



## Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan

### FROM THE EDITOR

*I do not want to make many words as we go into a new year. In 2011 SAWA managed to fulfil its commitments and responsibilities towards RAWA and OPAWC and could even expand into assistance in the health field, but it was sometimes touch and go. 2012 will not be easier. Please read the reports on our projects, see how successful they are and keep the women of Afghanistan in mind in these economically challenging times. Do not let our economic difficulties turn into a life-threatening crisis for the poor.*

Matthias Tomczak

### Hamoon Clinic: a patient's story



A mother who lost her three young sons, who lost 15 other members of her family during bombing raids of the USA, what do you expect she has in her life? I am full of pain, sorrows. I want to die, there is fire in my

heart, I am burning for my handsome sons. Their children have become orphans. I bring the children to this clinic many times. Thank you, OPAWC, for running this clinic, it is really needed for this poor society of mostly widows and orphans; they give the children medicine and some food like cereals, this support reduces my financial problem.

I was sick, several times I went to private clinics, but the medicine didn't bring any changes. I have come from Roken, a district of Farah, I have come by foot as there are no hire cars in my village. It took hours to arrive in the center of the city. But when I come to this clinic, I feel a little better, as I can see other women who have pain like me, who lost members of their family, too. The clinic personnel are good people, they know how to talk with a mother full of pain, they treat me very well, they listen to my stories and always give me a chance to get a registration number. I am praying for all of you, God may bless you for your help and support. We poor and lonely women need your help, please don't forget us, we are in need of your support. I want to say if it is possible please provide more registration numbers. I can see a lot of women waiting for getting a number, but soon the distribution of numbers is finished. Thank you again.

Shah bibi-Said alam

*Note: The Clinic hands out registration numbers every morning for appointments. Patients who do not receive a registration number have to come back the next day. See page 2 for more information.*

### UN: A long way to go for women's rights

*The following text appeared on the United Nations website <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1783&ctl=Details&mid=1882&ItemID=15747> on 23 November 2011.*

There is a long way to go before the rights of Afghan women are fully protected, says a United Nations report released today, noting that the Government has not yet succeeded in applying a two-year-old landmark law to the vast majority of cases of violence against women. The 2009 Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) law criminalises child marriage, forced marriage, selling and buying women for the purpose or under the pretext of marriage, *baad* (giving away a woman or girl to settle a dispute), forced self-immolation and 17 other acts of violence against women, including rape and beating. It also specifies punishment for perpetrators.

"Judges, prosecutors and police in many parts of Afghanistan have begun to use the new law, which is a positive development, but unfortunately only in a small percentage of violence against women cases," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay.

The report released by the UN human rights office (OHCHR) and the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), entitled *A Long Way to Go: Implementation of the Elimination of Violence against Women law in Afghanistan*, found both progress and gaps in the implementation of the law from March 2010 to September this year.

Comprehensive official statistics on the number of cases of violence against women in Afghanistan are not available and most incidents are unreported, according to the report, which was released ahead of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is observed annually on 25 November.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission registered 2,299 incidents of violence against women that could be defined as crimes under the EVAW law between March 2010 and March this year. UN human rights officials found that prosecutors in 28 provinces opened cases in 26 per cent of the 2,299 incidents, or 594 cases. They filed indictments in seven per cent, or 155 cases, and primary courts relied on the EVAW law as the basis of their judgments in only four per cent of total incidents, or 101 cases.

"The justice sector in some provinces has applied the EVAW law which is encouraging. But the low number of cases prosecuted and tried shows that a much more active collective effort by justice system actors, Government decision-makers and others is needed to urge judicial and local authorities to apply the law to all cases of violence against women," said Staffan de Mistura, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of UNAMA.

He added that progress on the status of Afghan women over the last 10 years is undermined by uneven implementation of the EVAW law.

### 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.

The report determined that many cases of violence against Afghan women were withdrawn or mediated, including serious crimes that would require prosecution. Some murder cases and other serious crimes criminalised under the EVAW law were instead prosecuted under the Penal Code or Sharia law. This sometimes resulted in acquittal of perpetrators, reduction of charges to less serious crimes, convictions with lighter sentences and women victims themselves being accused of "moral crimes."

