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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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Articles have been accepted in good faith, if you have any queries please contact the editor

FROM THE CONVENER

SAWA's fundraising efforts during 2007 have been so successful that at the end of the year more than \$20,000 had accrued in SAWA's bank account. We could have allocated these funds to more relief work in refugee camps, increase our support for RAWA's school in Rawalpindi, or purchase more pharmaceuticals. But we felt that as Afghanistan's state of conflict is becoming permanent and attacks on women's rights are becoming the norm, a more permanent presence of RAWA in Afghanistan is becoming more important than ever. We therefore approached RAWA with a proposal to allocate SAWA's funds to an Afghanistan-based project with a long-time perspective. The result is RAWA's new Vocational Training Centre in Kabul.

Supporting the Centre is a major commitment for SAWA that will require increased fundraising efforts in the years to come. SAWA will continue to support Hewad High School in Rawalpindi and at the same time aim at fulfilling its new support obligations in Kabul. We intend to approach other overseas aid and charitable organizations and hope to increase the Centre's support through partnership funding.

I thank all SAWA members for their unwavering support and look forward to increased support for the heroic women of RAWA in 2008.

Matthias Tomczak

PS: A sad development to report is the closure of Overseas Pharmaceutical Aid for Life (OPAL), the organization through which SAWA obtained free pharmaceuticals for RAWA's clinic. OPAL had to close its doors because its financial support from the government was discontinued. SAWA will try to find alternative supplies, but for the time being we can no longer send RAWA medical supplies.

RAWA opens a Vocational Training Centre in Kabul

The opening of the new Vocational Training Centre on the 1st of February marks a new phase in RAWA's work for the women of Afghanistan. The Centre has six permanent staff (three teachers, one handicraft trainer, a housekeeper and a security guard) and offers adult literacy courses and handicraft training. Literacy courses run for 24 months and finish with the issuing of a certificate. Handicraft courses run for 3 months, after which time the participants can establish the economic base to support a family. The centre has the capacity to accommodate 90 literacy students and 10 handicraft trainees. On an annual basis this corresponds to 45 literacy students and 40 handicraft trainees.

SAWA currently supports about 75% of the costs of the centre by funding the salaries of the staff, the rent, electricity and gas for the building and some textbooks and other material.

The Centre is a long-term project that requires ongoing support. SAWA now has well over 200 members. A regular ongoing donation of \$5/month from every member will cover the rent and utility bills for years to come. Please go to your bank and arrange for an automatic bank transfer of \$5/month, \$15/quarter or \$60/year. SAWA's bank details are at the bottom of the page.

News from Hewad High School

In November 2007 Rachel, a RAWA supporter from the USA, traveled to Rawalpindi. We asked her to visit Hewad High School and give us a report on the school. When she visited the school it was still housed in a building that was too small and in disrepair. It had a morning shift with 250 students and an afternoon shift with 100 students. Some classes were so crowded that multiple students were sharing tables and chairs.

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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 James

Treasurer: Heidi Lefanue

Committee: Ruth Redfern, Dawn Atkinson, Grace McCaughey

Newsletter Editor: Matthias Tomczak

Public Officer: Ruth Redfern

Auditor: Bob Shahinger

The school office had very little furniture and teachers had set up makeshift surfaces to cover minimal needs.

Since then a RAWA supporter from South Africa visited RAWA's orphanages and Hewad High School and decided to help financially. He promised to pay the difference between the current rent and the higher rent for a more suitable building. After much effort RAWA found a good building and signed the rental contract. The South African supporter covers the additional rental cost of US\$4,000 for one year.

The school moved into the new building in January. RAWA bought some new whiteboards and furniture to provide better facilities for the students and says that "now everything looks much better". But the school still has no computers.

A major project for the coming year will be the amalgamation with Naseema Shaheed High School from Khewa camp. After the initial announcement that the camp had to close by September, Pakistan's government gave the camp and the school a six month reprieve until the end of this month; so Naseema Shaheed High School is still functioning with 700 students. There are hopes that it will be allowed to finish the school year. The principal of both schools commutes between them on a daily basis. The 20 teachers are also shared. Some of them work for free.

Rachel's report stresses the importance of carrying on the excellent level of education of both schools: "The latter, I cannot say enough about! I had 14 - 18 year olds making speeches and asking me political questions in their 4th language, English. The quality of the teachers was confirmed in the comments which students made about them; many expressed an intention to follow that profession as adults."



