



Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan

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

FROM THE CONVENER

*The year 2009 is gone, and with it the annual flood of letters and phone calls from charities to honour the spirit of the "Festive Season". What was different this year? Charities invest donations on the stock market, and in 2009 millions of dollars in donations disappeared into the black hole of the Great Financial Crisis. So if you gave a donation to one of the larger charities, **up to fifty cents of every dollar were simply lost.***

*Small charities do not have the funds for major investments, but their performance can be even worse. The National Cancer Research Foundation is a two-year old charity. It received \$197,160 in donations in its first year and \$387,864 in 2009 (seven times the amount SAWA raised). Adelaide's Advertiser reported that "most of the money raised ... went on commissions, management fees, traveling expenses and drivers." Only \$5,835 – **less than one cent of every dollar** – was actually given to cancer research in 2008 and 2009.*

The National Cancer Research Foundation may be an extreme case, but it is symptomatic for the entire charity business. More and more charities are set up as vehicles to provide comfortable incomes for its administrators and subcontractors. If you want to make a difference by giving you better make sure that you know the financial practices of the organization you support.

*As a supporter of SAWA you can rest assured that you are making a difference. We at SAWA are proud that SAWA operates entirely through volunteers. Our constitution states that "officers and members of the Association offer their services on a voluntary basis and shall not receive remuneration for services to the Association." The cost of the SAWAN and other promotion is covered by membership fees; as a result, 100% of all donations is sent to Afghanistan **without any deduction.***

As an organization of volunteers we may not appear professional at all times, but we guarantee that your donations always reach their destination in full. Could this not be a good reason to recommend SAWA to others?

Matthias Tomczak

News from the Vocational Training Centre

To satisfy Afghan government regulations for charities, SAWA and OPAWC, the Organization for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities that operates the Vocational Training Centre for women on Kabul, formalized their relationship through a Memorandum of Understanding. Latifa, the Centre's new director, took the protocol of the literacy course to the Ministry of Education to obtain approval for a one year extension. She says that "they were very happy and admired our Literacy Course, they said that it is unique in its regularity and discipline. The head of the branch told me 'we are proud of you people, you are really working for the benefit of forlorn and oppressed people especially women.' "

The Literacy Course, now in its third year, has already made a big difference for families, particularly families without a male breadwinner. Here are four short statements from students:



Maryam Sharem

I want to write a few lines about the nature of the literacy course and about what I have achieved from it.

I have waited for a long time to become educated. It disturbed me in any meeting or party when there was an issue about education. I remembered once I received

news that women can be paid who can teach the beginners, at that time I had nothing at home to feed my children, though I am a widow and responsible for the children, it was the hardest time, it was the time I find the need for education and said to myself: Oh my God! I hoped I was educated.

But that is about the past, now I am not that one any more, I have changed, I have become an educated woman, I can work as a teacher though I am a teacher at home, I teach my children. All these events come to me from OPAWC, they provide us with everything we need for the course, and they serve us and see how the teachers teach and how the course progresses.

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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 Eningk

Committee: Dawn Atkinson, Grace McCaughey, Ruth Redfern

Newsletter Editor: Matthias Tomczak

Public Officer: Ruth Redfern

Auditor: Bob Shahinger

I hope that this course will be continued so that I can learn more and become educated completely and able to work as a teacher in schools and solve the financial problems I am facing now.



Suraya Gulam Bahlol

I am a mother of four children. I went through the world blind before participating in this course. I had a lot of economic problems; our insecure situation and other family problems made me sad and sick. I was nervous all the time as these problems effected me a lot and I considered myself a person who is not psychologically normal, because most of the time I was sad and thinking that I hate my children, I hate my husband, and I didn't want to talk with other people. All the time we were fighting for nothing, but since I have come to the literacy course I am completely okay. I am thankful to OPAWC who saved me from the darkness of my life. Before coming to this course my life was going to ruin, but now I have changed completely, I have learnt that I must not be hopeless, I must look after my children carefully, I must behave with my husband well – I am an educated woman now, an educated woman that must solve the problems she faces and find the right way for solving them. I have learned a lot of things, I can prevent my children from being affected from different diseases, as we have a subject about health and I have learned several things.