"As long as women and girls are subject to violence with impunity that violates their human rights, little meaningful and sustainable progress for women's rights can be achieved in Afghanistan," said Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA.

"Ensuring rights for Afghan women – such as their participation in public life, including in the peace and reconciliation process and equal opportunities in education and employment – requires not only legal safeguards on paper, but speedy and full enforcement of the EVAW law," she stated.

To improve implementation of the EVAW law, the report makes 32 recommendations to the Government and its international partners, including raising greater awareness of the law among Afghan women and men and within all levels of the Government, and having the Supreme Court, Ministry of Interior and Attorney General's Office instruct all officials to apply the law consistently, rapidly and efficiently.

### Hamoon Clinic, a brief overview

*Hamoon Clinic, or Hamoon Health Centre, is in Farah province, the largest and poorest province of Afghanistan. Several months ago it was in danger of closure for lack of funds. SAWA (SA) has contacts with the Planet Wheeler Foundation, the charity of Maureen and Tony Wheeler, founders of Lonely Planet Publications. Thanks to the generosity of Planet Wheeler, who gave \$30,000 for the clinic, Hamoon Clinic can continue its important work.*

*The following extract from the latest report can convey how important the clinic is for the women of Farah province. The full report can be read at [www.sawa-australia.org/hamoon/index.html](http://www.sawa-australia.org/hamoon/index.html).*

Hamoon Clinic or Health Center is a small medical center in Farah province, situated at the far west of Afghanistan close to the border of Iran. Despite its small size it plays a great role in providing free treatment to the poor people of Farah, as there is no proper government hospital in the province. The clinic provides basic health care to Farah people, particularly women and children who have been denied access to proper health care. Since Farah lies at the far west of the country and has seen little attention from aid agencies and government, the need for such a clinic was strongly felt.

Health care in Farah province is terrible. Despite having the largest area of all provinces and a population of around 900,000 people, only one ill-equipped hospital exists in the entire province. People go to major cities like Herat and Kandahar even for minor treatment. Women and children have been the main victims of that lack of facilities. Hundreds of women have been reported to have died from gynecological diseases.

The clinic has two doctors, one gynecologist and one medical and child specialist. Both together treat around 150 patients every day. All treatment is free, including medicine and doctor's consultation fee. The number of patients visiting the clinic is high, but the number of patients per day is limited through a registration process on arrival. In Afghanistan's male-dominated society women are rarely shown to doctors by their male family members. Women and

children are therefore given precedence over male patients at the Health Center because they are the most vulnerable and needy people and form the main part (95%) of the patients visiting the center.

Almost nine years have gone by since the clinic was first opened to patients and during that period the Health Center has earned a reputation of being



the only reliable medical center of the province. As the entire population depended on the ill-equipped state-run hospital, establishment of this clinic was a blessing for them. People undertake journeys that take hours from very remote villages and wait hours and sometimes days for their turn. Despite the limited number of patients being registered daily, the result and impact of this clinic on the people has been significant. In Afghanistan, particularly in remote areas like Farah, a very great difficulty people are facing is the problem of health care. For most people it is almost impossible to pay the exorbitant doctor fees and medicine charged elsewhere.

### Progressive Afghan parties meet in Lahore



Malalai Joya was one of the participants of the first ever conference of progressive and democratic forces of Afghanistan and Pakistan held in Lahore on 21-22 December 2011. Ten organizations of the region agreed "to organise coordinated days of action and other initiatives at the political as well as the cultural and educational levels." With regard to the situation of women they state: "It is commonly portrayed in the Western media that the situation of women in Afghanistan has drastically improved since the NATO intervention, with the protection of women being used as an excuse to justify the occupation of Afghanistan as well as military operations in Pakistan. We reject these claims as false and point out that after 10 years of occupation, Afghanistan has been awarded the rank of the most dangerous country for women." The full text of the declaration is available at [sawa-australia.org/background.html](http://sawa-australia.org/background.html).



