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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE CONVENER

We are approaching the end of our first year of support for Naseema Shaheed High School in Khewa Refugee Camp, near Peshawar in Pakistan. Many people responded generously to SAWA's call for support. Their willingness to assist with donations gives 360 girls the opportunity to develop their potential fully and grow up into confident, well educated young women.

SAWA welcomes donations of any amount, however small. Even small amounts go a long way: A donation of \$58 covers a teacher's salary for one month. The school's total salary bill for 2006 amounts to \$18,000, which we are just able to cover. We had hoped to raise the funds for some urgently needed furniture and a few computers as well, but our donation stream is not reliable enough to allow us to achieve this in 2006. In September we were not even sure whether we could meet our promise to fund the teachers' salaries, but a donation of \$1,440 from a SAWA member in Victoria arrived just at the right time. It will cover two years of salary for two teachers.

Several SAWA members have signed up for regular donations, and a group of women in Tasmania has decided to sponsor Malalai, the teacher of the year 3 students. You can read more about Malalai on page 2.

Recent events in Afghanistan make it more important than ever to maintain the support for RAWA's schools, orphanages and hospital. The Taliban are regrouping and pose a severe threat to women and girls. They have gained so much strength that Pakistan has arranged a "truce" and allows the Taliban to operate openly in Pakistan's border provinces. Taliban offices have been opened in cities in Pakistan and serve as bases for attacks on Afghanistan, and the Taliban have begun to collect "taxes" from the local population.

The new surge in fighting has created a new wave of refugees. Camps are bursting at the seams, and Naseema Shaheed High School is receiving more applications for enrolment than last year. As a result the demand for teacher support will be growing

in the coming months, and we are again called upon to help. If Australia is the lucky country it surely should be the generous country as well. Let us open our hearts to the needs of these Afghan girls and give them a real chance in life!

Matthias Tomczak

Fundraising events around Australia

Several local groups are planning events in support of RAWA during November:

In **Sydney** a fundraising luncheon will be held on Thursday 16 November in the Balmain Bowling Club, 156 Darling Street Balmain 2041. cost \$50.00 (\$35.00 concession), drinks from the bar extra. contact Dawn on (02) 9810 9093 or email d.atkinson@internode.on.net.

On the same day a fundraising dinner will be held in **Adelaide** at the Pondok Bali Restaurant, 310 Pulteney Street Adelaide. Sumptuous dinner, belly dancer, \$35 per head. Booking with prepayment essential, contact Barbara on (08) 8333 3479 or email barbjames@adam.com.au.

In **Perth** the Swan Districts Peace Group is planning a public forum on the war in Afghanistan later in November and will use it to raise funds for Naseema Shaheed High School. For details contact the Swan Districts Peace Group on (08) 9294 3013.

Get your Season's Greetings cards now!

Christmas decorations are going up in shopping centres to remind us that the biggest commercial event of the year will soon be upon us. We can add a bit of balance to the splashing out on presents by using SAWA greeting cards for our Christmas mail. You find a selection of cards and other goods on the SAWA website www.sawa-australia.org.

SAWA-Australia P.O. Box 90, Flinders University PO, Bedford Park SA 5042 www.sawa-australia.org info@sawa-australia.org

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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.

Convener: Matthias Tomczak

Secretary: Barbara Kameniar

Treasurer: Heidi Lefanue

Committee: Ruth Redfern, Barbara James, Colin Banks

Newsletter Editor: Matthias Tomczak

Public Officer: Colin Banks

Auditor: Barry Hocking

A teacher profile

Malalai, a teacher at Naseema Shaheed High School, is sponsored by a group of women in Tasmania. Here is how she introduced herself to her sponsors:



My name is Malalai, daughter of Abdullah Jan. I am 37 years old and was born in Kabul; but originally my family is from Nengrahar province in eastern Afghanistan. I was studying

in the Ningrahar University when the situation in Afghanistan became disastrous and we had to emigrate to Pakistan. I had to leave my studies but continued to study by my own and attended RAWA classes for women, where we were educated how to fight for rights and other political issues. Here in Pakistan there were no facilities for Afghan women to continue my studies at that time. This was almost 19 years ago. We have been living in a refugee camp in Pakistan since then.

I got married when I was 18 and had a loving husband. He was an intellectual and a freedom-fighter during the anti-Russian war of resistance in Afghanistan.

During the 1980s and early 1990s Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's fundamentalist Islamic Party was supported by ISI (the secret service of Pakistan) and the CIA and was receiving billions of dollars in aid. Under the regime of Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan he and his band were so powerful that they even had their own prisons and armed forces in Pakistan. They were terrorizing and abducting intellectuals and non-fundamentalist personalities.

