



# THE SAWAN

## SAWA-Australia

SUPPORT ASSOCIATION FOR THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN

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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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### FROM THE CONVENER

*October has been an exciting month for SAWA, with opportunities to renew old contacts and establish new ones. Amena's visit inspired all of us and generated an excellent response.*

*October was also a month to observe in Afghanistan. As the results of the parliamentary elections were announced it became clear that the old notorious warlords of the Northern Alliance will all take their seats, and some of the seats reserved for women will go to their wives and relations.*

*But Malalai Joya, the woman who denounced the warlords in the Loya Jirga of December 2003, was elected by more votes than there were women on the electoral roll. SAWA's web site now has a link to her support committee. It provides a rare insight into women in Afghan politics under warlord democracy and is well worth a visit: "This sister did impertinence and was out of the frame of humanity. She is a child ... impertinence... infidel" – all this and more from the members of the Loya Jirga.*

*Given the situation in Afghanistan, RAWA's work will remain as urgent as ever. We discussed SAWA's plans for 2006 with Amena and were told that RAWA will give SAWA the task to support of RAWA's year 1 – 12 school in Peshawar. Beginning in the next year SAWA will have direct contact with teachers and students of the school, which will give us an opportunity to be informed about the exact needs of the school and organize our work accordingly.*

*In return SAWA will pledge a minimum annual support of \$30,000 and monitor progress towards its target over the year. Given the fund-raising result of Amena's visit we are confident that such a target can be reached.*

*We all look forward to inspiring letters from RAWA's teachers and students. In the meantime we should review our own commitment. The end of the year is approaching, and memberships will soon be up for renewal. The SAWA web site now offers automatic membership renewals. It helps SAWA greatly if the treasurer does not have to remind members of paying their membership fees. So please go to our web site and make your membership payment automatic, or better still*

*(as it saves SAWA expenses) go to your bank and organize regular direct bank transfer.*

*While you are renewing your membership consider the needs of RAWA's school in Peshawar. \$75 per month pays the salary of one teacher. It should be possible that Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and other locations each support one teacher's salary by making automatic regular payments into the SAWA account. So talk to your friends and organize a regular monthly payment for one teacher's salary.*

*Remember: SAWA works entirely through volunteers; every dollar raised goes to RAWA. Our only overheads are the fees for our web site and postage for our newsletter (even the printing is donated), a total of some \$350 per year or about 1% of our current fundraising effort. If anyone knows a charity that can do better than that I would like to hear from them.*

*Matthias Tomczak*

**Article withdrawn.**

The article in this space has been withdrawn from publication.

**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:**

**Convener:** Matthias Tomczak **Secretary:** Barbara Kameniar **Treasurer:** Heidi Leffanue  
**Committee:** Ruth Redfern, Barbara James, Grace McCaughey **Web Page Admin:** Ro Bancroft **Newsletter Editor:** Louise Pyman  
**Public Officer:** Colin Banks **Auditor:** Barry Hocking

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**Bendigo Bank Account Number: 120800610 Adelaide Branch BSB: 633-000**

The references used in the article:

- (1) *Women in Afghanistan: a human rights catastrophe*, Amnesty International, London, 1995. AI Index: ASA 11/03/95.  
<http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/afgan/afg2.htm>
- (2) Asia Times online 8 October 2003  
[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/EJ08Ag03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/EJ08Ag03.html)  
Original US State Department's report at  
[http://www.state.gov/www/global/human\\_rights/hrp\\_reports\\_mainhp.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/hrp_reports_mainhp.html)
- (3) see the entry for 6 July 2005 at <http://www.sawa-australia.org/news/>
- (4) see the Oxford Research Group,  
<http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/nuclear/terrorism/PressSeminar131101.htm>
- (5) see the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa - New Zealand,  
<http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/3520.0.html>
- (6) see the website of the embassy of Afghanistan,  
[http://www.afghanembassy.net/massoud\\_remembered.html](http://www.afghanembassy.net/massoud_remembered.html)

The article in this space related to the Civil War of 1992 – 1996. It has been withdrawn from publication due to a legal argument with an Afghan politician of the period.