Before joining this course I was just a blind woman, I didn't know anything about health and other issues. I remember once my baby was very sick and I knew that the medicine was for fever so I gave it to her, but after a while she started vomiting because the medicine had expired and I gave it to her because I could not read it; but now I check the date of the medicine first and than give it to her.

I am thankful to the leadership of OPAWC, who takes care of us and provides us with all the needs of the course like stationery including books, notebooks, pen, pencil, rubber, ruler, and whiteboards on which we can write easily.

I ask OPAWC to continue this course and arrange similar activity for us to keep us busy and to prevent women with many problems like myself from falling into sickness.



Nafisa Nor Allah

When I was at home and saw girls of my age going to school and wearing uniform I was sad and unpleased, and a lot of questions arose in my mind – why am I not going to school though I am of the same age as they, I also want to study, to wear uniform like others; I wished I had classmates with whom I could share my ideas and secrets, but I was deprived of all this. When I asked my mother: "Why am I not going to school?" she said: "My daughter, we are a poor family, school is far away from our house and we can't pay for your transportation". So, for a few days I was thinking of this problem why we are poor, than I found out that it is because there has been war in our country and everything had been destroyed and my father can't work in a peaceful environment, he cant have work because he is illiterate. For these reasons I have been deprived of education.

But since I have come to the literacy course provided by OPAWC I have achieved my desires, I can read magazines, newspaper, anything I wish, I have friends here, they are girls of my age and old women like my mother, I am happy. I remember, at the beginning of the course I saw that most of my classmates were sick. They bought one or two prescription medicines, but by passage of time they become busy with learning and now all of them are okay and happy.

Thank you so much for this humanitarian action, to arrange this course for us and equip us with all the needs of the course.

I ask OPAWC to continue this course and if possible arrange some English courses too, because we like and wish to learn English as well but we are unable to pay for the private course. Similarly if possible teach us to work in a beauty parlour, because it produces a good income in Afghanistan, so that we can help and support our family financially.



Tuba Nesar Ahmad from Gazni province (lives now in Kabul)

My story is a sad one. When I was a small girl I lost my mother, so I was supposed to take care of all responsibilities in the house and to look after my younger brother and sisters. My father and my brother didn't let me go to school, this was the reason I remained illiterate.

Soon I was married and had children. But one thing which always disturbed me was education, I was so interested and eager to become an educated woman. OPAWC's light flashed before my eyes, I became aware that a literacy course had been established near my house where I can fulfil my desire. Soon I went and entered my name among other women's names, I enquired about the rules and conditions, and felt that I can attend this course and learn and still look after my children at the same time.

Now about 7 months have passed and I have learned a lot, I am able to read and write and can help my children. I am thankful to OPAWC for helping poor and forlorn women like me, and arrange everything we need and ask OPAWC to continue this course and arrange similar activities for us, because I want to learn as I had been longing to do for a long time.

The second annual intake of the Literacy Course graduated on 30 December. Guests from the Ministries of Education, Social Affairs, and Women attended the event and enjoyed its drama, poetry and song performances. 66 students received their diploma from the hands of the Headmistress and were congratulated by a representative of the Ministry of Education.



The Handicraft Course is always fully booked and has produced some excellent garments. SAWA is currently in discussion with Latifa about possible garment sales in Australia.



Family tragedy at Hewad High School

In November some sad news reached us from Hewad High School. Lailoma Jan, one of the first teachers of Hewad School, lost her husband Akbar, who supported his family by selling potato chips, in a traffic accident. Akbar had bought his daily potatoes on the market and was on the way to his stall on his bicycle when he was hit by a car and fell on steep rocks from a bridge.