In 1987 my husband fell victim to the Islamic Party and disappeared, along with 6 other intellectuals in Peshawar. Their only crime was that they did not want to join a fundamentalist criminal party. We tried hard to find him but without success; Pakistan's government did not help us. Later we found that he had been imprisoned in the Shamshato refugee camp in the suburbs of Peshawar city, where there was a large prison controlled by the Gulbuddin party. It has now been 19 years that we know nothing about him. We always hoped that one day, when the prison is closed by the Pakistani government or the UN, the prisoners may be released and my husband may come home. But the prison was abolished in the mid-1990s, and there was no sign of my husband and his friends. Most probably he was killed in the first months after his arrest.

I was pregnant when my husband was abducted, so I have a 19 year old daughter who never saw her father. I have also adopted a son. Presently I am living in Khewa refugee camp with my mother-in-law and brother-in-law. I have been teaching in RAWA schools for almost 11 years and now I am teaching class 3 students in the Nasima Shaheed School.

I am also a voluntary teacher for RAWA literacy courses in the camp and sometimes work as a nurse in the Malalai Clinic to help RAWA. I have finished a RAWA nursing course in the past.

I am very proud to be of any help to girls of our country. We are being helped by RAWA, so the environment in the Khewa camp

is quite different from that of other camps where the fundamentalist groups have control. Women of Khewa camp enjoy many freedoms which are not seen in any other place for Afghan women. Our school is the largest girls' school among refugee camps and not only teaches science and other subjects but informs the girls also that women and men are equal and that they must not take notice of what is said in the society about women being weak creatures etc.

I thank the Australian people for their support and help which is very much needed. You will be remembered by us always.



Malalai in her class in Naseema Shaheed High School

Taliban Country, by Carmela Baranowska

In June 2004 the Australian film maker Carmela Baranowska travelled as an embedded journalist with the US Marines to document a search operation for Taliban fighters in a remote part of Afghanistan. Suspecting that an embedded journalist will never find out the true story she then headed back to the same valley on her own and interviewed the local population. She was promptly reported as missing, presumably killed. But when she returned the Marines were forced to announce an investigation into the treatment of the villagers by US forces.

There is not enough room here to detail the various interviews. Some aspects do not come as a surprise, such as the commander's speech to the Marines before the operation, which is more an incessant repeat of the same four-letter word than a speech. But it turns out that the Marines found their master in the local governor, who accompanies them to point out "suspicious houses." The language of the representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is peppered with sexual expletives and swearing that even the Marines cannot match.

The governor and the people who live in the valley belong to different tribes, and the governor uses the opportunity to let the tribal people suffer. So the Marines arrest scores of innocent men and women, who later describe their ordeal to Carmela: Having been stripped naked and handled in humiliating and affronting manner to entertain the troops, they are kept overnight and finally sent home without charge. "We are like lambs to the slaughter" they say; "the Taliban came two days before the Americans and went; now the Americans arrest us." It is clear that the Marines were not making any friends.

This was in 2004, when the Taliban were just beginning to regroup. There is no reason to believe that the change of command from the USA to NATO will make any difference. The

foreign troops will continue to be seen as associates of corrupt governor-warlords and enemies of the people. A villager sums it up at the movie's end:

"Those Americans who've come here, either of their own accord or sent by the international community, they carry their guns with a licence to do as they like. Enough is enough. We can't accept it any more. Our people are being forced to pack up and leave. If I was forced to leave I swear I wouldn't be interested in leading a normal life. I wouldn't farm the land or anything else. I know how to find them, and I swear I won't let them live." Either a refugee or a fighter, that seems to be the future.

"Taliban Country" can be downloaded from www.archive.org/details/Taliban

Head of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Kandahar province killed by Taliban



Safia Amajan, the head of the Department of Women's Affairs in Kandahar, was shot dead from a passing motorcycle outside her home as she was on her way to work on 25 September. A Taliban-affiliated website, while not taking direct responsibility for the killing, said that she was assassinated for her "spying on the

Mojahedin of the Islamic Emirate on behalf of the United States of America, under the guise of women rights".

Safia Amajan was one of the few government officials respected by the people. Born as the last of five daughters of a textile merchant, Safia escaped the fate of her elder sisters, who were married off one by one, because her father died when she was 15 years old and Safia had to support her mother, her grandmother and her younger brother.

She began work in a kindergarten while finishing high school and moved on to become a teacher. By the 1970s she was head teacher of a school of 2000 girl students. She married late in life and had a son when she was in her 40s. In the late 1980s she was appointed inspector of all girls' schools in Kandahar province and became so popular that she was affectionately called "Amajan" (dear aunt), a name that replaced her family name Warasta.

During the reign of the Taliban she gained even more respect from the population because she did not leave the country but continued to educate girls, both clandestinely and through her position as a Hafiz (one who has memorized the whole Koran), which allowed her to become a prayer leader even under the Taliban.

