



THE SAWAN

SAWA-Australia

SUPPORT ASSOCIATION FOR THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN

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

FROM THE CONVENER

It is now nearly ten months since the Rudd government came to power. There have been some positive developments, but the Australian position towards Afghanistan is not one of them. More troops to support warlords and corrupt ministers will not solve Afghanistan's problems. Even the press realizes this, but Australia sticks to support for a government in Kabul that is increasingly discredited in the eyes of its own people.

Continued rule of fundamentalists –inside and outside Afghanistan's parliament – means that the life of the people is becoming harder and fraught with uncertainty. Thousands of war widows face a desperate situation. SAWA's effort to support them has never been more important.

Thankfully, SAWA's call for help did not fall on deaf ears. We now support two major projects, the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul and Hewad High School in Rawalpindi. Our connection to these two RAWA institutions has developed into bonds of friendship, and we receive many messages of thanks and gratitude that we should share with our members and supporters. To do this the SAWA committee decided to have this SAWAN printed in colour. The committee is conscious of the costs involved but considers it its responsibility to inform SAWA members and supporters adequately. Hopefully better documentation of SAWA's work will secure on-going support for the suffering women of Afghanistan.

Matthias Tomczak



For many years Khewa camp near Peshawar in Pakistan was not only home to 4,000 refugees but also a well-known education and culture centre for Afghan intellectuals; poets, writers, politicians, artists, doctors and others settled in this camp to work closely with RAWA. SAWA's first support project, Naseema Shaheed High School, was located in the camp. It was of the highest academic standards and the most successful of all Afghan high schools, with a success rate in the university exams of 88% against a countrywide average success rate of 33%.

Last year Pakistan's government decreed the closure of all Afghan refugee camps. This is Khewa camp today. It will be a hard struggle to build anything again that comes close to the Khewa camp community.

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SAWA OBJECTIVES

- Raise funds to assist in development and relief projects 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: Olga Enigk

Membership Officer: Helen Fletcher

Committee: Dawn Atkinson, Ann Clarke, Grace McCaughey, Ruth Redfern

Newsletter Editor: Matthias Tomczak

Public Officer: Ruth Redfern

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Bob Shahinger

Is Australia backing the wrong forces?

"Afghans are stuck between a vicious insurgency and a deeply corrupt state" wrote Tom Hyland, international editor of *The Sunday Age* on 26 June. Comparing Australia's involvement in Afghanistan with its role in the Vietnam war, he says: "In both cases, foreign troops were sent to support a government facing an insurgency. In Vietnam, it was the anti-communist government in Saigon. In Afghanistan, it's the government of President Karzai."

Hyland continues: "Like the Saigon government, Karzai's administration is unable or unwilling to fill the breathing space that military operations are meant to create, with development, clean governance and security. The Saigon government was massively corrupt. So is Karzai's."

Hyland quotes a study by international aid agencies that identifies security as the foremost concern of the people. When interviewed, one Afghan told the reporters: "if I could move around freely and not be bothered by the Taliban any more at night and the government during the day, that would be security." The report concludes: "More interviewees linked security to improved governance and the removal of unsavoury characters from positions of power, rather than the roll-out of small infrastructure projects."

As Hyland points out, this analysis is supported by the Australian military itself. Colonel Frewen, who served in Afghanistan, wrote in the *Australian Army Journal* that the Taliban "do not carry the same stigma of endemic corruption as that of the current Afghan government" and that as a result the Taliban receive tacit support "because there is no other way to voice political opposition" to a government that is "increasingly despised."

Malalai Joya, the elected parliamentarian who is banned from parliament since May 2007, says that Afghanistan has many democratic forces and personalities who do not have a chance to contribute to Afghanistan's future and under the current administration often have to fear for their lives. But the Australian government continues to support Karzai's corrupt clique and says that the problems of democratic personalities like Malalai Joya are "a matter for the Afghan parliament."

Labor, Liberals and Malalai Joya; a documentation

Following the expulsion of Malalai Joya from parliament in May 2007 SAWA sent a letter to the then Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and received a non-committal reply. Tanya Plibersek, then Shadow Minister for Human Services, Housing, Youth and Women, was more responsive and asked Mr. Downer "for advice about the diplomatic action his government is taking in regards to Ms Joya's treatment." (The full correspondence is documented in SAWAN 15 of August 2007.)

