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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE CONVENER

Afghanistan is coming back into the news. The Taliban are on the rise again, the USA are bringing more troops back into the country. Military conflict always gets good news coverage.

But the newspaper reports and television images give a distorted picture. The resurgence of the Taliban is of great concern, but it should not lead to the impression that without the Taliban threat women's rights are secured in Afghanistan. Forced marriages, selling of girls to settle debts, domestic violence against women are still a daily occurrence in most provinces, where women are still not allowed to leave home or talk to men outside their family. Every 30 minutes an Afghan woman dies during pregnancy, in childbirth, or from other gynaecological problems.

One of the tasks SAWA is facing is the need to explain again and again that the Karzai government has not changed the situation of women outside Kabul at all and that RAWA's work is as important as ever. Thousands of Afghan families still live in refugee camps, and families who want to give their daughters an education free of fundamentalist religious indoctrination send their children to RAWA schools in Pakistan. These schools require support, but the stream of donations is in danger of running dry if the public gets the impression that the only problem of Afghanistan are the Taliban.

In the face of this, SAWA made the decision to become the sponsor of Nasima Shabeed High School for girls in Khewa refugee camp. RAWA member Amena, who visited Australia in October last year, was a student of Nasima Shabeed High School, and everyone who met her during her speaking tour could experience the high standard of education of the school and see why Afghan parents are keen to have their daughters admitted to it.

SAWA's sponsorship commitment means that we are now responsible for the salaries of 25 teachers and 3 support staff at the school. We have been able to honour that commitment so far, thanks to generous

donations received particularly over the Christmas period. But the number of supporters who send regular donations through automatic bank transfer or credit card payment is still quite low. A secure regular funding base would give a guarantee of long term salary payment for staff at the school. I sincerely ask you to consider becoming a regular donor. You can arrange regular donation transfer to the SAWA bank account with your bank or subscribe to monthly, quarterly or annual donations, however small, through the SAWA web site.

SAWA membership will remain at \$20 annually. But we have to realise that additional income is needed to cover 28 salaries. Teachers at Nasima Shabeed High School earn \$58 per month. If everyone of us makes a small but regular contribution I am confident that SAWA will be able to guarantee their salaries.

The United Nations recommend that governments allocate 0.7% of the national income to overseas aid. Few governments have reached that target, and I do not suggest that we should all give 0.7% of our annual income to overseas aid. (For the average metropolitan wage of \$40,000 that would amount to \$280 per year.) But maybe we should try and at least match our own government, which spends a measly 0.26% (equivalent to \$104 per year for the average metropolitan wage) on foreign aid.

We all have many commitments in life. SAWA is probably not the only worthy cause that receives your support. How we set our priorities is everyone's personal decision. I close with one thought for consideration: According to a recent report in the Australian, nearly half (46%) of Australia's government aid is spent on Australian "consultants" who earn up to \$50,000 per month. SAWA does not employ consultants. SAWA operates entirely through volunteers. Every cent of your donation goes to Nasima Shabeed High School.

Matthias Tomczak

SAWA Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting will be held in Adelaide on 2 March 2006. SAWA members receive an invitation and proxy form with this newsletter. If you are a financial member and did not receive the invitation and form please email info@sawa-australia.org or write to the SAWA PO box address.

SAWA-Australia P.O. Box 90, Flinders University PO, Bedford Park SA 5042

www.sawa-australia.org

info@sawa-australia.org

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

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.

Convener: Matthias Tomczak

Secretary: Barbara Kameniar

Treasurer: Heidi Leffanue

Committee:

Ruth Redfern, Barbara James, Grace McCaughey

Newsletter Editor: Louise Pyman

Public Officer: Colin Banks

Auditor: Barry Hocking

Nasima Shaheed High School

Nasima Shaheed High School is located in Khewa refugee camp near Peshawar, the city close to Afghanistan's border with the highest Afghan refugee population Pakistan. It is a primary and secondary school for girls and covers years 1 - 12. It is named after a young woman who received her basic literary education in one of RAWA's first schools and was killed during the Soviet occupation.

Shortly after the 11th of September attack on the World Trade Center towers, when world attention turned to Afghanistan and RAWA's funding stream from foreign supporters increased significantly, RAWA launched a large educational campaign in Pakistan and Afghanistan. 15 new schools for girls and boys were opened in major cities of Pakistan and in refugee camps at the time, and a similar number of orphanages and hostels was established.

Due to the extreme lack of basic educational facilities for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, thousands of boys and girls rushed to get admission to these schools, as they were free from all fees, including even books and stationery.

Unfortunately the strength of the campaign did not last. As the war on Iraq began to dominate the news, Afghanistan was put aside by the world media, and people gradually diverted their attention away from Afghanistan. In those instances where the media did report on Afghanistan they often gave the false impression that the situation in the country had much improved and there was no longer any reason for concern. This badly affected many of the projects that RAWA was running in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Due to financial problems, RAWA had no option but to close many projects despite the fact that they were badly needed. Nasima Shaheed High School is one of the few that managed to remain open. With SAWA's help RAWA hopes to expand the school considerably during 2006, to accommodate about 350 students and offer good facilities, such as English and computer classes.