After the fall of the Taliban she volunteered to work for the new government and established the provincial Department of Women's Affairs. Now well into her 50s, she initiated donation collections for the poor, support for women in prison, income-generation for war widows, literacy classes for rural women and political awareness courses.

Safia's husband, who had supported and defended her through all these years, was in the house and heard the gunfire that ended his wife's life.

The new life of General Rashid Dostum

Rashid Dostum's rise began in the 1970s as secretary of the union of oil field workers. He formed an Uzbek militia to defend the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan against the United States-backed mujahedin in the 1980s but switched sides several times in the years that followed. In 1992 he anticipated the fall of the Soviet-backed government and joined Ahmed Shah Massoud against the Soviets in his assault on Kabul. In 1994 he switched sides again and joined Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in the destruction of Kabul. After the fall of the Taliban he became Deputy Defence Minister in the Karzai government, a position he used to establish a North Zone of Afghanistan where the Kabul government has no control.

Dostum is accused of summary executions of prisoners who surrendered in Kunduz in 2001. His soldiers repeatedly robbed and raped Pashtun women in the Mazar area. In the same year Dostum completed his new indoor swimming pool:



Associated Press reported that Dostum inaugurated his new pool in a midnight swim with the US Special Forces attached to his army.

Source: website of Dr. Marc Herold, Departments of Economics and Women's Studies, University of New Hampshire, Whittemore School of Business and Economics

Malalai Joya confronts the fundamentalists

Among Afghanistan's warlords and their supporters who make up the majority of the country's parliament, one woman stands out as the conscience of the country. 28 year old Malalai Joya gained her seat with the overwhelming majority of votes of the women and men of Farah province in the far west. She has made it her duty to improve women's rights and expose the criminals in government.



In December 2003 she caused uproar during the inaugural session of the Constitutional Council when she denounced its fundamentalist members and said: "They were the most anti-women people in the society who brought our country to this state and they intend to do the same again. I believe that it is a mistake to test those already being tested. They should be taken

to a national and international court." Her comments generated death threats and forced Malalai to change houses every week. In April this year Malalai took up a question on behalf of one of her constituents during parliamentary question time and asked why all the ministers during their speeches again and again swear by the Quran that they are Muslims: "Do you have doubt about yourself or the MPs being Muslim? People don't care for such swearing because in the past some leaders committed crimes, then went to Holy Mecca and swore to stop but they did not stand by their promise."

Malalai has seen four attempts on her life and now sleeps in a different house every night. Several months ago the Karzai government withdrew the bodyguards that were allocated to her, so Malalai now has to organise her own security. But threats do not stop her from exposing the fundamentalists in positions of power. "They know very well I will never be silent. I will never be afraid," she said. "We will all die someday."

But the fundamentalists in power are the only ones who hate her. In Farah province Malalai has tremendous support. When Karzai appointed Bashir Baghlani as the governor of the province, the elders and tribal leaders came to her for help. They said that they reject Bashir as a well-known criminal commander of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was responsible for the killing of thousands during the Civil War of 1992 - 1996.



Elders and tribal leaders visit Malalai Joya to seek help.

Malalai Joya is determined to force positive change. "I'll try to introduce legislation that will protect the rights of the oppressed people and safeguard women's rights", she said. "Those who came here under the name of democracy shouldn't be given the chance to continue their crimes under the slogan of democracy. Which means first, I represent my people here, and secondly, I will also continue my struggle against warlords, no matter what party or sex they belong to. I'll continue my struggle, especially against those parties who destroyed our country. As I am representing my people, I have big hopes."

Malalai Joya operates a hospital in Farah province and founded the Organisation for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities. Hopefully SAWA will become strong enough to allow us to extend our support to this courageous woman, too.

The SAWA website contains a link to the website of Malalai Joya's support organization that gives access to a wealth of information, including several video clips of Malalai Joya in parliament and in press conferences.

Suggested reading (part 1)

Meena, Heroine of Afghanistan: the Martyr who founded RAWA, Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan by Melody Ermachild Chavis
The story of Meena and her life and the formation of RAWA.

With all Our Strength by Anne Brodsky
A detailed account on RAWA's evolution and principles.

Zoya's Story: An Afghan Woman's Struggle for Freedom by John Follain
The daughter of activists who 'disappear', Zoya is raised by her grandmother and later by RAWA. Through her story we see at first hand, life under the various oppressors; the Russians, the Taliban.

Kabul in Winter: Life without Peace in Afghanistan by Ann Jones.
A novel about contemporary life in Afghanistan after the American-led bombing and alleged 'defeat' of the Taliban.

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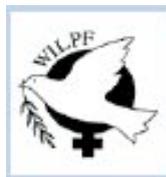
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