



Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan

FROM THE EDITOR

The recent incorporation of SAWA-Australia in NSW marks the beginning of a new level of Australian support for Afghanistan's suffering women. SAWA now exists as two state associations: SAWA (SA) and SAWA (NSW). This is reflected in the new format of SAWA's newsletter. The SAWAN will continue as SAWA's national newsletter but now incorporate news pages from the two state associations.

One of the first decisions of the SAWA (NSW) committee was to take responsibility for the support of Hewad High School. Donations for the school should therefore now be sent to SAWA (NSW). The details are on page 2.

The establishment of state associations and the new cooperation agreement with Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA described on page 3 are important steps to raise the support for Afghanistan's women. The demand for funds is always larger than what we can send, and we have to continue to strive for increased donation income. On behalf of the students of Hewad High School and the women in the Vocational Training Centre we thank all our supporters for their generosity.

Matthias Tomczak

Dialogue through art: Australian and Afghan women share their world through images and text

In July 2009 Melbourne artist Gali Weiss approached SAWA with an idea. "Living in Australia," Gali wrote, "I have been fortunate and privileged to live and work in a place where I have had the freedom and encouragement to realize my potential. The conditions of Afghan women and children and their struggle to pursue what I view as a basic right to literacy has moved me in particular. I feel compelled to join in some action towards relieving this injustice."

"Apart from donating money for their cause, the plight of Afghan women makes me want to actually do something. The action I can best contribute I think is through what I am most well-equipped to do, that is, to promote the cause through the arts and education. It involves a collaboration between Australian women artists and Afghan women and girls. It would involve images in book-like forms that would be created in Australia and would somehow be transported to Afghanistan to be overlaid with writing by women and girls - any kind of writing in any language, whether stories or poetry or words

alone. The books would then return - somehow - to Australia and exhibited."

After initial discussions between Gali and Barbara Kameniar, SAWA's Melbourne contact, the idea turned into reality. Gali contacted friends in the Melbourne art community, and six months later 14 artists had produced a series of concertina-type books in many different styles. When Matthias visited the Vocational Training Centre in April 2010 he took the books with him and handed them over to Latifa, the Centre's director.

It was interesting to see the reaction of the women. At first sight they were taken in by naturalistic scenes such as the lino prints of Annelise Scott but puzzled by Jennifer Kamp's expressive design. But Matthias asked Latifa to discuss the books with the classes and allow the women time to think about what to write.

Six months later 36 books arrived in Adelaide by mail. They are all absolutely beautiful, and the combination of Australian art with Dari text written by women who a year ago were illiterate is deeply moving. Their full impact cannot be seen in the small reproductions shown here; nevertheless it is hoped that they give some idea of the dialogue between Australian artists and their sisters in Afghanistan.



Naheeda Ali Ahmad and Khatol Niyaz Mohammad work on their contribution to the art project

Gali and Barbara are now working on getting funds from possible sponsors to prepare a traveling exhibition of the books. It will include summaries of the text, together with photos of the artists and writers, and some full translations. It is also hoped that the complete texts with the history of the Vocational Training Centre will be published in an exhibition catalogue, which will then remain for sale into the future.

SAWA OBJECTIVES

- Raise funds to assist in development and relief projects for Afghan women and children,
- Increase community awareness of the needs of Afghan women and children;
- Encourage women, men and young people to join SAWA-Australia state associations;
- Set up SAWA/RAWA support groups; and
- Encourage cooperation among SAWA-Australia state associations through participation in national SAWA network forums.

18 months after Gali's first email the books are back in Melbourne, waiting to be shown around the country. In the meantime, here are two examples. More can be seen, with brief annotations, at www.sawa-australia.org/art/index.html. The original books without the Afghan text can be seen at www.galiweiss.com/collaborations.html.



Two of the 36 books: Mah Gul's book, artist Gali Weiss (top), Mansora's book, artist Krystal Seigerman (bottom)

A student profile from Hewad High School



When Zarifa, now a student in year 12, was just one year old, her family escaped the wars of Kabul to take refuge in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. They have been living in this city for the past 16 years. Zarifa lives with her parents, one sister and two brothers. Her father was a carpenter in Kabul but during the civil war of 1992-96 his shop was destroyed and looted. When he came to Pakistan, he and his two young sons were

forced to work in the carpentry shop of a Pakistani, who paid them very little. They had to pay the house rent, gas and electricity bill and other daily expenditures at home and this money wasn't enough. So Zarifa's mother worked in people's homes, cooking, cleaning and washing their clothes.