Following the election of the Rudd government the new Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne wrote SAWA a letter "to discuss issues and concerns that are of importance to you." SAWA decided to take up Malalai Joya's case again and wrote letters to Ms Payne and to the new Foreign Minister Stephen Smith on 21 March. We document the correspondence here for the record. It appears that the more

things change, the more they stay the same. With Labor now in power and the Liberal Party in opposition, Ms Payne is prepared to take action, while the Honourable Stephen Smith washes his hands of the issue. Here is the letter to Ms Payne:

Dear Senator,

I refer to your letter of 19 March to SAWA Australia and thank you for the offer to meet you and discuss matters of concern. As I am based in Adelaide it will not be likely that there will be an opportunity to meet in the near future. However, allow me to raise an issue with you in writing.

You will be aware that Ms. Malalai Joya, one of the few female members of Afghanistan's parliament, who was elected with the second largest majority in her province, has been banned from attending parliament for the duration of its current term. Ms. Malalai Joya's rights as parliamentarian have still not been reinstated. On the contrary, earlier this year the Afghan government revoked Ms. Joya's diplomatic passport in an attempt to stop her from travelling abroad.

May I also draw to your attention the resolution of the Inter-Parliamentary Union of 18 April 2008 in relation to Malalai Joya.

I urge you to do everything in your power to impress on the Afghan government the need to return Ms. Joya's parliamentary status and rights to her as a matter of urgency and to protect her against continuing death threats.

The letter sent to Stephen Smith excluded the first paragraph but was identical otherwise.

Ms. Payne's answer of 10 June was as follows:

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding Afghani parliamentarian Ms Malalai Joya and her suspension from Afghanistan's parliament.

Please find attached the relevant references of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Budget Estimates Hansard where I raised with the committee matters concerning Ms Joya's suspension as well as seeking clarification as to whether the Australian government has made representations on Ms Joya's behalf to Afghanistan's parliament.

At the time of the Committee hearing, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) was not aware if the government had made representations specifically on Ms Joya's behalf. I have asked DFAT to take the issue on notice and return with the required additional information. Furthermore, I have also asked DFAT to report back on whether it is likely that the government will make future representations on behalf of Ms Joya, if no representation has yet been made.

I look forward to receiving a response from DFAT concerning these questions and will forward the response to you.

The response from DFAT is not yet known but can be anticipated from the letter from Mr Smith's office dated 22 July:

Thank you for your letter dated 21 March 2008 to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stephen Smith, concerning the situation of Ms Malalai Joya, a member of the Afghan parliament. Mr Smith has asked me to reply to you on his behalf. I regret the delay in response.

The Australian Government is aware of Ms Joya's case and recent publicity highlighting her lengthy parliamentary

suspension. The Government strongly encourages efforts by Afghan authorities to ensure inclusive, democratic and transparent parliamentary process, including the right of elected members to voice their views under the protection of parliamentary privilege. At the same time, the Government also recognises the right of Afghan authorities to take appropriate action to defend and uphold the authority of Afghan institutions and its elected representatives. Ultimately, the Government considers that the issue of Ms Joia's suspension is a matter for the Afghan parliament and people and, as necessary, Afghanistan's justice system.

The Government will continue to monitor developments in Ms Joia's case and raise its expectations that Afghan citizens will be treated in full accordance with Afghan law.

Much fundraising activity around the country

The months of May, June and July saw again much fundraising activity. SAWA member Sandra in NSW told her friends who attended her birthday party not to bother with presents and donate to SAWA instead. She raised \$1,050. A great result!

A wonderful evening was organized by Soroptimist Torrens recently. The May Day Dinner was held at Ming's Palace, 157 Gouger St Adelaide. The Chinese Banquet, attended by 160 people, was delicious and the company and atmosphere very lively. Barbara James, secretary of SAWA, spoke about the RAWA projects that SAWA supports. All proceeds from the evening, entry sales and raffle tickets, went to SAWA, Autism SA and the Hajare School in Nepal. SAWA is very grateful to Di Potter and everyone at Soroptimist Torrens for their generous support of the women of Afghanistan.

Barbara also spoke later in May to Soroptimist Eastern Districts at their annual internal fundraising dinner. The theme of the talk was "Women in Afghanistan - Is there hope?" Thanks go to Marjorie Molyneux and all the terrific women at SE Eastern Districts for their willingness to engage in useful discussion about the problems faced by Afghan women.

The Soroptimist groups of Torrens, Adelaide and Narracoorte donated \$1,000 each as part of the Soroptimist pledge to support handicraft training in the Vocational Training Centre. A substantial part of this was raised during "A Varied Musical Afternoon" in Unley Uniting Church with Peter Handsworth, Janis Laurs of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and Jane Wilson, the Young Adelaide Voices, and Schmue & Co Jazz ensemble.

WILPF (SA) increased its sponsorship substantially by handing over a cheque over \$500. SAWA expresses its thanks on behalf of Afghanistan's women.