Akbar sold fries in the morning and Khyber, the eldest of their four sons, took over the stand after he finished his lessons at Hewad High School in the afternoon.

Lailoma is a highly regarded teacher of the school. She started teaching geography to 8th, 9th and 10th graders in 2002. Throughout these years she has stood out as one of the finest teachers, playing an important role not only in the studies of her students but also in discipline, character building and sense of moral values.



Lailoma and Akbar celebrate Khyber's birthday

As a refugee in Pakistan, Lailoma lives in a shabby two-room apartment in a busy bazaar near the school. Like hundreds of thousands of Afghan widows, Lailoma is now the mother and father for her four children and has to work harder to feed and educate them.

RAWA helped Lailoma in the costs and arrangement of the funeral. After the death of Akbar, Khyber might have to work full

time in place of his father or live on the little salary his mother gets from her job in Hewad.

SAWA supported Lailoma with a major donation. The SAWA committee also resolved to establish a special Social Support fund for the teachers of the school, to be used in cases of hardship at RAWA's discretion.



Lailoma with her four sons today.

UN: Public space for Afghan women is shrinking

Eight years after the formal end of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, women are facing growing challenges in public life and have limited access to justice, according to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

"The space for women in public life is shrinking," warned Norah Niland, head of UNAMA's human rights unit and representing the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Under the Taliban, women had few rights, and though efforts have been made since then to boost them, progress has been inhibited by armed conflict, weak political commitment, corruption, and strong patriarchal traditions. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) is concerned that initial gains made after 2001 are being lost.

The number of women working in the government is "steadily decreasing" and their participation in other decision-making processes such as voting in elections has also gone down, according to the UNAMA.

Compared to 2005 fewer women participated in this year's elections and there was only one cabinet minister in 2009 (the minister of women's affairs) compared to three in 2003-2005.

"It is unrealistic to anticipate significant socio-economic progress when half the population is denied or unable to participate in poverty reduction, reconstruction or development projects," said Niland, adding that the space for advocacy campaigns for women's rights had also diminished in recent years.

UNAMA says gender-based violence is still widespread and deeply rooted in society. Women face physical and mental abuse in their own homes but have little or no access to justice, according to rights watchdogs.

Over 1,000 cases of violence against women were recorded in the Violence Against Women Primary Database (maintained by the government and women's rights groups in 21 of the

country's 34 provinces from March 2006 to October 2007). Incidents recorded included rape, forced prostitution, forced marriage, physical attack, polygamy and harassment.

"Some women are even sold and exchanged as commodities," said Zia Moballegh, acting country director for the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, a Canadian organization.

"Violence against women thrives in socio-economic conditions that see women as inferior and, somehow, less entitled to the full respect of their human rights," said UNAMA's Niland.

"Impunity is one of the biggest problems in Afghanistan from a rule of law and human rights perspective," Niland told IRIN.

Afghan courts and police are considered corrupt, male-dominated and incompetent by many women who have suffered violence, according to rights groups.

Some victims of gender-based violence who lack access to justice and support turn to self-harm, elopement and/or other extreme actions, according to the above-mentioned database.

Afghan women have one of the lowest literacy rates in the world: UNAMA says 90 percent of women in rural areas cannot read or write and the overall literacy rate among women is 12.6 percent.

UNICEF: Afghanistan especially dangerous for girls

Eight years after a U.S.-led invasion ousted the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, the war-ravaged state is the most dangerous place in the world for a child to be born, the United Nations said on Thursday.

It is especially dangerous for girls, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said in launching its annual flagship report *The State of the World's Children*.

Afghanistan has the highest infant mortality rate in the world - 257 deaths per 1,000 live births, and 70 percent of the population lacks access to clean water, the agency said.

