

THE SAWAN

SAWA-Australia
SUPPORT ASSOCIATION FOR THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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SAWA OBJECTIVES

- * Raise funds for Afghan women and children;
- * Increase community awareness of the forgotten needs of Afghan women;
- * Encourage women, men and young people to join SAWA-Australia;
- * Set up SAWA/RAWA support groups throughout Australia.

SAWA-Australia Committee

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Secretary:: Barbara Kameniar
Treasurer: Heidi Leffanue
Committee: Ruth Redfern, Barbara James,
Grace McCaughey, Colin Banks

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PLEASE PASS SAWAN ON TO FRIENDS/FAMILY

FROM THE CONVENER

The last few months saw some significant changes to SAWA. The committee has moved from Castlemaine to Adelaide, and SAWA is in the process of becoming incorporated in South Australia.

The Castlemaine group has been the driving force during SAWA's very successful first year. SAWA raised public awareness for the plight of Afghani Women and raised thousands of dollars in support of RAWA, gained new members and extended its activities to several cities.

Towards the end of 2004 it became apparent that SAWA can work more efficiently if its committee is based in a capital city. At the annual general meeting in February the decision was made to elect a new committee from members of the Adelaide group.

On behalf of all SAWA members I express my sincere appreciation for the work of the outgoing committee and congratulate it for making SAWA a strong and successful organization in such a short time span. Details of the new committee can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. Our Castlemaine members will continue to work as a fundraising group.

SAWA received support from many sides during the relocation process. The University of South Australia gave us an excellent venue for the public meeting required for incorporation in South Australia, and I wish to express SAWA's appreciation to Vice-Chancellor Prof. Denise Bradley for her generous assistance. The Australia Post workers in Castlemaine gave their time and work to help us transfer the PO Box to Adelaide. (Note the new address!) It all shows that Australians are prepared to help Afghani women wherever they have an opportunity, and it tells us that SAWA can achieve even more in the year ahead.

What are the tasks for SAWA now? The situation in Afghanistan is as precarious as ever. It is true that the new cabinet includes three women among its nearly 30 members, and a woman is to become governor for the Hazari-dominated Bamiyan province (for details see the news pages of our web site, where you can add your own observations and comments). Hazari women have traditionally had relatively more freedom than other Afghani women, who are still locked up in their houses in most rural areas. It is still a long way until women will be equal before the law and have the same human rights as men.

For the first time since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 an Afghani woman was again stoned to death after a court in Badakhshan

province convicted her of adultery (The Australian, 25 April).

To achieve SAWA's objectives the new committee will make it one of its aims to secure tax deductibility status for SAWA. Establishing new fundraising groups in major cities is also high on the list of tasks. Later this year Mariam Ravi, known to many of us from an earlier fundraising tour, will visit New Zealand and Australia again as a RAWA ambassador, and SAWA will make sure that she can visit as many places around Australia as possible to raise funds for RAWA's hospitals, schools and other projects. I look forward to working with all SAWA members to achieve these aims.

Matthias Tomczak

THANKYOU

SAWA's committee extends its warm thanks to UniSA, in particular Vice Chancellor Professor Denise Bradley and Jenny Coulls for providing the venue for our first AGM in South Australia. We are most grateful and thank you for your generous support.

ONE WOMAN'S PILGRIMAGE - LONG WALK FOR RAWA

Having just lost my job after 10 years at the Nine Network's Business Sunday program (journalist/producer) in Sydney, Australia, and being on the wrong side of YOUTH (i.e. no spring chicken) I have decided to do something useful for both me and others. For me it's a chance to clear my mind and get fit and for others it's an opportunity to benefit from any funds raised by pledging so much a kilometer for my solitary and self-funded walk.

My Long Walk RAWA is the 800 kilometer Pilgrims' Walk from the Pyrenees in France, right across the top of Spain to Santiago de Compostela. If you walk 25 kilometers every day for 32 days – you can cover the 800ks in just over one month.

As subscribers to SAWA (www.sawa-australia.org) you will know what RAWA is all about. It's the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan – or as the website <http://www.rawa.org> says: RAWA is the oldest political/social organization of Afghan women struggling for peace, freedom, democracy and women's rights in fundamentalism-blighted Afghanistan since 1977.

So far I have pledged of more than \$500 but this has come mainly from business and former work colleagues. The money will not be collected until I have completed my walk and provided proof via a Pilgrims' record and a certificate from the Spanish authorities in Santiago de Compostela. The Pilgrims' record is a book that is stamped at each village along the way.

For those that would like to make a pledge it would be \$8 at one cent a kilometer, \$80 at 10c a kilometer, or any variations in between and beyond. So you don't have to be Rockefeller to help someone in need?