Hewad High School; mid-term exams

Fundraising for RAWA in Inverloch, Victoria

A gathering of approximately 60 women attended a private venue in Inverloch, Victoria, on 15 December to raise funds and awareness for RAWA. It was an initiative of the local community, who had contacted SAWA for support. The following is a brief note from the organizer of the event:

"A representative of SAWA-Australia attended the event providing an up-to-date account of the current situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan. She also outlined the role of SAWA-

Australia in supporting the work of RAWA. The speech was followed by a visual presentation to highlight the suffering of the Afghani people over many years and the work of RAWA in resisting oppression and fighting for freedom. Local businesses supported the day. Entertainment was provided by local musicians. The day was highly successful. Over \$1100 was raised. All funds will be donated to assist in the ongoing effort to improve education and health where it is needed."

SAWA-Australia would like to recognise the enormous effort of this group of women and, on behalf of RAWA, thank them for their generosity and support.

More birthing kits for rural Afghan women

In the villages of Afghanistan going through childbirth can be a life-threatening experience. Many men do not allow routine medical examinations by male doctors to monitor pregnancies. There are few women doctors, and low standards of hygiene pose a serious threat.

The statistics are grim: There are 6,500 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births; every 28 minutes a woman dies during childbirth; the average life expectancy for women in Afghanistan is 44 years; most girls are married at very young age, and if they do not die in childbirth they will give birth to 8, 10 or even more children.

The Adelaide Hills Club of ZONTA International has developed a birthing kit that consists of a 1m x 1m plastic sheet for the mother to lie on, a piece of soap, two rubber gloves, three gauze squares, three cord ties, two plastic clamps and a sterile scalpel blade, all contained in a small press-sealed plastic bag. The total cost is one dollar, enough to save one woman's life through clean conditions during childbirth.

RAWA learnt about ZONTA's birthing kits last year during Sohaila's speaking tour. When Sohaila was in Adelaide she had a meeting with the Adelaide Hills ZONTA club and took a few sample kits back to Afghanistan. Since then RAWA has received thousands of kits and says that they are "one of the most useful items for our health workers and mobile health teams". The kits were distributed inside Afghanistan (mostly in cities such as Jalalabad and Farah, where RAWA is running its health care facilities) as well as in Khewa refugee camp in Pakistan. Another shipment was distributed in the northern provinces of Takhar, Balkh and Baghlan.

In most parts of Afghanistan including towns and rural areas women are not able to go to hospital or even a health centre. RAWA's mobile health teams who visit villages make a list of pregnant women in every family and deliver the kits on their next visit or direct the families to centres where they can get one. In some areas it even happened that the mid-wife had to go from house to house to hand over the kit, explain its benefits and convince women to use it. The women were very grateful to learn that their life and their baby's life can be saved through such simple methods.

Until recently, when the closure of Khewa camp became imminent, RAWA had run a mid-wife training program for a large group of women in the camp. Most of these women were trained

so that they can return to Afghanistan and work in their communities. On the day they were receiving certificates each of them were given a first aid bag with all necessary items and of course ZONTA's birthing kit. The women were proud that they were not going back with empty hands but with a lot of knowledge in their heads and a life-saving kit in their hands!



A RAWA member hands out ZONTA birthing kits

SAWA has ordered another 2,000 birthing kits from ZONTA. Demand for the kits is so high that the next batch will not be available before March. When it arrives the kits will have to be assembled and packed by SAWA volunteers. 1,000 kits will be assembled in Sydney, the other 1,000 in Adelaide.



A RAWA meeting explains the need for sanitation and hygiene during childbirth and the use of the birthing kits

If you are interested in participating in assembling the kits contact SAWA by mail or email. In a ruined and poor country where millions of dollars are misused or simply filling the pocket of warlords, each small kit is giving a new life to a woman and her baby!

CITCSA charity raffle supports RAWA

Every year the Council for International Trade and Commerce South Australia (CITCSA), the peak body for the 39 international chambers of commerce and business councils located in South Australia, holds a charity raffle during its annual Gala Awards Dinner. In 2007 the proceeds of the raffle went to SAWA in support of the social work of RAWA. \$2,900 was raised. Presenting the Cheque to SAWA secretary Barbara James and her daughter Georgia Hourigan were the Chairman of CITCSA Nick Begakis AM and the Executive Manager of CITCSA Barry Salter.

