The value of these two official decrees becomes clearer when we know that both measures faced strong opposition from some factions of Saudi society. The controversial nature of all issues related to women in Saudi Arabia would have made both decisions impossible to reach without the long discussions that took place between opponents and supporters, in which support for women’s rights appeared strong enough. This is what one can call an achievement of the Arab women’s movement. The achievement lies in the fact that the movement managed, however indirectly, to set up an agenda of feminist reforms that has permeated the very different societies of the Arab world at different periods of their modern history. Challenging women’s literacy from within the blacked-out value system of Islam was one of the main achievements, and democracy, especially in view of the fact that women in some parts of the Arab World were prevented from learning because of a certain interpretation of Islam. The same is true in relation to women’s right to employment.

The failure of the Arab women’s movement can be identified as its inability to extend this kind of success to other areas of women’s life without being trapped in the modern image of western women. Another point of criticism is its failure to resolve the historical conflict between men and women by building an equality of gender.

2. We have an Arabic saying, "It is a word of justice that is used for injustice". This saying was first used by the Prophet (peace be upon him) to mean that sometimes a word of truth is misused to lead to a false conclusion. It seems to me that the idea of ‘illuminating’ (may Allah’s peace be upon him) to mean that sometimes a word of truth is misused to lead to a false conclusion is very applicable to those who criticize the Arab women’s movement not for the sake of giving an opinion but only as a means of condemning the movement itself. The aim behind labeling the women’s movement as a blind follower of Western feminism is not one of objective criticism of ideas and of certain ideals. It seems to me that what is really at stake here is the notion that women’s movement should not take time to respond to such accusations, or allow them to divert it from its goal of empowering women. The practical response is to devote itself to its goal by rallying women from all parts of the Arab world - in urban and rural areas, among women of different educational orientations, and from different ethnic, cultural and economic backgrounds. This cannot be done unless the movement tries faithfully to identify itself with the urgent issues and real needs of women in specific Arab environments.

Despite the overall trend towards global- ization, it has to be realized that women’s issues are not identical in every part of the world. It is true that there are common elements in the discourse of the Islamic world that should be a sense of solidarity among women internationally, but it is also true that problems cannot be imported or exported and solutions cannot be imposed.

In addition to this, another practical response is to take the issue of democracy seriously rather than using it as a slogan, which means that the Arab women’s movement should demonstrate themselves from within. This needs taking into consideration the views and the criticisms of both men and women. The women’s movements should have the courage to initiate self-criticism.

Finally, it is very urgent that the whole Arab women’s movement should make a serious attempt to crystallize its thoughts and practices in the light of what the legal system of Islam says about women. It is a common mistake and a retreat into tradition. This view is not to disparage their opinions, but to consider the views and the criticisms of both men and women. The women’s movements should have the courage to initiate self-criticism.
The impact of most UN declarations in relation to women has been very limited, and so far most of them are going nowhere beyond propaganda.

6. Yes, indeed. In fact, globalization must not exclusively mean Americanization or Westernization. Globalization in the positive sense of the word means the collapse of the Berlin wall in all directions of the globe. This means an equal representation of different dimensions of the seven continents. In the region, it is time that the movement starts to realize the importance of its own independence. However this is not achieved if it tries to mimic the voices of other cultures, whether it is the echoes of a dominant discourse of a ruling class, or political parties. It is also the only way to put an end to attempts to use the ‘woman question’ as a card in political maneuvering, as happened in Algeria and elsewhere in the so-called Third World during the second half of the last century. I think one of the main things to be done at this stage is to establish a mutual trust by strengthening solidarity among women of different linguistic, cultural and/or social backgrounds. This in my opinion should be done within the bound of unity of the Arab world.

8. I would like movement women to leave their offices and conference rooms and walk barefoot in alleys ...