If you are interested in joining the growing list of supporters, please email me at vsmls@tpg.com.au

Copious records are being kept and full disclosure will be made of the total amount raised and dispersed. Must get back to my training as I leave in a couple of weeks!

Vickie Smiles

RAWA TOUR AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND 2005

RAWA has been invited to attend New Zealand's national community development conference, September 21-23 this year, as a keynote speaker and the good news is that a RAWA member will attend the conference along with other RAWA support events organised around the conference in New Zealand.

As we can't let the opportunity of having a RAWA member so close to Australia go by, we are planning an Australian tour to follow the New Zealand programme, 'adding on' several weeks of events around the country.

To date, there have been three Australian RAWA visits.

Many now know RAWA and will be eager to have a personal RAWA update and reconnection but there are still many others who would also be interested to learn of RAWA's work, so we hope to reach far and wide with this coming tour. The emphasis will be twofold: providing current information of Afghan women and RAWA's work as well as, most importantly, fundraising for RAWA. News from RAWA indicates that funds for projects are dwindling but are badly needed, so we hope to better the \$32,000 given to RAWA following the 2004 tour. Our Aussie dollars can make such a big difference to so many and having an inspirational RAWA speaker at an event has a great impact. RAWA also gains much emotional energy meeting supporters on the other side of the globe so we hope we can give the RAWA batteries a big charge.

The invitation is open to all SAWA members and all supporters of RAWA to be part of the Australia tour which will run over the latter part of September and early October. All are invited to organise a local event that can be part of the tour calendar, to make this tour the biggest and best ever.

If you are interested in running an event, please contact Onnie Wilson mok@connexus.net.au the tour co-ordinator so your event can be scheduled.

FUNDRAISING IN VICTORIA

FIRBANK GRAMMAR SCHOOL

On International Women's Day, March 8th, the girls from Firbank Grammar school in Melbourne held a special event. The school principal, Dr Ann Sarros, wanted her girls to not only celebrate the lives of women and girls at Firbank on IWD but to think beyond the local to other women and girls less fortunate. Onnie Wilson was invited to address the girls at a school assembly, to give information of women's and girls' lives in Afghanistan as well as to inform all of RAWA's inspirational and courageous work. The girls were allowed to come to school out of uniform, in purple green or white clothes and were fined for the privilege; the money raised going to RAWA..

The girls learned much about RAWA and are keen to meet with the RAWA member who will be in Melbourne in later September. A fantastic sum of \$800 was raised on the day

and the girls are hoping to continue their RAWA fundraising support. A great effort!
Perhaps we can put out a challenge to other schools to get behind RAWA, too.
Onnie Wilson

FUNDRAISING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Helen and Nicholas Pike opened their garden for the Open Garden Scheme in April with all refreshment donations going to SAWA. Blows Brothers nursery at Stirling also donated a percentage of plant sales. \$438.55 was raised over the two days. Thank you to the Pikes and the Blows.

AFGHANI WOMAN STONED TO DEATH

A woman has been stoned to death in Afghanistan, reportedly for committing adultery. The killing is said to have taken place in the Urgu district of north-eastern Badakhshan province. A local Afghan government official confirmed the death, and said the government would investigate the case.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission said the woman had been sentenced to death by a decree from the local religious scholar. Under Afghan law, cases such as this should go through the local courts. A reporter for the BBC Pashto service in Afghanistan said the woman's husband recently returned from Iran after five years away. The wife asked for a separation on the grounds that her husband could not support her. However, he said she was having improper relations with another man. It is not known if the couple had any children.

Correspondents say this is the second time a woman has been stoned to death since the ousting of the Taliban in 2001. Both events happened in the same area. During the Taliban's rule, women were regularly stoned to death for adultery.

BBC News 23Apr 2005

CANADIAN SUPPORT FOR AFGHAN WOMEN

From Afghanistan Today: Canadians as Global Citizens

In the last three and half years remarkable progress has been made in Afghanistan. The girl has returned to school. Her mother is able to see a doctor. But most women still have little access to adequate healthcare. Children are without book and teachers. Many women and children fear for their safety. In Afghanistan today, there is hope for the future thanks to the help of Canadians like you. HOWEVER, IF WE FORGET AFGHANISTAN, THIS HOPE COULD BE LOST. Help us ensure the rights of Afghan women and girls are as real and lasting of our own mothers, daughters and sisters. Join us! Read more about how you can host a [Breaking Bread for Afghan Women](#) pot luck dinner with your friends and family. Donations from your guests will contribute to the cost of a teacher's salary for one year in Afghanistan.

As at March 2005, the Breaking Bread fundraising project had raised CDN \$378,000 providing 93 grants for teachers in Afghanistan schools.
website: www.w4wafghan.ca

RAWA STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY – extract

Women's emancipation can only be achieved by the restoration of democracy based on secularism!

