

## **Commission proposed to protect women and children in Saudi Arabia**

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Saudi Arabia is studying the establishment of a nationwide system under which a supreme commission would be established to protect women and children from violence.

The proposal, prepared by the King Khaled Charitable Society, has been forwarded by the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Council of Ministers, according to Dr. Maha Al-Muneef, president of the National Family Safety Program in the National Guard Hospital.

"This system, if it is established, would have wide legislative powers to make laws and regulations to eradicate and combat violence against women and children," she told Arab News.

"It is now with the committee in the Cabinet. We hope that it is established within the next few months," she added.

Al-Muneef said she was hopeful that the nationwide program would endorse the Family Safety Program which has been operating under orders from Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah since November 2005.

Al-Muneef noted the importance of appointing both men and women from the public and private sectors as members of the commission. "Any civil government commission that studies violence against women and children cannot be a male-only government body," she said.

She also stressed the importance of appointing experienced and qualified people for jobs in the commission. "You cannot appoint someone who does not know anything about violence against women and children and have him head the commission," said Al-Muneef.

Speaking at the Arab Child Health Conference in Riyadh, Al-Muneef said that violence against women and children "was on the rise in the Kingdom."

"Violence against women and children should be fought just like any other problem such as AIDS or cancer," she said, pointing out that as in many Arab countries, coordination between government bodies is a problem. "Our problem is that each of our ministries works on its own."

Dr. Samia Halileh from the Institute of Community and Public Health, Bir Zeit University in Ramallah, Palestine, presented a paper, "Violence and Negligence of Children in Occupied Palestinian Areas."

She said physical abuse heads the list of problems among Palestinian children; it is followed by psychological, general and sexual abuse in that order.

Dr. Pamela Beih from Morocco said child abuse was rampant in the Arab world and blamed social taboos and local traditions.