

SAUDI NATIONAL DAY

Women's health rights in focus

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Women's rights is a topic that needs to be focused during our National Day. Saudi women may not have claimed all their rights but we should be fair and honest and also proud of what have been achieved so far.

I graduated in 1981 in medicine and was part of the first group of female doctors from the college of medicine at King Abulaziz University. Our generation worked very hard but it was through the community and of course our leaders' support and empowerment of Saudi women that we have achieved what we have.

Female doctors constitute around 40 percent of all doctors. They are in prominent positions and recently one of our female nurses achieved a high position in the Ministry of Health. Many doctors are awarded national and international awards in recognition of their achievements.

Last July I was in Seattle, US, where I gave a talk about women's health rights in the Kingdom at the University of Washington. I started my lecture with a quote from King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques: "Women are citizens and we will never allow anyone to marginalize their effective role in the progress of society."

The basic law of KSA issued in 1412AH, states in Article 8: "The rule of the

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on justice, consultation and equality in accordance with the Islamic Shariah. This text clearly calls for equality among Saudi citizens, whether they be male or female.”

Human Rights Watch in its country summary in January 2011 states that Saudi Arabia continues to treat women as legal minors, allowing male guardians to determine whether a woman may undergo certain medical procedures. This is not true according to Shariah Law and Ministry of Health rules. The adult woman of a sound mind is the one who has the right to take decisions on her health care.

If you look at other health rights women have on this National Day, you will find big steps have been taken and much advancement has been made.

When you look at reproductive health care, one finds that 96 percent of our women receive maternity care and childbirths are attended by skilled personnel. Our maternal mortality, which is an important indicator, has dropped to 14 deaths per 100,000. Not only that, the labor law grants women paid maternity leave as well.

These health rights and others have to be made clear to the public so they know that there have been changes and there are rights and our country is giving us a lot.

We should be proud of being a part of all this progress and celebrate our National Day with pride and happiness, with open hearts and minds and with faith. We have accomplished a lot, more is coming and tomorrow will hold real promise. Have faith and God bless our country. Happy National Day to all of you.

The author is the founder, CEO and Board Member of Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Al-Amoudi Center of Excellence in Breast Cancer.

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