Hamas bans women from using motorcycles

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Hamas’s recent decision to ban women from using motorcycles has sparked controversy in Gazan society.

Opponents of the move say it violates the basic rights of poor and middle-class Gazans, who depend on motorbikes for transport.

On Monday, Hamas, which has ruled the tiny coastal strip for the past decade, announced the ban on women riding or being carried on motorcycles.

The Hamas Interior Ministry in Gaza says law enforcement authorities will force women on motorbikes to dismount, and impose penalties against them. If the woman is a pillion rider, the driver will also be held responsible.

The ministry said: “It is time for Gazan society to put an end to the phenomenon of women using motorcycles. This does not suit our society socially or morally. Nor does it fit with Muslim rules and regulations, as women’s use of motorcycles can easily disclose their sensitive parts.”

The ban was motivated by Sunday’s death of motorbike passenger Suhair Al Louh, 43, from Deir Al Balah in Gaza.

Al Louh and her son were riding pillion behind her husband on the motorcycle when she died in an accident. Her husband and son were hospitalized with moderate injuries.

The ministry said motorcycles had been the main cause of at least half the road accidents in the strip in the past three years. According to the ministry, seven motorbike-related fatalities occurred in the strip in the first half of 2017, and dozens suffered serious injuries in other incidents.

Ebrahim Al Madhoun, a Gazan thinker and writer, said on his Facebook account that he unconditionally supported women’s use of motorcycles, and condemned the ban as a serious violation of the freedom of the entire society.

He said the ban was unnecessary because when Gazan women rode motorcycles they dressed appropriately in decent clothes.

He added that women’s use of motorcycles had been part of Palestinian — and particularly Gazan — culture for many years. The ban was baseless, especially when the authorities had not provided residents with alternative transport options.

Myaser Taha, a Gazan activist, said it was wrong to blame women for motorbike accidents, and pointed towards incidents of young reckless riders performing stunts on Gazan streets.

Hamas violently took over the Gaza Strip in 2007 following a brief civil war with the Fatah movement, which was ousted from Gaza.

Since then, Israel has imposed a strict air, maritime and land siege on Gaza and waged three wars on the coastal strip.

This has led to a serious fuel shortage that has forced many Gazans to opt for cheap transport such as motorcycles.