Recently, the "Independent Commission of Human Rights" released a report that contained documents of war crimes and breaches of human rights from the April 27 coup till the collapse of the Taliban. If this report were objective and unbiased and true to the heart-rending cry of our righteous people, then all the criminals should have been disclosed by their victims. But not one criminal's name is unveiled in this expedient and incomplete report. We strongly believe that if the criminals are not persecuted and punished, and if their names are not listed as being prohibited from leaving the country, the release of such reports only means the deceiving and throwing of dust into the eyes of the people. The majority of Afghan people, who have suffered the most pathetic pain during the past 25 years, demand nothing but fair trial and punishment of all leaders and heads of Khaliqi, Parchami, Jehadi and Taliban bandits.

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan has repeatedly asserted that the leaders of Khalq and Parcham, Northern Alliance and Taliban must be summoned like other war criminals to the International Court to answer for their heinous crimes and for the looting of national assets which they have done. They should never be allowed to sit down on any ministry or embassy seats in Afghanistan.

While we extend congratulations on the occasion of International Women's Day to all the oppressed and freedom-loving women of Afghanistan and other countries, we are of strong belief that the brightest day for all men and women in our misery-stricken country would be the day of celebrating democracy based on secularism, in which the influence of fundamentalists to misuse religion is completely cut off. The celebration of International Women's Day would take on its full meaning in such circumstances. We shake hands with all groups and people who stand firmly with their "flesh and blood" in battle against the fundamentalist bandits of all brands and against their bosses and who do not give in to fear, hesitation and compromise in working toward that day and for the reconstruction of their beloved nation.

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) March 10, 2005, Kabul

For full text: <http://www.rawa.org/mar8-05.htm>

IMPORTANT DATES 2005

May 10: Public Meeting Adelaide

May: Castlemaine Melanque Concert

October: Mariam Rawi visit

September: Afghan Parliamentary elections?

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONTINUES

KABUL, 13 Apr 2005 (IRIN) - The story of Zaynab, (name adopted to conceal her identity) an 18-year-old mother of five who has taken refuge in a new women’s shelter in the capital Kabul, illustrates how routinely women continue to suffer rights violations in conservative, patriarchal Afghanistan.

She fled her home after refusing to put up with any more beatings from her husband, less than three weeks after giving birth to her youngest son.

“My father forcibly married me to an old man when I was 11 and my husband treated me like a slave over the last seven years,” she said.

But Zaynab and the 20 other women she shares the facility with are the lucky few out of millions of destitute Afghan women. The small group have managed to find sanctuary from widespread physical violence, forced marriage, honour killings and other violations in ultra-conservative rural Afghanistan.

Zaynab’s leg was broken when her husband threw her out of a window. The torment ended when she managed to escape from the hospital where she was being treated, leaving her children behind. “This is the new pain I must bear, living without my family, but I had no other option. I knew he would never change.”

Throughout the whole country, there are just four shelters, all in the capital, that are home to more than 100 women and girls. Supported by different agencies and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA), the confidential centres are designed to give protection, accommodation, food, training and healthcare to women who are escaping violence in the home or are seeking legal support due to family feuds.

”Often they are introduced to MoWA by the office of the attorney general or supreme court, while sometimes they come directly to our ministry,” Shakila Afzalyar, a legal officer at the ministry, told IRIN.

A girl at the shelter, Paikai, just 12 years old, said she was compelled to marry the brother of her fiancé, who died before marrying her.

“They paid some money and gave a car to my father, but I did not like the man and escaped,” she said. She had heard from a local radio station that there was a women’s affairs ministry in the capital, which heard the complaints of women, “that idea helped me make the final decision.”

“Women are used as a means for settling disputes between two families or tribes,” she said, adding that she did not want to return to her village, where they treated women “like animals”.

“I have nowhere to return to, I like it here, because there is a literacy course and at least I don’t see and hear those arrogant men,” she sighed.

But space at the specialised shelters is limited. Many of the women who cannot find a place in the four secure hostels in Kabul end up in prison. More than 30 women are currently in jail in the capital, many simply because they have nowhere else to go, women’s rights activists say. “But I think even being in prison is safer than bearing the misery and punishments of violent men at home, at least in prison... one day you leave,” Zaynab said.

www.irinnews.org

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HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can contribute enormously to promoting SAWA:

- Pass this newsletter to a friend/neighbour/relative
- Print and/or copy the SAWA leaflet and this newsletter and give to friends, work colleagues, relatives and organisations. Forward it to your address list or through your organisations.
- Encourage others to join SAWA and to check out the award-winning web page:

www.sawa-australia.org

- Invite a few friends and neighbours or members of a group you belong to, over for morning tea/supper.
- Ask your organisations/employers to make a donation
- Run a fundraiser (some ideas on previous page) or join SAWA as an organisation member
- Make a bequest in your will to Sawa-Australia

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