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## **Vote for Saudi women no guarantee of rights**

Saudi Arabia must take immediate steps to end all discrimination against women in the kingdom, Amnesty International said today following moves to give women the right to vote.

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia announced on Sunday that women will have the right to vote and run in municipal elections, the kingdom's only public poll, from 2015 and be appointed to the Shura Council, a body that advises the monarchy.

However, under Saudi Arabia's repressive laws, a woman is unable to travel, engage in paid work or higher education, or marry without the permission of a male guardian.

"It is a welcome, albeit limited, step along the long road towards gender equality in Saudi Arabia, and a testament to the long struggle of women's rights activists there," said Philip Luther, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"It is, however, much overdue and does not go nearly far enough."

Women are also still unable to legally drive in the kingdom. A high profile right to drive campaign launched by Saudi women in June this year led to dozens of arrests.

The women were all released shortly afterwards, but only after being forced to sign a pledge that they would not drive again. Several are reported to be facing court cases.

"The whole system of women's subordination to men in Saudi Arabia needs to be dismantled," said Philip Luther.

"We can only hope that this announcement on voting will be the first in a long line of reforms that guarantee Saudi women the rights that they have been demanding for so long."

The concept of guardianship of men over women, as applied in Saudi Arabia, severely limits women's rights in their private and public lives. In addition, Saudi Arabian women married to foreign nationals cannot pass on their nationality to their children, unlike the case for Saudi Arabian men in a similar situation.

Domestic violence against women is reported to be rife in the country.

"While moving in the right direction, Saudi Arabia is moving far too slowly. Ultimately, it is no great achievement to be one of the last countries in the world to grant women the vote," said Philip Luther.