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The regional groups in WA, Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, the Riverina and Northern Rivers are affiliated with SAWA-Australia (SA) and contribute to the support for the Vocational Training Centre and Hamoon Clinic.

### Quiz night in Adelaide

On a warm spring evening on Friday 18 November 2011 about 60 people gathered at the Box Factory in Adelaide for the Inaugural SAWA (SA) / WILPF (SA) Quiz Night. SAWA (SA) joined forces with our strong supporters WILPF (SA) to present a fun-filled, often intellectually challenging night to support the Women's Vocational Training Centre in Kabul, Afghanistan. Everyone entered into the spirit of the night, both organizations gave an interesting account of their aims and projects, there was a diverse range of goods and prizes and the quiz mistress was most entertaining!

Some highlights included guests attempting to perform the Haka, sing, draw and write (and perform) poetry!

It has already been suggested that we plan another quiz night next year or even that it becomes an annual event.

Our thanks to everyone who came along or supported the night by way of donations or in many other ways. It was a great example of teamwork in action! SAWA and WILPF shared the proceeds evenly; SAWA's share of the money raised was \$943.

*Barbara James*



*The haka, nearly as menacing as the New Zealand All Blacks!*

### A successful special appeal

As 2011 came to its end and the date for the annual money transfer to OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre approached there was a real possibility that SAWA (SA) could not honour its pledge to support the Literacy courses. There was a shortfall of \$1,415. Ten days before Christmas we sent out a special appeal to all members. The response was wonderful; we covered the shortfall in less than a week.

Our sincere thanks go out to all who responded so generously. Our support of \$40,000 for 2012 has already been transferred to Kabul. Unfortunately the urgency of the situation did not allow us to send the appeal by mail, so we could only reach those members who gave us their email addresses. Members for whom we only have postal addresses will find a copy of the appeal as an insert to this SAWAN.

It is not too late to respond to the appeal. Our support for the Literacy Centre has been the same for several years, but the cost of living in Kabul has gone up dramatically. Most goods including basic foodstuff has to be imported from Pakistan, and the deteriorating situation on the roads has led to massive increases in transport costs. The price for one litre of oil, for example, has risen from 50-56 to 110 Afghanis. We would like to increase our support but depend on your generosity. If more members could decide to organize regular monthly donations our support for the Literacy Centre would be secured into the future.

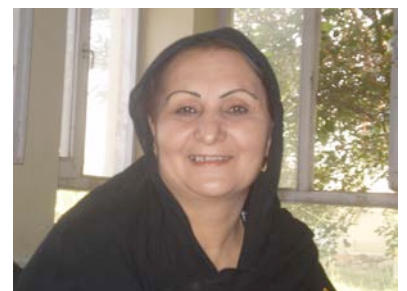
### The Literacy Centre on Afghanistan's national radio

*The following is an excerpt from the Annual Report for 2011. The full report is available at [sawa-australia.org/vocationalcenter](http://sawa-australia.org/vocationalcenter).*

In 2010 the OPAWC teachers had to run a hard campaign to encourage women to join the literacy classes. This year was different; the beginners' class that is established every year found its students in a different way. Most of the students came by their own accord and got their registration number. Families living near the center had gained confidence and sent their daughters to the center; even the mullah, who had spread propaganda in 2010 and asked the men of the area not to send their wives and daughters to the literacy course, has sent his wife to the center to learn. This is the biggest success OPAWC's Literacy Center has achieved and shows that summer is on its way after a hard winter.

OPAWC gave special attention to the Literacy Center and allocated the most hard working teachers to it. The result of all the efforts has now become visible to the public. Last year the Literacy Section of the Ministry of Education organized a nationwide survey related to literacy training over all of Afghanistan. OPAWC's Literacy Course at Spin Kalay received the highest scores for learning, regularity, discipline and punctuality. The National Radio of Afghanistan selected OPAWC's Literacy Section to record the methods they teach at the center. The program was broadcast in all provinces of Afghanistan and the center promoted as an example for other courses.

