

Wednesday, 10 April 2013

Saudi Arabia registers first female lawyer



Saudi Arabia has registered its first female trainee advocate, paving the way for women to practice as lawyers in the kingdom.

Arwa Talal al-Hejaili told Al Arabiya that she did not receive a license to practice law yet, but explained that there are two lists in the Saudi Ministry of Justice: a list for trainees and another for practicing lawyers. Walid Abulkhair posted on his Twitter account a copy of the justice ministry's certificate of Hejaili's registration. "The (trainee) lawyer should be contracted by a lawyer who has been in service for more than five years... and should train for no less than three years," he said. A trainee lawyer is allowed to practice, he told reporters.

Hejaili added that the trainee is on the list until they meet certain conditions which have been stipulated by the Saudi legal system.

She did stress on the fact that this is the first and most formal step all law graduates take before practicing law.

Hejaili also noted that when the training period comes to an end, the lawyer in question may be able to plead any case without gender discrimination, and the client may then choose the one they see fit.

In October, the ministry said women lawyers would be allowed to plead cases in court starting November 2012. But the promise did not materialize.

Women law graduates launched a campaign in 2011 demanding that they be allowed to plead in court.

The training period may extend up to 3 years according to Saudi Arabia's legal system for those who hold a bachelor's degree. On the other hand it may take up to one year for those possessing a Masters while Ph.D. holders are exempted, they directly receive a license to practice law.

The ministry has confirmed that it will give any female lawyer, who meets the prerequisites, a chance to become a lawyer in training within two days of her request.

This will inevitably give women the right to plead in an unlimited number of cases.

The Ministry of Justice will grant a license to practice law to female lawyers who have presented their papers to the admission committee at the ministry.

The committee includes four members, the Undersecretary of the Justice Ministry, the director of the public Administration of Law at the Ministry, a judge, and a qualified lawyer.

Those four professionals will be the ones who decide whether the lawyer in training is fit to practice and has the skills and qualifications for a license.

The ministry's move would boost the status of women in the ultra-conservative kingdom, where females need the consent of their male guardians in most legal procedures.

Women are also banned from driving and have to cover from head to toe when in public.