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Saudi Arabia: Female Drivers Fight for Gender Equality

Imagine living in a country where, women aren’t allowed to drive, or they’ll be arrested. For the those in Saudi Arabia, this has been their reality up until the recent legalization of driving for women. Men and women in Saudi Arabia have never been viewed as equal. Most men believe that women are far less intelligent and shouldn’t be allowed the same rights. For Saudi women, not being allowed to drive is not only unfair, but is a major inconvenience to them. For example, those who have jobs depend on taxis and Uber to get where they need to go. June 24th, 2018 was the day that Saudi Arabia lifted the driving ban and women were legally allowed to operate motor vehicles. The Saudi Arabian government's decision to legalize driving for women helps them to be independent and make a larger impact on their society.

Saudi Arabian women are not only excited to finally be able to hit the roads, but are also glad they get to start helping improve their economy. With the ban being lifted, they are able help improve their economy now that they are more independent. In a news article written by Ruba Obaid in June of 2018 called “Women Driving in Saudi Arabia Helps Create 50,000 Job Opportunities”, she explains that the lift of the ban will help to create more jobs, and increase the amount of female leaders in Saudi Arabia. The prince of Saudi Arabia predicted that the contribution of women will grant a vast amount of new jobs and “help women enter the labor market” (Obaid). A rise in female leaders would greatly improve how Saudi women are viewed and would show people that they deserve to be treated equally to men. In another article called “The End of the Driving Ban is a Blueprint for Economic Reform in Saudi Arabia”, written by Najah Al Otaibi, she discusses the idea of ‘Vision 2030’ and provides statistics that show that the driving ban being lifted further boosts the economy. For example, Otaibi says, “With the lifting of the ban on women driving, the government’s goal of raising Saudi gross domestic product by 65 per cent will become easier, as this will revive other sectors, such as the automotive and retail, which will increase the productivity because more women will enjoy the ability to work.” The legalization of female drivers proves useful for the economy in many ways.

Women play an important role within their communities, as well as a vital role in the lives of younger individuals. Being adults, the Saudi Arabian children look up to women, especially young girls. It’s beneficial for young kids to see women being independent and having a large part in society, because it shows them that both genders are equal. Josie Ensor, author of “In the Driving Seat at Last - Saudi Arabia’s Women Take to the Road”, interviews women of Saudi Arabia who are excitedly exercising their new right. Ensor spoke to a Saudi Arabian Nurse by the name of Asma, who said, “A young girl on the street saw her in the driver’s seat, and could not believe her eyes ‘Being a taxi driver for me is about inspiring girls to do what men do.’” It’s important for the adolescents of this day and age to understand that the time for gender equality is here.

No one can deny that women are treated as lesser in Saudi Arabia; women are not given the same rights in Saudi Arabia, because some people believe that men are superior. People are still under the impression that men are higher-up, compared to women. Margaret Coker, author of “Saudi Women Get Keys, Not Equality”, explains that even with the new rights the Saudi women have been granted, the fight for equality is far from over. She writes, “A Saudi public opinion poll, commissioned in February by Uber, showed that 90 percent of respondents felt positively about lifting the driving ban. That has not diminished sexism. A popular preacher last year strongly opposed letting women drive, saying their brains were half the size of mens.” This shows that gender discrimination is still alive and well. Despite the naysayers and their opinions, many people are hopeful that the ban being lifted will help reduce the discrimination. “The End of the Driving Ban is a Blueprint for Economic Reform in Saudi Arabia”, by Najah Al Otaibi, describes how the lifting of the ban is essential to the end of gender prejudice in Saudi Arabia. With the removal of the law against female drivers, the country will lure more tourists who’ll notice that “the kingdom no longer as a bastion of male representation but a...society where women are on equal footing as men” (Otaibi).

Some people believe that, thanks to the recent lifting of the ban, their country won’t be viewed as male dominated, and both genders will be seen as equal. In Ailsa Chang’s article, “Does the End of Saudi Arabia’s Women Driving Ban Signal Change for the Country?”, she interviews Saudi women rights activist Fawziah Al-Bakr, asking her what the ban lift represents to her and other females of Saudi Arabia. Al-Bakr responded with, “‘It means freedom. You feel free. You go about your daily life, but then you have the choice. You’re treated like human beings. You’re treated equally to the men.’” It is obvious that the women of Saudi Arabia are appreciative of this new right; and enjoy the feeling of being treated as equals, because they’re finally getting what they deserve. Gender equality for Saudi women is on the horizon, because the government finally decided to lift the ban against female drivers, and many people are looking forward to it.

Independence is one thing that the women of Saudi Arabia lack, but wish very much to have. Since so many people have the notion that women shouldn’t have a lot of freedom, there are still many rights that they hope to obtain. Saudi women are hoping that the driving ban being lifted is just one of many freedoms they are to acquire. In a news article written by Susannah George called “The Latest: UN Head Welcomes Saudi Move Letting Women Drive”, she reports that, “Youssef, a professor at King Saud University, says women will continue to push for an end to male guardianship laws that remain in place.” Saudi women are under full control of their male guardian, which is a rule they hope to change very soon. Geir Moulson, who wrote “Saudi Women Will Be Allowed to Drive, But Hurdles Remain”, explains the remaining obstacles that the women of Saudi Arabia still face. He writes that women can’t do certain things such as “attend sporting matches” or go to restaurants that do not have different sections for family units all because of the Saudi Arabian government executing their segregation by gender rules. He also notes that by rule of the Saudi Arabian law, women are not allowed to do things such as “marrying or even leaving prison”, traveling abroad, or acquiring a passport without the permission of a male guardian. Now that they are allowed to drive, Saudi women believe that in the near future they will no longer be tied down by male guardianship laws.

By continuing to fight for their rights and gender equality, the women will gain more freedom and become more independent. Being able to drive is the first step of many towards the end of gender prejudice in Saudi Arabia. They remain hopeful that one day the Saudi Arabian government will grant them all the rights they deserve, so they can be treated equally. The Saudi Arabian government's resolution to authorize driving for women helps them to be independent and play a more important role in their society.

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