When Zarifa turned six years old she was very interested in studying, but the poor financial situation at home made it impossible for her to attend school. Her mother sent Zarifa to study with a woman who was their neighbour.

Zarifa says, "I was eight and the fact that I couldn't go to school like other children pained me a lot. One day a woman from our neighbourhood told me that RAWA has several schools where students don't have to pay money." Zarifa was one of the first students in Hewad High School and has been studying there from the 3rd grade till now.

The financial situation of the family is much worse now as her father injured his hand three years ago and is no longer able to work. Her mother developed a back problem from her hard work. Zarifa's only sister has Hepatitis B, a very common

disease in Pakistan that is very expensive to treat. Zarifa is forced to work in people's homes instead of her mother and earn money for her sister's medicines.

Zarifa says, "Life is very hard. I wake up early in the morning every day and go to other people's houses to work. I also work after school. My sister's life is very important for me. With all these problems, I am glad I can come to school and study. Maybe I will be able to find a better job after I finish school and earn more money for my sister's treatment."

New membership arrangements

Usually the arrival of the new year means that it is time to renew your membership. This year it is also the time to make a decision. As reported in the last SAWAN, SAWA-Australia has been restructured into two state associations: SAWA-Australia (SA) and SAWA-Australia (NSW). Both associations work for a common goal and assist each other in the funding of SAWA's support projects, but they operate independently in the areas of fundraising, publicity and awareness building.

When you renew your membership for 2011 you have to decide to which state association you want to belong. There is no compulsion for SAWA members in NSW and SA to be a member of their respective state associations, although in the absence of contrary reasons it makes best sense to be a member of the association in the respective state. SAWA members in other states have a choice of membership with SAWA (SA) or SAWA (NSW). It is of course also possible to support both state associations through membership in both, as some members have already chosen.

So please renew your membership now and send your membership fee to the bank account of your chosen state association. You find the bank details on the relevant page of this SAWAN. You will receive confirmation of your membership from the state association of your choice. An automatic repeat transfer from your bank account to the account of your chosen state association is always the best method to assure that you will remain financial into the future.

New donation arrangements

SAWA (SA) and SAWA (NSW) agreed to share the responsibility for SAWA's two major support projects. The support for Hewad High School will be managed by SAWA (NSW). Donors who want to direct their support to the school should therefore send their donations to NSW; address and bank account details can be found in the masthead of page 4.

The support for the Vocational Training Centre will be managed by SAWA (SA). Donors who want to support the Centre should send their donations to SA; address and bank account details can be found in the masthead of page 3.

For donations to the Vocational Training Centre it is now possible to receive a receipt for taxation purposes through a special APHEDA account. The details of the procedure for tax-deductible donations are described under "Partnership with Union Aid Abroad – APHEADA" on page 3.



Convener: Matthias Tomczak **Secretary:** Barbara James **Treasurer:** Christine Tomczak
Committee: Carmel Chiu-Sutcliffe, Libby Drew, Kath Jones, Ruth Redfern.
Newsletter editor: Matthias Tomczak **Public Officer:** Ruth Redfern **Auditor:** Bob Shahinger

Fundraising dinner in Adelaide

SAWA-Australia (SA) held a wonderful fundraising dinner at the Pondok Bali Indonesian Restaurant on 16 November. Amid the tinkling sounds and striking Rama figures adorning the restaurant walls, 39 people enjoyed good company and a plentiful, tasty banquet, Bali-style. A silent auction was held, made possible by many generous local businesses and individuals. \$2,000 was raised for the Vocational Training Centre for the education of war widows in Kabul, Afghanistan. Many thanks must go to everyone who attended, donated money, goods or services, and to Junaidi and staff at Pondok Bali.