While SAWA maintains that its article was accurate, it does not want to spend its funds on legal proceedings and therefore decided to withdraw the article.

The background to the controversy can be judged from the article “**Fundamentalist in the Guise of Academician**” published on the RAWA website <http://www.rawa.org/>

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## RAWA AUSTRALIAN TOUR

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What a great month October turned out to be: RAWA's Amena Shams was in Australia, speaking at many forums across the country. For all those who were fortunate enough to attend one of Amena's many events, it was a great opportunity to reconnect directly with RAWA, to be inspired by news of RAWA's ongoing work and to receive accurate, current information of the situation for Afghan women. This 2005 tour, events were organised in Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney, Lismore and Brisbane by a wide range of organisations including the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the Boite, the International Women's Development Agency, Immigrant Women's Support Service, Melbourne University, Flinders University, Amnesty International, the Australian Peace Committee, Darebin City Council, several private and government schools as well as many RAWA supporter groups and individuals. Many were eager to support RAWA and Amena was able to take back over \$15,000 that was raised for RAWA's programmes: approximately the cost of a RAWA orphanage for 6 months. Like her RAWA colleagues who have visited us in the past, Amena was a great ambassador for RAWA, an unparalleled

Afghan male supporters that is both unique and inspirational in its political and community work. Hearing Amena, we were reminded that the extreme suffering, insecurity, oppression and violence experienced by Afghan women continues but that under the burqa are great women of strength, wisdom, and outstanding capacity who have the dedication, courage and abilities to bring about a new future for all Afghans. For those who were privileged to have spent time with Amena, it was a time to recharge our feminist batteries, renew links with our RAWA sisters and have the opportunity to have RAWA advise our future support directions.

There were many memorable moments and events of the tour but one event that stands out was Amena's visit to Mt Waverley Secondary College in Melbourne. During the year, year 7 students studied the novel Parvana, the story of an Afghan girl under the Taliban and were so moved by the plight of Parvana that they used the internet to locate Afghan girls and found RAWA. All 180 students emailed RAWA separately and in true RAWA spirit, all the emails were answered. Their teacher jumped at the opportunity to meet Amena and for 90 minutes the students sat, glued, on the edge of their seats as they listened to and questioned Amena. Time ran out before the questions and Amena was clearly moved by the students' interest and concern, particularly that of one small but extremely thoughtful girl who read Amena her most moving poem: a response to Parvana's plight.

A big thank you goes to all those who put so much time and energy into organising such a successful series of events and to all those who supported the tour. Amena has taken back to RAWA many stories of Australian support that are keenly sought by RAWA members and funds raised will go a long way to continuing RAWA's vital work.

For anyone who missed hearing Amena, do not despair, a copy of her public presentation at the Darebin City Council is available from Onnie ([mok@connexus.net.au](mailto:mok@connexus.net.au)) for a RAWA donation of \$20.

**Onnie Wilson**

## **Women in Afghanistan; Expectations and Challenges**

### **Public Forum, Coglein St Community Centre 20.10.05**

Amena Shams, member of the RAWA international speaking committee and orphanage director in Pakistan, spoke to a packed Centre about RAWA and the situation that exists in Afghanistan for women today.

She gave a very personal perspective beginning with her feelings of alarm that while in New Zealand, it had come to her attention that Najibullah Lafraie, former Afghan foreign minister with links to the Northern Alliance, has a teaching post at a university in New Zealand.

Amena said that there were many such cases of fundamentalists from the former regime being sheltered in countries throughout the world.

Amena also spoke of a Human Rights Watch report of July 2005\* that documents that there are many criminals in the

Karzai government who have never been brought to justice. Even though in an 'anti-drug' post, Daoud himself, Amena said, is involved in the opium mafia. As she said, 'there is an Afghan saying; they have assigned rabbits to take care of carrots'.

