

Saudi defends app allowing men to monitor women relatives

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The Saudi government says the app provides services for "all members of the society", but critics say it enables abuse against women and girls by allowing men to track their movements

Saudi Arabia on Saturday defended a mobile app that allows men in the

kingdom to track female relatives after rights groups and a US lawmaker criticised tech giants for offering it.

The Absher app provides services for "all members of the society... including women, the elderly, and people with special needs", the interior ministry said.

The [free app](#) is available on Android and Apple smartphones and allows users to renew passports, visas and eases a variety of other electronic services.

But critics have said the app enables abuse against women and girls by allowing men to track their movements.

Apple CEO Tim Cook told US National Public Radio earlier this week he had not heard of the app, but would "take a look at it".

US Senator Ron Wyden has called on both Apple and Google to remove the app, arguing on Twitter that it promotes "abusive practises against women".

Under Saudi law, women must have consent from a husband or immediate male relative to renew passports or leave the country.

The ministry criticised what it called a "systematic campaign aimed at questioning the purpose of the services".

It rejected what it described as "attempts to politicise" the tool.

This comes as Saudi Arabia faces intense scrutiny over the shocking murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year, which has renewed criticism of the kingdom's rights record.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has garnered international attention with his rapid rise to power and promise of social and economic reforms.

But the kingdom has detained a number of human rights and women campaigners, some of them accused of undermining national security, with scant public information about their whereabouts or the legal status of their cases.

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