## Saudi Arabia Warns Women Not to Join Protest Against Ban on Driving

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## By Yahoo/Reuters

http://news.yahoo.com/saudi-arabia-warns-women-not-join-protest-against-141113384.html;\_ylt=AwrBJSDPKUlUqUIAxWrQtDMD

Saudi Arabia's Interior Ministry on Thursday issued a warning to women not to get behind the wheel in defiance of the kingdom's men-only road rules after a renewed social media campaign to challenge the law by driving in public.

The announcement comes ahead of the anniversary on Oct. 26 of a demonstration last year in which dozens of Saudi women said they had taken to the road in protest at the ban on female drivers, leading to some arrests.

In recent weeks, campaigners have been pushing on social media for women to drive themselves and post pictures or films online, as they did in the run-up to last year's protest.

"The Interior Ministry emphasizes it will firmly apply the laws against anyone who participates (in a protest by female drivers)," the ministry said a statement carried by state media.

Any such attempt by women to drive in public in breach of the law was "an opportunity for predators to undermine social cohesion", the ministry said.

Since the 2011 Arab uprisings and subsequent regional turmoil, Riyadh has taken a zero tolerance approach to all attempts at protest or dissent in the kingdom, including by liberal rights activists, Islamists and members of the Shi'ite Muslim minority.

The conservative Islamic kingdom is the only country in the world to stop women driving, although a growing number of public figures in the country have publicly pushed for the rule to be overturned.

Some leading members of the country's powerful Sunni Muslim clergy have argued against women being allowed to drive, which they say could lead to them mingling with unrelated men, thereby breaching strict gender segregation rules.

In Saudi Arabia, a top Arab ally of the United States, women are legally subject to a male guardian, who must give approval to basic decisions they make in fields including education, employment, marriage, travel plans and even medical treatment.

Under King Abdullah, who has ruled since 2005, the position of women has gradually improved in the face of opposition from conservatives.

He has pushed for women to have more opportunities in education and employment, and has appointed some to the Shoura Council which advises the government on policy.