The need for Afghan schools in Pakistan

Nasima Shaheed High School forms part of Afghanistan's education system. The majority of Afghan children prefer Afghani schools over Pakistani schools, and the need for Afghan schools is still very high. This is because:

- Refugee children cannot pay the exorbitant tuition fees of Pakistani schools. The average tuition fee of a student in class 8 is 2,000 Pakistani rupees (AU\$45), which is too high for common people to pay for three or four children.
- Pakistan's government-run schools are cheaper than the private schools, but children would face great hassles to be registered in government-run schools.
- Pakistan's education system is completely different from the education system of Afghanistan, and the language of instruction is also not the same. As a consequence it is very difficult for children who attended Pakistani schools to continue their education in Afghanistan. The Afghan ministry of education does not recognize certificates of Pakistani schools.

- There is only a limited number of Afghan schools in Pakistan, not sufficient in number to service all Afghan children. Few NGOs have really shown interest in establishing schools for Afghan refugees. Since the fall of the Taliban and the coming to power of Hamid Karzai's government, Afghan and Pakistani authorities are pushing Afghan people to go back to Afghanistan, but not many are ready to go back because of the poor condition of life inside Afghanistan.

In addition to the conditions for Afghan children just described, girls in refugee camps face particular challenges:

- While students of schools in Peshawar city have some access to English and computer courses and libraries in the city, such facilities are missing in Khewa camp.
- Most of the aid agencies and NGOs are very active in cities; hence the students living in cities are more likely to get a chance of finding free training courses.
- Girls need more attention than boys in Afghanistan as they have to be empowered to gain their independent identity. Girls are hardly given the permission to attend training courses such as computer classes, hence a school with good facilities located in the camp is very important for them.

The Afghan Commissionaire, which funded the majority of the refugee schools in Pakistan, has announced that it is not willing to continue its funding after 2005. It hopes that this will encourage the Afghan refugees to return home.

However, under the current security situation in Afghanistan, which is likely to prevail for quite some time, it is much safer for girls to receive a quality education in Khewa refugee camp, even if their families live Afghanistan.

The curriculum

Although the aim of education at Nasima Shaheed High School is very different from the educational aims of the Afghan government, following a completely different curriculum would create problems for those students who may return to Afghanistan at some stage during their education and get admission to other schools. Nasima Shaheed High School therefore follows the same curriculum that is adopted by many other schools in Afghanistan, in order to move in accordance with Afghanistan's education system.

While the school thus has a few similarities with other Afghan schools, there are many differences. RAWA's Education Committee monitors and checks the contents of the subjects, the methodology of teaching and the school environment closely. Nasima Shaheed High School strictly follows RAWA's teaching policy, defined by RAWA's Education Committee. This policy is in accordance with the basic values of humanity, democracy and freedom. (RAWA's education policy was printed in the SAWAN issues 3 and 4 and is included on the SAWA website's extended version of this article.)

Recently new textbooks, funded by the USA and written and modified by the Islamic fundamentalists, were published and distributed to many schools. The textbooks were reviewed and passed by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a warlord with close ties to Saudi Arabia and the fundamentalist Wahabi Islam. Obviously such textbooks will have content

that serves the missions of the Islamic fundamentalists and USA interests. RAWA banned these textbooks from Nasima Shaheed High School.

The second problem with other schools is that students are taught too many religious subjects. In order to propagate their ideology, the Islamic fundamentalists have used their influence and power to include many religious subjects in the school curriculum. One subject taught is *Jehad* (Holy War), to encourage the students to wage war against non-Muslims and against those who violate the rules of Islam. Nasima Shaheed High School is completely free from such subjects, the main emphasis is on core subjects of science and arts. The subjects taught in Nasima Shaheed High School are:

Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Mathematics, Geometry, Geology, History, Geography, English, Dari, Pashto, Physical Exercise, Fine Arts and Computer Studies.



The students

In 2006 about 350 students are enrolled in Nasima Shaheed High School. Most come from a very poor background.

Upon their graduation from RAWA schools, the majority of the students apply for admission to universities, but this depends entirely on their economic status. Some of the students seek to find jobs in government offices, NGOs and other foreign aid agencies. These students are quite capable of finding good places in the job market, and RAWA helps them in this regard.

Obviously, getting an education in backward countries like Afghanistan has a direct impact on the life of the students after leaving school. Educated students are able to find good employment and can lead good, economically independent lives.

The funding situation

Salaries have to be funded quarterly in advance. SAWA transferred funds for the quarter January - March in December. Donations over the Christmas period secured the salaries for April - June. We are currently asking for donations to cover the quarter July - September. The funding situation for teaching material is acceptable, but we are still short of our target and have to find funds for the PC lab. Help us reach our target for Nasima Shaheed High School; make a donation! SAWA operates entirely through volunteers; every cent of your donation will go to the school.