Growing insecurity is also making it hard to carry out vital vaccination campaigns against polio, a crippling disease still endemic in the country, and measles that can kill children.

"Afghanistan today is without a doubt the most dangerous place to be born," Daniel Toole, UNICEF regional director for South Asia, told a news briefing in Geneva.

Some 317 schools in Afghanistan were attacked in the past year, killing 124 and wounding another 290, Toole said.

"We have seen a drop in the number of children who are attending schools and particularly young girls," he added.

School enrollment in Afghanistan had risen to 5 million, including 2 million girls, against 1 million with virtually no girls in 2001 when the Taliban were ousted from power, he said.

"In both countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, we've made some progress but we're starting to worry about back-tracking on that progress given the high rates of insecurity and the ongoing conflict," Toole said.

"The most dramatic indication of back-tracking is the deliberate attacks against girls' schools," he added.

Separately, UNICEF director Ann Veneman spoke to reporters in New York on Thursday about the Convention on the Rights of

the Child, a pact aimed at protecting children worldwide that was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly 20 years ago.

Veneman said it was "frustrating" that Washington has not ratified the pact, noting that the United States and Somalia were the only two states in the world that remain outside it.

The spokesman for the U.S. mission to the United Nations, Mark Kornblau, said that the administration of President Barack Obama was "committed to undertaking a thorough and thoughtful review of the Convention on the Rights of the Child."

Stephanie Nebel

Women lead protest against government corruption

From the Los Angeles Times, 10 December 2009

In an unusual display of female political activism, several hundred demonstrators demand that President Hamid Karzai purge those connected to corruption, war crimes or the Taliban.

Several hundred women, many holding aloft pictures of relatives killed by drug lords or Taliban militants, held a loud but nonviolent street protest today, demanding that President Hamid Karzai purge from his government anyone connected to corruption, war crimes or the Taliban.

"These women are being very brave," said the protest leader, her face hidden by a burka. "To be a woman in Afghanistan and an activist can mean death. We want justice for our loved ones!"

Afghan police, in riot gear, monitored the rally as it worked its way slowly through muddy streets to the United Nations building here, but they did nothing to disrupt the event.

The unusual display of political activism by women comes as Karzai is under increasing pressure to remove from his Cabinet anyone connected to rampant corruption, including links to the flourishing drug trade. His own finance minister says corruption is the biggest threat to the future of Afghanistan.

The protest group, under the banner *Social Association of Afghan Justice Seekers*, said that "our people have gone into a nightmare of unbelieving" because of the disputed election and the fact that "the culture of impunity" still exists despite Karzai's vow to eliminate it.

While the women took the lead in the protest, about 500 men followed them in support, an unusual display in Afghan culture of men allowing women to take a leadership role.

The group spokeswoman, who gave her name as Lakifa, said many women are still afraid to demand an accounting of the death or disappearance of family members during the three decades of war that have ripped Afghanistan.

"We need to know about all of our martyrs, and the government needs to find the mass graves and the killers, not give them jobs and protect them," she said.

Although it was not a major focus of the protest, the group was also critical of President Obama's decision to send additional troops.

"The innocent and oppressed people will be the victims of American air and ground attacks," said the group's statement handed to Afghan and U.S. reporters.

Reports from local groups

The formation of local SAWA groups around the country has been a major milestone in the development of SAWA's work. All local groups have been active with awareness building and fundraising; some send brief reports to the newsletter editor to share with others. The following is an incomplete overview of activities, based on the reports we received.

Sydney

In August about 30 members of the Balmain Probus Club heard a talk by Dawn Atkinson about the work of SAWA. They were appalled to hear of the terrible situation of women in Afghanistan and were fascinated to learn about the work done by SAWA, particularly the Vocational Training Centre for widows in Kabul. The birthing kits were also felt to be of very practical help for Afghan women.