Many thanks to the businesses who kindly supported this cause; Tee Lee Travel, State Theatre Company, Soniclean, Abache Hair and Beauty, Adelaide Hilton, Adelaide Festival Centre, SA Tourism Commission, Belly Dance Academy of Nayima Hassan, SA Film Corporation, Food Adelaide, Adelaide's Top Food and Wine Tours, Bellis Fruit Bars, Barossa Fine Foods and Sumptuous Magazine.

Young Afghan journalist condemned to death

Parwez Kambakhsh is a volunteer reporter and journalism student in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif. Several months ago fellow university students accused him of distributing an article that criticized Islam's treatment of women. Kambakhsh was arrested and remains in jail since October 2007. His trial was held behind closed doors and without any lawyer defending him. He is accused of printing/distributing an article from the Internet, which points out controversial verses of the Quran regarding women's rights. The book *Religion in the History of Civilization* by Will Durant taken from his living room has been kept as an evidence against him in the court!



Sayad Parwez Kambakhsh

The international media do not tire to report that the occupation of Afghanistan by western countries has brought "democracy", "human rights" and "freedom of press" to the country. But the religious fundamentalists clearly have the justice system under their control and try every possible way to mute anyone who tells the truth about the Northern Alliance criminals.

Parwez Kambakhsh is not only imprisoned for his enlightening articles in the local newspaper *Jahan-e-Now* (The New World).

He is the brother of Yaqub Ibrahimi, a well-known investigative reporter who has repeatedly criticized local warlords. Family members of Mr. Kambakhsh suggested that he may have been targeted as a way to silence his brother.

In the latest development, in January the Religious Scholars Council of Balkh province, who never condemned the criminal acts of the fundamentalist warlords in the north, issued a verdict for the execution of Parwiz Kambakhsh by hanging. The Afghan president Karzai declares that it is not in his power to control the Council.

When protest against the imprisonment and verdict was raised Hafizullah Khaliqyar, the deputy provincial prosecutor in charge of the case, threatened to imprison all journalists who support Kambakhsh, adding that "Kambakhsh has confessed to the crime and must be punished."



Moulvi Shamas-ul-Rehman Moomand, head of the Primary Provincial Appeals Court who has sentenced Sayad Parwez Kambakhsh to death, during a press conference on 23 January. (AP Photo: Sameer Najafizada)

Oxfam: too much aid to Afghanistan wasted, growing corruption, no security

In November the Reuters News Agency reported that according to an Oxfam investigation US military spending in Afghanistan runs at 65,000 Dollars a minute. But despite an influx of more than 15 billion US dollars in aid money there are no signs of serious reconstruction. Most aid to Afghanistan is wasted -- soaked up in contractors' profits, spent on expensive expatriate consultants or squandered on small-scale, quick-fix projects, Oxfam said. Despite billions of aid the government still cannot provide electricity, food and water for its people.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) allocates close to half its funds to the five largest U.S. contractors in Afghanistan. A full-time expatriate consultant can cost up to \$500,000 a year, Oxfam said. "Too much aid is absorbed by profits of companies and sub-contractors, on non-Afghan resources and on high expatriate salaries and living costs," the report said.

Afghans say corruption is worse now than at any time in the past nearly 30 years, including under Taliban and Soviet rule. About 60 per cent of 1,250 Afghans questioned for a survey by Integrity Watch Afghanistan thought the administration was more corrupt than at any time since the 1970s. Around 93 per cent believed that more than half the public services required a bribe.

There are four times as many air strikes in Afghanistan as in Iraq, Oxfam said. At least 1,200 civilians have been killed overall this year -- about half of them in operations by Afghan and international troops.

UNICEF's photo of the year 2007

Top honours in the annual Photo of the Year contest sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2007 went to Stephanie Sinclair for her photo of an 11-year-old bride sitting next to her 40-year-old fiancé in Ghor province. The girl had been sold for money to be able to bring food on the table for the rest of her family.



Photo: Stephanie Sinclair

The 2008 Annual General Meeting will be held on 5 March in Adelaide. For details visit the SAWA website.

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