



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 SECRETARY

For many years Pakistan was a 'safe haven' for Afghan refugees. Afghan families, torn apart by the Taliban, then later trying to escape the insecurity caused by insurgency and foreign occupation, would travel across the border into Pakistan where they attempted to lead 'normal' lives as refugees.

In just this last month, according to the UNHCR, 22,000 Afghans have crossed back into their home country citing "rising living costs, fewer jobs and the difficult security situation in Pakistan" as the main reasons for moving back. Imagine having to uproot your family like this, time and time again!

SAWA-Australia recognizes not only this situation but the many problems faced by Afghans in their homeland.

We, along with the brave women of RAWA and OPAWC, work hard to do what we can to address some of these issues, particularly faced by Afghan women; unemployment, domestic violence, illiteracy, lack of education for girls.

In Rawalpindi, Pakistan we support the Hewad High School for Afghan refugee students, run by RAWA. Rawalpindi is one of Pakistan's towns with the largest Afghan refugee population. You can read Matthias Tomczak's report from the school later in this newsletter and find out what he discovered are its most pressing needs.

In Kabul, Afghanistan, our major project is the Vocational Training Centre, run by OPAWC. SAWA funds the Literacy program and an Italian aid organization funds the handicraft classes that are also held there.

Again, you can read a report from this Centre, written by Matthias while he was there recently, later in this edition of the SAWAN. You will find out how much the Centre has grown since it opened its doors in March 2008 and what a positive effect it has had on the lives of the many women, young and old, many widowed, who have completed these courses.

We hope these women will be more employable, confident and see their future with hope.

Barbara James

International Women's Day 2010 in Kabul



For many years RAWA held a major function on International Women's Day in Kabul. More than a thousand people attended it, and prominent Afghan and international supporters were among the guests. The last such event, on 8 March 2008, assembled 1,500 guests in the largest available venue. (See SAWAN 18 of May 2008).

The deteriorating security in the country did not allow RAWA to hold the event in 2009. Now OPAWC, the Organization for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities registered as a charity under Afghan law, has taken up the tradition. 1,600 guests were again assembled to celebrate women's achievements and denounce the forces that still want Afghanistan's women to be shackled to the old traditions. Several of OPAWC's foreign supporters could be seen, and representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Economy attended the function. OPAWC's director Latifa Ahmady was the main speaker. She spoke about the women and their rights in the world and especially in Afghanistan, where women continue to be abused in many ways despite the heavy presence of the International Community. Women are still traded like animals and turn to self-immolation and suicide in desperation.

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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: Yvonne Allen

Secretary: Barbara James

Treasurer: Olga Enigk

Committee: Kath Jones, Carmel Chiu-Sutcliffe, Helen Fletcher

Newsletter Editor: Matthias Tomczak

Public Officer: Ruth Redfern

Auditor: Bob Shahinger



*OPAWC
director
Latifa
Ahmady
speaks at
the function*

OPAWC's instructors also gave short speeches on women's issues, and students from the Vocational Training Centre performed national songs, wearing the national dresses they had made themselves in the Centre, and performed two plays about the situation of women in Afghanistan today.



Students from the Vocational Training Centre sing at the function

Speakers from various ministries praised OPAWC for its work. Solidarity messages from OPAWC's foreign supporters were read out. After two hours the function ended with the presentation of merit certificates to outstanding OPAWC instructors, followed by tea for all guests.

SAWA's message to OPAWC, sent by Secretary Barbara James, was read out:

"On this day, International Women's Day 2010, SAWA-Australia sends you its heartfelt message of solidarity and support.

OPAWC has been serving women inside Afghanistan since 1999. It was registered in Afghanistan in 2002 and in Pakistan in 2005. OPAWC is a non-governmental, non-political and not-for-profit NGO working for the empowerment of Afghan women in the fields of education, health care and income generation, thereby promoting women to participate in the process of the reconstruction of a peaceful Afghanistan. OPAWC believes that Afghan women will remain enslaved and oppressed if they don't develop their potential and stand up for their rights.

SAWA-Australia applauds the efforts and initiative of OPAWC's Vocational Training Center in Kabul which continues to grow from its beginnings in March 2008 as a literacy and handicraft education provider for 90 students, to serving over 300 women, including war widows, and young girls. SAWA-Australia is proud to sponsor the Center and wishes it continued success."

A visit to Hewad High School

A report by Matthias Tomczak

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to visit Hewad High School in Rawalpindi. I met with the teachers and with representatives of RAWA and was able to discuss the needs and future directions for the school.

The school is housed in an ordinary residential building. Most rooms are the size of ordinary bedrooms, and the classes are crammed. A few square metres on one of the landings has been closed off with tin walls to make a science laboratory.

Last year the school had 14 qualified teachers (teachers who hold a diploma of education) and two assistant teachers, and there were about 280 students. This year the number of students has gone down. Many families have returned to Afghanistan, some have moved to other countries. Now the school has 173 students. There were only 5 new enrolments for year 1; they were placed in the year 2 class, so there is no year 1 class this year. The school had to terminate the employment of two teachers, leaving it with 12 qualified and 2 assistant teachers. About two thirds of the teachers are women, one third are men.