When asked to comment on the recent elections in Afghanistan Amena said that there were two candidates who were real friends to democracy, one a woman, Malalai Joya\*\*.

Unfortunately however there were many women who were pro-fundamentalist and warlords who won their seats through these women.

Amena also showed a slide show about the fine work of RAWA and the courage of the women who constantly put their lives at risk.

There were many questions from the audience who generously gave \$735 in donations on the night. This money will go to support a high school in Peshawar run by RAWA. Many expressed their interest in becoming members of SAWA.

Many thanks to all involved; Amnesty International Australia [SA/NT], Australian Peace Committee [APC] and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom [WILPF]; a great success!

\* The full report "Blood-stained hands: Afghanistan's legacy of impunity" can be accessed from the News page of the SAWA website.

\*\* You can read more about Malalai Joya on the News page "The women of Afghanistan find a leader" at the SAWA website.

**Barbara James**

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### **From Lismore**

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"I think the overall sentiment was that Amena presented a grim picture of the situation for women and children living in Afghanistan. From the shadows, we could see the glimmer of light being shone by RAWA as the human spirit prevails and perseveres in the most difficult of circumstances. Amena, although pregnant and tired, gave a moving presentation and we were able to raise \$1000 to send back with her to Afghanistan".

**Ruth Rosenhek**

"Thanks for organizing the event. I had flown back from Northern Italy a day before the RAWA meeting. The contrast between Amena's struggle and those of her people and the comfort, wealth and health of Italian citizens was stark. I wonder when we will abolish the artificial borders around what we call 'nations' and realise we all share one small planet".

Greta Bird attended the Lismore meeting.

## Women's Rights Magazine Editor Arrested in Afghanistan

October 5, 2005 Feminist Daily News Wire

The editor of an Afghan women's rights monthly magazine was arrested on Saturday in Kabul. Ali Mohaqiq Nasab, the male editor of Haqooq-i-zan, which means Women's Rights, was accused of publishing articles that went against Islamic teachings.

One of the articles that drew the ire of the conservative Supreme Court raised questions about execution and other severe punishments for adultery, thievery, and murder under Sharia law, reports Reuters. Nasab was arrested at the urging of Mohaiuddin Baluch, who serves as a religious advisor to President Hamid Karzai, according to the Associated Press.

"This is of grave concern," said Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority Foundation. "The United States is telling the world that the US is supporting women's rights and democracy in Afghanistan. Freedom of speech is fundamental to women's rights and democracy."

"We are disturbed by this arrest, which reflects a recent pattern of deteriorating press freedom conditions in Afghanistan," said Ann Cooper, Executive Director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York-based non-profit organization that promotes freedom of the press. "We call for the immediate release of Ali Mohaqiq Nasab. Journalists should not be jailed because of their work," Cooper said in a statement issued Monday.

## Thank you

Thank you to Amena for her time and commitment during the RAWA Australian tour.

SAWA extends thanks to all of the teachers and students who supported the RAWA tour. Special thanks goes to the years 5, 6 & 7 of Eden Hills Primary School and to year 8 of Hallett Cove High School for their support of Amena's visit and to the staff and students of Eden Hills for allowing SAWA the use of their paintings. This tour presented Amena with her first opportunity to speak with school students; she was inspired by the interest and questions of all of the students.

Thank you to all people who were involved with the many events held during the tour.

## New SAWA bank account

SAWA now has a bank account registered under its own name. The old bank account, which was registered under the names of members of the previous committee, will be kept operational for another 12 months; but could all members who make payments through direct bank transfer please change to the new bank account.

## 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](http://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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## JOIN SAWA HERE:

Name:.....

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Address:.....

Post Code..... Phone:( ).....

Email: .....

I support the objectives of **SAWA**

Signed:.....Date:.....

(circle as appropriate):

Organisations: \$100.00

Individual \$20.00

Concession \$10.00

Student \$5.00

School \$10.00

Donation \$.....

**TOTAL** \$.....

(Pay by cheque, via Internet or direct deposit through your bank)