Some Probus members had heard of SAWA and had been to Balmain Town Hall when Shazia Shakib spoke at a meeting there. In future, there will be more who are ready to support activities of SAWA. The applause at the end of the meeting made it clear how interested the members had been, and there was quite a rush to the table where the colourful bags with the SAWA logo were laid out. In fact, sales amounted to \$170, a very good result. As each bag is given or used, more people will come to know the name of SAWA and the work it does.

Rona Prokhovnik

Help for SAWA doesn't always have to involve a major event. Recently several of the people in a local Book Group went to hear Shazia, the young visiting speaker from Afghanistan, and were moved by her talk. One of them suggested that we had a special lunch to raise some money at our next book discussion meeting, and invited us to her home. She prepared some delicious snacks based on recipes from India, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh - our book for the month was "Midnight's Children" by Salman Rushdie. \$225 was collected to send to SAWA.

Rose Pickard

SAWA supporters were privileged to receive an invitation to the Australian premier of "The Sweetest Embrace: Return to Afghanistan" shown at the Canadian Film Festival. Our sincere thanks go to Canadian Consul General Tom MacDonald, filmmaker Najeeb Mirza and artistic director of the festival Mathieu Ravier for their recognition of and support for SAWA-Australia.

At the request of writer, director and producer Najeeb Mirza the Consulate has forwarded a copy of the film to be used for fundraising. It is available from the Sydney group. The Consul General has also sent a copy of Canadian photojournalist Lana Slezić's book *Forsaken* saying "This book seems highly relevant to SAWA's mission to support the women of Afghanistan." *Forsaken* is a collection of photographs and vignettes that document Slezić's two years living and working in Afghanistan, a book well worth asking for at your local bookshops or libraries.

Apart from these generous gestures, on the night \$671 was raised through ticket and bag sales. The 4th Annual SAWA Lunch, held on 19 November, raised over \$5,900.

Dawn Atkinson

Northern Rivers

The presentation of "View from a Grain of Sand" in Nimbin, the inaugural event of the group, saw an audience of 40, well above expectation at the small but excellent venue that normally only seats 20. The response to the film was very positive and many people expressed that they had very little previous knowledge of most of what was shown in the documentary. The presentation definitely left an impact on people. As a result, the local newsletter went from 5 to 22, with some expressing active participation and others wishing to be notified of future events. The evening netted \$300.00 for SAWA, plus the sale of over \$300.00 worth of Afghan handicrafts.

The "One Light" fundraiser in Mullumbimby organized by Sahar Alum-Sadah saw an attendance of 79 people plus numerous volunteer helpers and local performers. The film presentation appeared again a major reason for the attendance, with the response on par with that of Nimbin. A number of people added their name to the mailing list. \$2,100 were raised through the event. SAWA appreciates all the kind donations from Ku Promotions, Raes on Wategos, Just Imagine Hypnotherapy, Life of Byron, Harvest Cafe, The Green House, Electric, Fish Mongers, Santos, Mary Ryan's Bookstore, Body Balance, Passion at Flowers, Late Night Video, Dendy Cinemas, Hustle & Flow, Melinda Andreas Byron Bay Photos, Espresso Head, Music & Vision, Paradiso Beauty, Byron Bay Gourmet Pies, Goddess of Babylon, The Kiva Spa, Biobotanica Skincare, Sabayon Private Dining, Cape Byron Kayaks and Nami.

Bob Oort, Ruth Rosenhek

Perth

Through the initiative of Nathalie Hayman, who had organized a very moving exhibition on the sinking of the asylum seeker vessel SIEVX, a SAWA donation box was set up in the exhibition room. \$225.30 was handed over to the local group at the end of the exhibition.

Melbourne

The Melbourne group used the screening of "October 2008 in Kabul", a documentary about the visit of SAWA convener Matthias Tomczak to the Vocational Training Centre, as its first public event. New contacts were made that led to handicraft sales amounting to \$510.

Gali Weiss introduced SAWA's work to her Reaal Book Club. \$90 were raised as a result.

