

تعليم البنات في المملكة العربية السعودية ومبدأ المساواة بين الجنسين

بقلم : عبدالعزيز بن عبدالله بن طالب

Gender Equality and Girls' Education in Saudi Arabia

By Abdulaziz A. Bin-Taleb

pages : 8 written in 2002.

Abstract: (first three paragraphs)

On March 11, 2002, fourteen Saudi girls died and more than fifty others were injured at the 31st Girls Middle School in Mecca as they were trying to escape after a fire broke out. The school is located in a small, old, three-story rental building, which was originally set up to be a residence home. It was overcrowded and lacked proper safety features. About 835 pupils and 55 teachers were inside the school when the tragedy occurred. After the fire, parents and the Saudi press blamed the General Presidency of Girls' Education for its incompetence in failing to deal with the issues of inadequate safety procedures and overcrowding. Parents and intellectuals across the Kingdom have demanded that officials must take full responsibility for the catastrophe.

The tragedy in Mecca's school, which has evoked so much emotion and outrage among the Saudi public, has brought up issues that have been bubbling below the surface for decades. To be sure, March 11, 2002 has entered Saudi history because it opened a season of discussion and debate within Saudi society about gender equality and girls' schooling. In a country where no effective long-term plans are offered and where significant decisions take place only reactively, and after two weeks of focused attention and debate, the General Presidency of Girls' Education has been merged with the Ministry of Education, which was traditionally limited to boys' education only. This came about by a royal order issued on March 24, 2002 by King Fahd bin Abdulaziz.

The recent tragedy in Mecca's school and the groundbreaking historical royal order that followed it inspire me to write about girls' education in my country, Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this essay provides a historical overview of girls' education in Saudi Arabia, and then it analyses the rationale for Saudi's version of segregated schools. It further continues to discuss the cost of segregated education and, finally, it offers a look to the future while considering the educational system of the United States.