The Unitarian Church Refugee Support Group held a fund-raising evening on 26 July to assist SAWA's appeal in support of the women's Vocational Training Centre in Kabul: "The evening consisted of a pot-luck dinner, followed by entertainment by guest instrumentalists, vocalists, readers of prose and poetry, finishing with energetic communal singing. We were delighted to have an Afghani family present, who looked magnificent in their traditional dress. Four young ladies entertained us by singing the Afghani national anthem, which surprised and delighted us. A magnificent basket of 'goodies' was raffled and along with

donations from members of the church who could not be present, an amount of \$1,210 was raised."



Some of the guests at the Unitarian Church fundraising evening.

New photos from Hewad High School

Members of Friends of RAWA Japan, who shares the support for Hewad High School with SAWA, visited the school in May. They also visited the site of Khewa camp and saw its demise with their own eyes.

We reproduce here two photos of Hewad High School, sent to us by Michiko Takata of Friends of RAWA Japan.



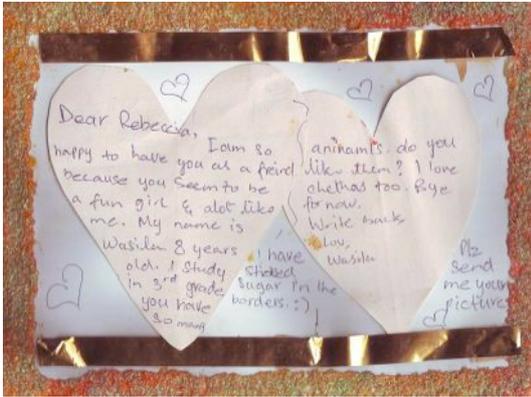
Girls and boys share studies at Hewad High School.



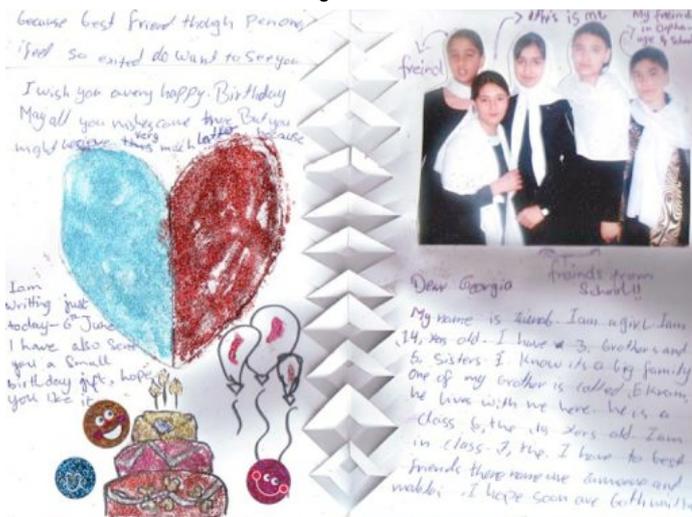
A class studies near the window and open door during one of the frequent power black-outs.

Loreto College gets Letters from Hewad School

It is some time ago that the year 7 students from Loreto College in Marryatville (Adelaide) decided to develop pen pal relationships with students of Hewad High School. Last month SAWA received many colourful letters from Hewad High School students in grades 3 to 8. There is not enough room to document them all, but we reproduce some examples. We plan to use some of the drawings for greeting cards and hope to have them ready for Christmas.



Wasila's letter to Rebecca. Wasila is 8 years old and in 3rd grade.



Zainab's letter to Georgia. Zainab is 14 years old and is in 7th grade. She has three brothers and six sisters.



Amin's drawing for Caitlin. Amin is 14 years old and in year 8. His drawing will be on one of SAWA's Christmas cards.



Ulfat's letter to Emma. Ulfat is 13 years old and in year 9. The text on his drawings says :Watan (Homeland) Orphanage".

Afghan handicraft for sale

Last year SAWA ordered some beautiful Afghan textiles from RAWA's workshops for sale at fundraising events around Adelaide. They were so popular that a second order had to be placed several weeks ago. We now have a selection of pillow covers (\$15), shoulder bags (\$25), purses (\$15), shirts (\$30), table napkins (\$50) and table runners / wall hangers (\$40).



Examples of RAWA's textile handicraft

To find out more and purchase one or more of the wonderful items send your phone number to SAWA by mail or email. Our secretary Barbara will contact you, describe every available item in detail and mail the items of your choice to you.



To become a member of SAWA go to <http://sawa-australia.org/joinus.htm> or write to SAWA's PO Box. Send a message to membership@sawa-australia.org if you wish to receive the SAWAN by email rather than ordinary mail.