Adelaide

On 4 November 2009 *Afghan Afternoon*, a celebration of Afghan culture, was held at the University of South Australia. The event was hosted by the universities' own student group, the Sohbet Society for Human Rights in order to raise awareness about SAWA amongst students and young people.

Students and staff enjoyed Afghan music whilst sampling Middle Eastern food and Afghan desserts kindly donated by a friend of SAWA's Treasurer, Olga Enigk, as well as a local Afghan restaurant, Parwana. Afghan handicrafts and SAWA products were on sale and the universities' bookshop provided copies of Malalai Joya's book *Raising my Voice* for purchase. All proceeds go towards supporting RAWA's on-going projects in Afghanistan.

We extend our many thanks to everyone who celebrated Afghan culture with us on the day. Special thanks to: UniLife, UniBooks, Parwana Afghan Restaurant, Olga's friend who is a refugee from Iraq, and Scott Bain.

The group had a very successful fundraiser by arranging a special screening of the film "My Tehran for sale", shot on location in Iran, directed by Iranian-born Adelaide resident Granaz Moussavi, one of Iran's most celebrated female poets. It follows the story of a young actress, who cannot get roles in theatres except in underground performances and tries to find a way to leave the country for Australia. The film is a powerful depiction of the situation of young people in Iran. The director was in attendance for questions and answers after the movie. \$740 was raised through the event.

The Refugee Support Group of the Unitarian Church of SA, who has been a steadfast supporter of SAWA, decided to disband. SAWA thanks the group for its past support and for the \$1,500 received as a final donation.

awareness of the needs of Afghan women and children," as stated in the SAWA Constitution.

To this end, another contact made while I was away was with the people behind the web site www.hopeforafghanchildren.org. "Hope for Afghan Children" has been created by a group of people who have become child sponsors and orphanage founders through the work of AFCECO, the Afghan Child Education and Care Organization. AFCECO runs the Mehan orphanage in Kabul which is featured in our calendar and in the film that Matthias Tomczak, SAWA's convener, made whilst in Kabul. Matthias stayed at the orphanage as a guest of AFCECO.

I was asked to write a post on the web site's blog about the work that SAWA is doing for Afghan women and children. This can be seen at www.hopeforafghanchildren.org/topics/blog/.

SAWA is developing a strong international reputation!

Barbara James

A special thank you to our loyal supporters

We want to thank all the loyal supporters who never expect to be mentioned but who continue to contribute and in so doing, help to improve the lives of women and children in Afghanistan. You are the backbone of our organization; you enable us to commit to our projects.

RAWA and the other progressive associations we support in Afghanistan gain strength from your generosity. A heartfelt thank you to you all!

Olga Enigk, Treasurer

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To become a member of SAWA subscribe to the SAWAN at <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.

Visit of SAWA secretary Barbara James to the USA

While in California on a family visit, I had the opportunity to attend to some SAWA related business.

Firstly I was able to attend an event organized by San Francisco Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Afghan Women's Mission (AWM). As WILPF is one of SAWA's loyal sponsors and as a WILPF member myself, I was keen to meet these kindred spirits and see how events are run on the other side of the world! The event was called "Afghan Women Speak Out" and featured a talk by Zoya from RAWA, who spoke passionately about the issue of President Obama preparing to widen the war in Afghanistan and commit more troops. My overall impression was that most Americans are tired of the war, they don't think it is achieving what it purported to achieve, and they are genuinely concerned about the number of Afghan civilians becoming caught up in the carnage and devastation. Unfortunately Obama has made the decision anyway.

Now is not the time for negativity however, as I felt that there was a pleasing degree of public interest and awareness of the issues faced by the Afghan people in the U.S. This can be built on, both here and overseas, indeed I feel that this is one of SAWA's most pressing objectives – "increase community

The bottom line

The Times



The Daily Telegraph