RAWA IN AUSTRALIA APRIL/MAY

A CALL FOR EVENT ORGANISERS

We are fortunate to have a RAWA member in Australia again, in April/ May this year, as RAWA has been invited to speak at Deakin University's 'Community Development in a Global Risk Society' conference in Melbourne, 19th -22nd April and we will add extra events around those dates. Conference goers are in for a treat and we want many more to be able to meet RAWA, as well.

It is always such a wonderful experience to have RAWA members here. We are able to make a direct connection with such an inspirational organization, whose members work with such enormous dedication to Afghan women and a peaceful, democratic and successful future for all Afghans. This will be RAWA's fifth visit and we are sure this tour will be another great show of support. SAWA members are invited to take an active part in the visit and as we hope to make this tour a profitable one for RAWA, financially and politically, anyone willing to organise an event for RAWA during that time will give a large boost to RAWA. And being involved in providing support in this way is very good for the heart!

It is expected that the RAWA member will be in Australia from Easter (mid April) until early May so there will be plenty of time for many events.

If you would like further information or wish to offer an event, please contact me. I look forward to being swamped with offers.

Onnie Wilson
mok@connexus.net.au

PH (03) 9822 8858

Plans are underway for events in Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and other cities. Details will be posted on the "EVENTS" page of the SAWA website as they develop. Keep visiting the site and make sure that you are informed about the tour schedule. One focus of the tour will be a detailed report on RAWA's work at Nasima Shaheed High School and SAWA's contribution.

SAWA sends pharmaceuticals to Malalai hospital

Overseas Pharmaceutical Aid for Life (OPAL) is a unique overseas aid organisation. Established in 1992 to send medicines to countries in need, it has provided assistance to medical institutions around the world. The medicines are donated by the pharmaceutical industry and collected from pharmacies. Over \$30 million worth of medicines have been collected and sent to more than 50 countries so far.

SAWA contacted OPAL last year and submitted a list of antibiotics desperately needed at RAWA's Malalai hospital. OPAL agreed to provide all medicines on the list. When the next RAWA speaker visits Australia in April she will return to Pakistan with a consignment of free medicines of a size determined only by the baggage restrictions of the airline. Most airlines stretch these limits well beyond the normal allowance of 20 kg when it comes to services for charity, so our RAWA visitor will carry heavily on her way back to Pakistan.

Lara and Imogen go busking to support Afghan girls.

When RAWA member Amena visited Eden Hills Primary School in Adelaide last October and told the students of Year 5 about the lives of Afghan children, eleven year old Lara and Imogen wanted to do something. Three weeks before Christmas they took their clarinet and flute and went busking among the busy shopping crowd. They made \$68.75 and donated it all to the girls of Nasima Shaheed High School.

But that was only the beginning. When SAWA placed their story on its website it touched people's hearts and generated several hundred dollars of donations in Australia. RAWA saw their story and alerted friends around the world to it. For several days the SAWA website had hundreds of visitors from the USA, Europe, Asia and South America.

The front page of SAWA's website features links to RAWA support organizations in other countries, so visitors from outside Australia could make donations in their own country. Without doubt Lara's and Imogen's decision to go busking for RAWA generated donations around the world.

Shaima, the RAWA member responsible for SAWA's support of Nasima Shaheed High School, said in an email: "I was extremely impressed by Lara and Imogen for their incredible sense of humanity. They are incredible little girls!" Thank you, Lara and Imogen, and well done!

Militants behead headmaster in southern Afghanistan

KABUL, Jan. 4 (Xinhuanet) -- Militants in Afghanistan beheaded a headmaster of a school in the country's southern Zabul province Tuesday night, the director of the provincial education department said on Wednesday. "Armed militants entered the house of Abdul Habib, the headmaster of the Shikh Mati Lycee in Zabul's provincial capital Qalat, last night and brutally beheaded him in front of his children."

Some eight personnel of educational institutions including teachers and students have been killed and three schools were set on fire over the past two months, mostly in the southern provinces, the hub of Taliban loyalists.

Withdrawn article in the last SAWAN

The November 2005 edition of the SAWAN carried an article about an Afghan politician from the Civil War period of 1992 – 1996 who is now a lecturer in New Zealand. The politician threatened SAWA with legal action if the article is not withdrawn. While SAWA maintains that the article is correct in every aspect it does not wish to spend its funds on legal proceedings. The article was therefore withdrawn. The matter is now followed up by RAWA. Anyone interested in further developments should see the article "Fundamentalist in the Guise of Academician" on the RAWA website (<http://www.rawa.org/>).

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
-

JOIN SAWA HERE:

Name:.....

Organisation:

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 at www.sawa-australia.org or via direct deposit through your bank)