*Fatema, one of OPAWC's hard working teachers*





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### **Saving the lives of Mothers and Babies.**

Can you imagine a story like the one below happening in Australia?

A woman who is eight months pregnant with her seventh child starts to feel pain at home in an Afghan village in Badakhshan. Her husband is persuaded to find help and goes off on a donkey. He returns an hour later with an old woman who has frequently helped with births; she has no midwifery training and is illiterate. The baby is delivered. The old woman tells the family not to worry about the mother's bleeding. They are temporarily reassured by this advice, but as the mother looks increasingly ill and her breathing becomes difficult, they know they should take her to a clinic, but that is six hours walk away and impossible at night time. Within hours the mother is dead, and an hour later the baby also dies. The father is left to care for six young children but is not skilled in keeping children clean or cooking and the effort at home is a drain on his capacity to earn. He is too poor to provide them with adequate clothing and food and there is no effective help in the extended family or the village. As well as the suffering, grief and loss from preventable deaths, a whole family is undermined by the death of the mother. [This is a précis of Sangima's story in Veil of Tears: Afghan's Stories of Loss in Childbirth published by IRIN, part of the UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2009.]

The statistics indicate that this is a situation repeated many times in Afghanistan. Time Magazine (Oct 11, 2011) reports that about 18,000 Afghan women die during childbirth every year and that Afghanistan is ranked as the worst place to give birth, followed by Niger and Chad in Africa. Time also points out that 60% of all births are not attended to by skilled health professionals. Certainly a great deal has been done since the American invasion to set up clinics and to improve the much worse situation which occurred under the Taliban, but much more needs to be done.

The Birthing Kits assembled by SAWA NSW will be distributed to pregnant women in rural Afghanistan and are one way of lessening maternal deaths. The Birthing Kit Foundation (Australia) provides the contents of the kits and each costs a paltry \$A3.00. ([www.birthingkitfoundation.org.au](http://www.birthingkitfoundation.org.au)). Each kit contains a 1m. square plastic sheet, a piece of soap, a pair of latex gloves, a sterile scalpel blade, 3 cords to tie the umbilical cord and gauze squares all contained in a small plastic press seal bag.

The kits offer the possibility of a clean home birth - an important advance when WHO calculates that Sepsis /infection account for about 11.6 per cent of birth deaths in the area which includes Afghanistan. Injuries and infections, often painful, disabling, embarrassing and lifelong, affect many times that number. See below date for the next assembly of kits.

*Photo: Birthing Kit assembly day February 2009  
at Leichhardt Rowing Club.*

### **Hewad High School for Afghan Refugee Children in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.**

As the result of a directive from the Afghan Ministry of Education that boys and girls must be educated separately, the school has had to develop separate morning and afternoon sessions and has moved to larger premises to accommodate its almost 250 students. SAWA NSW has promised to meet the annual budget of Hewad - \$28,638 for 2012. This modest amount employs a Principal and 20 teachers and covers all overheads of the school.

### **Thank You**

A warm thank you to all who generously paired our Christmas Card with the purchase of a Birthing Kit. Over 800 of the 1000 kits have been donated through this last minute appeal. Next Christmas we plan to offer a card earlier for those who would like to mark the Birthday of Christ with this help to Afghan women facing the trauma of birth in isolated rural areas.

Thank you also to all who supported the Sixth Annual SAWA Lunch at Finola's Restaurant on 17<sup>th</sup> November which raised over \$3,000 for Hewad High School.

A special thank you to Members who are planning to host an event in their own home for their friends as a private fundraiser for SAWA - a coffee morning, a dinner party or a lunch. If you are planning a SAWA fundraiser, please contact us at [info@sawansw.org.au](mailto:info@sawansw.org.au) so we can provide you with brochures, information and other assistance.

### **Coming Events**

**Birthing Kit Assembly Day - Monday 5 March 2012, 10am**  
at the Leichhardt Rowing Club, Glover St, Leichhardt. We will be assembling 1000 kits so if you can help please advise on 0425 718 996 or at [info@sawansw.org.au](mailto:info@sawansw.org.au). Morning tea will be provided.