Sincere thanks for donations to the silent auction to: Michael Hall, Maria Mackenzie, Yvonne Allen, Matthias and Chris Tomczak; the Oxfam Shop, Adelaide; Chelsea Cinema; Hove Pharmacy; The Salon, Kensington; Parade Cellars, Norwood;



Fabric of Life, North Adelaide; House, Norwood Parade; Trak Cinema; Chem-Mart, Marryatville. Special thanks to Scott Bain for designing tickets and poster.

Barbara James

Several Afghan supporters who attended the dinner helped us to understand the Dari text in the art books. Here

Reyhana studies one of the books to prepare a translation.

Partnership with Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA

SAWA and its supporters can be rightfully proud that all donations received are sent to Afghanistan without any deductions. SAWA can do that because it operates entirely through volunteers and therefore has extremely low administrative overheads. But operating as an association of volunteers has its drawbacks. It makes it difficult to receive accreditation and tax deductibility from the Australian government, and as a result donations to SAWA are not generally tax-deductible.

To offer supporters the option of tax-deductible donations SAWA went into partnership with Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA, the accredited overseas aid organization of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Supporters who want to avail themselves of this option should make cheques out to APHEDA and send them to APHEDA, Level 3, 377-383 Sussex Street, Sydney NSW 2000, accompanied by a note

that the donation is for the Vocational Training Centre in Afghanistan. Donations made directly from your own bank account have to be made to Commonwealth Bank Haymarket Branch, BSB 062-006, account number: 10049043, account name: "APHEDA Inc. Overseas Projects Account No 2". It is essential to send APHEDA an email or letter with the details (date and amount) of your donation and **specify Afghanistan as the reason for the donation**, or your payment may go into the general APHEDA account inadvertently.

Compared to legislation of the USA and Europe the Australian legislation that regulates overseas aid is rather restrictive. To be eligible for tax deductibility, donations have to be for development or for emergency relief. Schools, orphanages and hospitals do not qualify as development; in the eyes of the Australian government such institutions are part of the general social services that have to be provided by governments.

We at SAWA know of course that our support for Hewad High School contributes to Afghanistan's development, by providing future doctors, nurses, engineers and many other important professions. But this does not change the legal position that support for schools does not qualify for tax deductibility.

One consequence of the legal situation is that donations channeled through APHEDA have to be allocated to our support for the Vocational Training Centre. Because responsibility for the Centre's support lies with SAWA (SA), the partnership agreement is between APHEDA and SAWA (SA).

As a major NGO, Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA cannot operate through volunteers alone. Donations channeled through APHEDA therefore attract a 5% administration fee, still lower than deductions made by many other NGOs.

Not everyone requires a tax-deductible receipt for donations. We should not lose sight of the needs of Hewad High School. So if tax deductibility is not important for you, you should continue to send your donations directly to SAWA.

Our partnership with APHEDA reaches further than tax deductibility. APHEDA has already begun to promote our work through its own publications, and discussions are underway to apply for funding from AusAID to expand the Vocational Training Centre and turn it into a self-supporting institution.

Thank you to donors and helpers

Several major donations were received during the last few months. We thank Soroptimists Adelaide for a donation of \$500. The Theosophical Society Perth raised \$423 through handicraft sales. The Latrobe/Plenty Region of the AEU sent us \$1000. Our thanks go to these and to all other supporters who gave donations large or small. A special thank you goes to Henry Collins in New Zealand for making a donation instead of sending Christmas cards to his family and friends. And a great thank you to Reyhana, Aziza and Razia for translating all the books of Gali's art project!



Convener: Dawn Atkinson **Assistant Convener:** Shirley Allen **Secretary:** Karen Pakula

Treasurer: Carolyn Allen

Committee: Maryellen Galbally, Margaret Hetherton, June Lunsman, Herma Sieper, Helen Toner.

Afghanistan: Paralegal training and community education on violence against women

On International Human Rights Day December 10 2010, SAWA (NSW) representatives attended the launch of the ActionAid project "*Training Paralegals on the issue of Violence against Women in Kabul, Afghanistan*".

Activities of this project include identifying well known and respected women in communities in Kabul to become paralegals and assist female survivors of violence; training in women's rights; paralegal training in court procedure; psychological support training and mapping violence cases in the community throughout the project. Once trained the paralegals will establish community groups to increase awareness of women's rights.

The community based paralegals will be able to provide help to women who survive violence, providing them with psychosocial support and refer them to relevant bodies such as healthcare, legal services or security.