Classes are held from 8 am to 12.30 pm to allow students to work after school. To conform with Afghanistan's regulations for school hours the classes are distributed over six days of the week. Additional voluntary classes are offered during the afternoon: Mathematics for years 10, 11 and 12 from 12.30 to 1.30 pm (with 19 students: 12 girls and 7 boys) and computing for year 7 and older from 4 to 5 pm.



Some of the senior students

The most pressing need of the school is clearly a bigger building. The school has a good range of books and other literature, kept in storage because there is no room for a library. English is part of the compulsory curriculum, but there is a big need for additional voluntary English classes. Given the shortage of qualified English teachers and the large number of private language schools, English teachers command a substantially higher salary than the teachers of the school, and the school has not been able to hire an English teacher.

When asked what the school's priorities are, should SAWA be in a position to increase its support, the first requirement was funds for an English teacher. Second on the list was a digital camera with the capability to take movies in reasonable quality.

Everyone was very appreciative of and thankful for SAWA's support. Being able to set up a computer laboratory with SAWA's help was seen as particularly important; every employer's first questions are: "Can you speak English? Do you know how to use a computer?" SAWA will have to address the need for an additional English teacher.

The students are all bright and cheerful and filled my days in Rawalpindi with light. Some 37 of them live in RAWA's Watan orphanage, the home of the artists of SAWA's greeting cards. They went out of their way to make my stay a most enjoyable memory.



Lailoma with her class (see SAWAN 25, February 2010)

Adila could not coach them into speaking to me; she had to tell me about their backgrounds and motivations herself. This time all students were bright and cheerful, and several women volunteered to tell me how they had come to attend the course.



The Handicraft Program is only a few blocks away. Rakia, who used to teach in the literacy course, is its financial and organizational manager. The program is funded by an Italian aid organization and offers courses in tailoring, hand embroidery, machine embroidery and bead working. It has an excellent display room, and the

products are of excellent quality. When women have finished their training they can produce garments on their own accord or sell their work to the Centre. The Centre has just joined the Federation of Afghan Business Women, which will enable them to exhibit at trade fairs.

A visit to the Vocational Training Centre

A report by Matthias Tomczak

Following my visit to Hewad High School I travelled from Rawalpindi to Kabul to meet Latifa, the director of the Vocational Training Centre, and see how the Centre operates. In the two years since March 2008, when the Centre was established through SAWA's initiative, it has grown beyond all expectations. It is now housed in two buildings. The Literacy Program, which is funded by SAWA, had just moved into a new building three days before I arrived. The paint was still fresh, and some furniture was still missing. School principal Adila and teacher Fahima are still there. Three literacy classes were in session.



Old and young learn together in the literacy classes

The change in atmosphere from my last visit in October 2008 was remarkable. 18 months ago the first group of women went through their one-year course; all were shy and insecure, and



In the machine embroidery class

The reason why OPAWC moved the literacy course was that after having trained some 300 women over two years, Adila could not find any more women in the suburb who wanted or were allowed to enrol, so the Centre was moved to another suburb. The plan is to move the Centre every two years, slowly covering more and more suburbs. Adila described again how hard it is to convince families to send their women to the course. Often she invites mothers to sit in for a few days and see for themselves that the presence of women without head scarves does not mean that the Centre is a way to hell.

The handicraft centre, which has well equipped work rooms and an excellent showroom, will stay in the same place. Not all women who finish the literacy course are prepared to walk the long distance to the handicraft centre, but many do it. The teachers, of course, have longer and longer ways to get to work, which shows how dedicated they are.

Sometimes women ask to be admitted to the handicraft course. OPAWC's policy is not to allow any woman to enter the course before she completes the literacy course.



The students of the bead working class with their instructor

Law to pardon war crimes comes into force

Afghanistan confirmed for the first time publicly on Tuesday that it had enacted into law a blanket pardon for war crimes and human rights abuses that took place before 2001. Human rights groups have expressed dismay that the law appeared to have been enacted quietly, granting blanket immunity to members of all armed factions for acts committed during decades of war before the fall of the Taliban.

President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan had promised not to sign the measure, known as the National Stability and Reconciliation Law, when it was passed by Parliament in 2007. Human rights groups said they had learned only this year that the bill had been published in the country's official gazette, making it law. A spokesman for Mr. Karzai, Waheed Omer, said Tuesday that the bill had become law because it was approved by two-thirds of the members of Parliament and therefore did not require the president's signature.

Parliament is made up largely of lawmakers who once belonged to armed groups, some of which have been accused of war crimes by human rights groups and individual Afghans. During Mr. Karzai's eight years in power, he has included former commanders of armed factions in his government and inner circle, including a number of former warlords who have been accused by the West of war crimes and other abuses.

Mr. Karzai's two vice presidents are former leaders of armed groups whose factions squabbled for control of the capital, Kabul, in the 1990s, when thousands of civilians were killed and hundreds of thousands fled their homes.

