

## **Kuwaiti panel passes landmark women's rights bill**

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A Kuwaiti parliamentary panel has approved landmark draft legislation that grants a host of benefits to women in the oil-rich Gulf state, the head of the committee said.

MP Saleh Ashour said the bill allows women to seek government housing on a par with men, increases paid leave to 70 days from a current 40 and grants maternity leave for up to two years.

The legislation must be passed by parliament and signed by the emir to become effective. Ashour expected the bill to be debated in the house in March or April.

Under Kuwaiti law, only male citizens who are married can apply for a government house. The new bill gives the same right to Kuwaiti women who are divorced, widowed or married to foreigners.

The bill also obliges the government to pay monthly assistance of 865 dollars to Kuwaiti women who are married, have children but don't have a job.

Kuwaiti women took part in parliamentary elections for the first time in June, one year after they were granted full political rights following a struggle lasting four decades.

Twenty-eight women candidates contested the elections but none of them won.

The 16-member Kuwaiti cabinet includes one woman minister.