87% of women "are beaten on a regular basis" according to a UNIFEM survey while 80% of marriages are with women under 16 years of age.

Key partners in this project include Afghanistan Independent Bar Association and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Guest speakers at the launch included Hon. Susan Ryan, journalist Tracey Spicer and ActionAid's Protection Advisor Sophie Reid- Hamilton.

I am sure all SAWA members and supporters will join with SAWA (NSW) in applauding all involved in the development and implementation of this special project. Those requiring information please contact sawa.nsw@sawa-australia.org

Fifth Annual SAWA Lunch in Sydney

We thank all SAWA (NSW) supporters who helped in making the 2010 lunch a great success: The management and staff of Finola's Restaurant and Balmain Bowling Club; Locks Hair; Tali Gallery; Stem and Hill of Content Bookshop.

As 2011 is the centenary of International Women's Day the lunch speaker referred to the international network of women's organisations that are involved in supporting Afghan women in their struggle for basic human rights for the people of Afghanistan. The event raised \$6,294.00 and further increased the membership of SAWA (NSW).

While SAWA-Australia (NSW) was only Incorporated in October 2010 and we are still finding our feet the Committee is very pleased with the response and support received since our formation.

Hewad High School

Small Things Matter is a group of men who meet for dinner a few times each year. On the night one man nominates a cause to be supported that evening. Steve Gray nominated RAWA and through SAWA (NSW) he and his friends donated \$2,150. This donation was used to assist SAWA (NSW) to pay the 2011 initial quarterly payment to the funding of Hewad High School in Rawalpindi. It has been agreed in principle that SAWA (NSW) should aim to cover Hewad High school's budget of US\$25,532 less US \$6000

received from Japan. A formal decision on this must wait clarification of our fundraising possibilities.

SAWA (NSW) Committee recognize that details of the Hewad High School Budget for 2011 suggest that the school is struggling to afford salaries of some teachers. SAWA (NSW) has transferred US\$5,200 as the initial payment.

We welcome all founding members of SAWA (NSW) and we thank all who have made donations to the support of women and children of Afghanistan.

Lunch for Malalai Joya

UNIFEM hosted a lunch for Malalai Joya when she made a brief visit to Sydney in November 2010. Along with 48 other women Dawn Atkinson, SAWA (NSW) Convener, was invited to attend. Malalai Joya spoke of the essential importance of education to the future of Afghanistan and the need to develop understanding and implementation of human rights throughout Afghanistan.

Human Rights education in Afghanistan

Three members of SAWA (NSW) attended a talk in November last year at the University of Technology, Sydney, by the visiting Deputy Director of the Afghan Human Rights Commission, Fahim Hakim. He spoke about the work the Commission has been doing in Human Rights Education as he believes education is essential for the achievement of human rights in Afghanistan.

Prior to the Russian invasion, education was available to girls and boys, to a reasonable standard. In reaction to the invasion, radical Islamic teaching increased and violence was institutionalised in the school curriculum, from Kindergarten onwards. U.S. aid was used to print texts.

In 1999 a peace education movement began, initially amongst refugees. Revised texts were produced, removing graphic pictures and examples of violence and were smuggled into schools. Although the Human Rights Commission was set up by the current government and Afghanistan is a signatory to almost all international human rights conventions, the government has not given practical support, nor has it legislated to support human rights. Moreover, outside of the capital, local groups have control and half of the TV channels are controlled by warlords. Greatly increased poverty, long-held cultural beliefs and accusations of being anti-Islamic are all difficulties for the Commission to overcome.

The Commissioners therefore have to work on many different levels and reach a wide range of people to be effective. Commissioner Hakim outlined the many and varied ways in which they are working, with their staff of 650 many of whom are outside of Kabul.

Important areas include: teacher training (a problem we are aware of through the difficulties Hewad High School has in finding trained teachers); police and army education against the use of torture; raising awareness amongst government workers and the public generally; education in democratic voting; translation of texts into languages other than the mainstream ones; outreach for women's literacy; cultural change to recognise women's rights; symbolic support in the form of awards, monuments and celebration of Human Rights days.

Although the challenges and difficulties are great, it was heartening to learn how much is being done through this Commission which is largely funded by the United Nations.