REUTERS, 16 March 2010

Reports from local groups and donors

This is an incomplete report on SAWA activities around the country. Not every activity is communicated to the Editor, who does his best to include everyone's efforts. Please do not feel offended if your fundraising effort is not mentioned here.

"Each year the students of Toorak College in Mt Eliza, Victoria, have a free dress day to mark International Women's Day. Monies raised are donated to RAWA as we have formed links over the years and had RAWA speakers at our assemblies. Toorak is a girl's only senior school and so we chose to support female causes and SAWA is very worthy. We will continue to support your charity and hope to improve conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan. Regards, Amanda Ritter, Commerce Teacher and SRC Facilitator"

SAWA thanks Toorak College for \$425.60 received this year.

SAWA appreciates a donation of \$2,000 from the charity *Peace for the Children* to assist the children of Afghan refugee families in Pakistan. *Peace for the Children* has expressed an intention to develop this into a continuous arrangement. The details of such arrangement are still under discussion.

In **Sydney** SAWA members Joan Chapman and Dawn Atkinson were among many who attended a presentation by Canadian Ambassador to Afghanistan William Crosbie at the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA), Sydney Campus in late February.

The right to be educated, three personal stories

Several students of the Vocational Training Centre stood up in class to thank SAWA and tell me what it meant to them to attend the literacy classes. Three girls at the back of a class got up to tell me that only their mothers know that they are coming to classes; if their fathers would find out they would not be allowed to return. A shy eight year old girl had to be prompted by Adila and refused to speak, so Adila told me that her father allows her to attend the class, but when he is not at home her 15 year old brother beats her to stop her from coming.

An elderly woman told me that she has three sons, who are all educated, but her 36 year old daughter did not get any education. She dragged her daughter to the Centre against her will, and now the daughter sits next to her in the same class, very embarrassed by what her mother tells me in front of the class; but when she is asked whether she regrets having been forced to attend the course her face lights up and she says that it has been the best thing that has ever happened to her.

Matthias Tomczak



Mother and daughter attending class together

Ambassador Crosbie discussed Canada's role in Afghanistan. Canadian priorities focus on security, provision of basic services, humanitarian aid, enhanced border stability, building capacity for democratic governance through public institutions and supporting political reconciliation. The talk was attended by a large number of students from UNDA as well as many secondary and tertiary Afghan students from Sydney campuses and state schools.

SAWA was invited to have an information table and all who attended showed a genuine interest in the work of SAWA.

We thank Consul General MacDonald and the UNDA School of Arts and Sciences for the presentation as well as for their recognition of SAWA-Australia.

Dawn Atkinson



Sydney SAWA group secretary Dawn Atkinson (right) with Joan Chapman, Canadian Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan William Crosbie (centre) and Canadian Consul General Thomas MacDonald.



International Women's Day in Sydney

The **Northern Rivers group** held a fundraising concert in April and raised \$395.

Glenys Baldwin, secretary of the **Brisbane group**, spoke at the May breakfast of the Sunshine Coast branch of the Federation of the University of Queensland. SAWA is thankful for the donation of \$100 from the branch.

In WA Chilla Bulbeck, one of the secretaries of the **Perth and regional WA group**, gave a talk to the Theosophical Order of

Service, one of SAWA's good supporters. SAWA thanks the Service for their cheque over \$300.

The **Hobart group** sent \$458 from handicraft sales in January and has since promoted SAWA at the International Women's Day in March.

The young **Riverina group** sent \$738 of donations already in January and another \$100 from handicraft sales in March.

SAWA joins BHP Billiton's Matched Giving Program

SAWA is now a registered partner of the BHP Billiton Matched Giving Program. Under this program BHP Billiton matches all donations to a registered charity from its employees dollar for dollar.

The first contribution from the program came two months ago, when SAWA received a cheque over \$90 from BHP to match a donation from one of its employees in Port Hedland.

The program is not restricted to personal donations. An employee in Perth recently raised \$15,000 for a local charity through a fundraising event and received another \$15,000 from BHP. This should be an inspiration to all of us who have connections to BHP Billiton staff!

SAWA financial statement for 2009

2009	income	expenditure
bank balance 1 January	17,666.52	
revenue (1)	93,445.88	
total funds available for 2009	111,112.40	
transfer to RAWA (2)		29,704.14
transfer to OPAWC (3)		44,800.00
administration (4)		951.60
total expenditure		75,455.74
bank balance 31 December (5)		35,656.66
Balance income/expenditure	111,112.40	111,112.40

- (1) Donations and membership, interest from term deposits.
- (2) Support for Hewad High School, including a new social support fund for staff in need
- (3) Support for the Vocational Training Centre
- (4) Postage of newsletters, website maintenance, auditor's report etc.
- (5) Reserves held to cover payments for Hewad High School and the Vocational Training Centre due in January 2010

New "Background" section on SAWA's website

A new "Background" section on the SAWA website documents statements and opinions from organizations and individuals on developments in Afghanistan. While SAWA does not share all positions expressed in these contributions, SAWA nevertheless recognizes the need for open debate and exchange of views. We encourage all members and supporters to visit the new section at www.sawa-australia.org/background.html and send us contributions for publication.