is also demanding that Saudi women be granted the right to “movement, independence and decision-making” so that they can be free in their personal life and not feel “trapped” in their homes.

In recent weeks, several women have used the platform to share personal experiences of suffering, deprivation as well as physical and spiritual pain.

"My prison suffocates my passions and aspirations," wrote one user who did not use her real name. "It chokes off my desires, capabilities, ambitions," and "rendered me severely depressed and obsessive, as well as afflicted me with thousands of psychological ailments". Another user described life as a woman in Saudi Arabia as akin to being "assaulted with all forms of violence on the psychological, physical, and material level".

The constant monitoring denies women "the privacy of closing the door of the room with a key," said another, making some feel like an "immobile piece of furniture in a living room", seeing "their age and youth passing while they are trapped between four walls".

In trying to free the country from dependence on oil, the basis of the "Vision 2030" program, Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) is seeking, albeit carefully, to change the fundamentalist basis of [Islam](#) and social life in the country.

The [reforms](#) he introduced since 2019 have touched social and [religious life](#), allowing for example women to drive and go to stadiums (albeit under certain restrictions), and boosting the entertainment industry.

However, the [arrests of senior officials and businessmen](#), the [crackdown on activists and critics](#), and the [Khashoggi affair](#) have raised questions about the extent of change.

Still, the campaign has garnered support and solidarity from abroad, as evinced by the message of a woman from Kuwait who claims to "share pain and suffering" felt by Saudi women.

It also comes in the wake of the sudden release of two members of the royal family, Princess Basmah and her daughter Souhoud Al Sharif, who were arrested in 2019 and held in Al Ha'ir maximum security prison.

Detained without formal charges, their imprisonment was likely prompted by their complaints over the treatment of women, the male guardianship system, and their opposition to the war in Yemen.