

Saudi Arabia plans to send female astronaut to space in 2023

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Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan bin Salman talks at the Global Aerospace Summit in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates about his 1985 experience as the first Arab and Muslim to travel to space aboard NASA's Discovery shuttle, March 8, 2016. Saudi Arabia announced Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022, plans to launch a training program with the goal of sending its own astronauts, including a woman, into space next year. The kingdom is actively promoting science and technology as part of its wide-ranging Vision 2030 plan to overhaul its economy and reduce its dependency on oil. Credit: AP Photo/Aya Batrawy, File

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The kingdom is actively promoting science and technology as part of its wide-ranging Vision 2030 plan to overhaul its economy and reduce its dependency on oil.

The plan, championed by Saudi Arabia's powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, also calls for greater integration of women into the workforce of the conservative Muslim country. Saudi Arabia lifted a long-standing ban on women driving in 2018.

"The Saudi Astronaut Program, which is an integral part of the Kingdom's ambitious Vision 2030, will send Saudi astronauts into [space](#) to help better serve humanity," the Saudi Space Commission said in a statement.

"One of the astronauts will be a Saudi woman, whose mission to space will represent a historical first for the Kingdom."

The first Arab or Muslim to travel to space was Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan bin Salman, a half-brother of the crown prince and an air force pilot who was part of the seven-member crew of NASA's Discovery mission in 1985. He later served as head of the Saudi Space Commission from 2018 until last year, when he was appointed an adviser to King Salman.

The neighboring United Arab Emirates has the Arab world's leading [space program](#), having launched a probe into Mars' orbit in February 2021. The UAE [plans to launch its first lunar rover in November](#). If the

moon mission succeeds, the UAE and Japan, which is providing the lander, would join the ranks of only the U.S., Russia and China as nations that have put a spacecraft on the lunar surface.

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