

Saudi morality police will not be dissolved

Agence France-Presse - 22 September, 2006

Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz reportedly said there was no question of the morality police, charged with upholding morals in the conservative monarchy, being dissolved.

Asked about calls in Western media for the religious police to be disbanded, Prince Nayef said: "They talk about an organ that promotes the good and prevents the bad. That (its dissolution) has been rejected in the past, it is rejected today, and it will be rejected tomorrow."

The minister made his comments on Wednesday at a meeting of the directors of the morality police from across the kingdom, the official SPA news agency said.

In May, the interior ministry said the morality police would no longer be allowed to interrogate those it arrests over behaviour deemed un-Islamic.

The 4,000-strong force known as Mutawas, many of them men in long beards, commonly go around malls, restaurants and other public spaces to make sure men and women not related by blood do not mix.

They usually intervene if they spot any public display of affection between the sexes or see anyone they deem indecently dressed.

In most parts of the kingdom this means no shorts for men and the abaya, a mandatory black head-to-toe cloak, for women.

The Mutawas also enforce the kingdom's ban on women drivers and the public practice of religions other than Islam.