



### **From the Editor**

*When Britain, having vanquished China in the Opium War, forced the defeated country to sign the unjust Treaty of Nanking in 1842, one of its key determinations was that no British subject would be tried under Chinese law. It allowed the foreign intruder to follow its interests by any means considered suitable with guaranteed impunity. The extraterritorial powers lasted for more than 100 years.*

*When on 10 January this year Barack Obama announced that foreign troops in Afghanistan would have a "very limited" role in the country – training and "mopping up terrorist remnants" – he also stated that all US troops will operate under legal immunity. They may "accidentally" kill civilians, on the road or in action, but they will not have to fear prosecution by an Afghan court.*

*Hamid Karzai is happy to sell his country's sovereignty, because he knows that the continued presence of US troops is needed to prop up his government and the dozens of warlords that depend on western support. With the warlords in power, what will be the future of the women of Afghanistan? Will extraterritorial powers again prevail for more than 100 years?*

*Matthias Tomczak*

### **Why SAWA supports Afghanistan's women**

Many countries around the world are dangerous places for women. Rape, mutilation and violence are engrained in many societies – even our own society is not entirely free from it. Hundreds of

NGOs and other charities have made it their objective to assist women to escape from oppression. They all do valuable work, and the women who benefit are thankful for their support.

At first glance SAWA-Australia does not seem to be all that different from other women's charities. Even in Afghanistan there are many charitable organizations besides SAWA that support girls' schools, adult literacy centres and hospitals. But superficial similarities should not distract from the fact that SAWA is guided by a clear aim that reaches further than mere charity. SAWA's aim is to assist the women of Afghanistan to bring about a fundamental change, to recover the freedom their grandmothers had and contribute to the building of a modern democratic country.

Afghanistan was not always a country blighted by fundamentalism. In the countryside traditional life kept women in shackles, but under the reign of King Zahir Shah, who ruled from 1933 to 1973, Afghanistan was well on its way towards a modern industrialized Islamic state. Women worked and studied side by side with men and played an increasing part in the country's economy.

To defeat the fundamentalist forces that control Afghanistan today requires the unanimous effort of all democratic forces of the country. Women play a decisive role in that process; without equal rights and guaranteed security for all women Afghanistan will never become a modern democratic state, and these rights can only be secured if they are laid down under secular law. SAWA therefore sees its work not so much as charity – charitable as it may be – but as a contribution to Afghanistan's move to recover its lost freedoms and move on towards a secular democratic state.

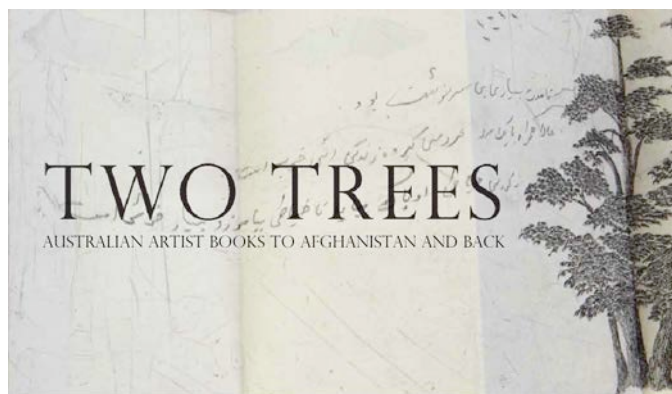
The key to allow women to take their rightful place in society is education. SAWA's support for schools began in 2004. It expanded into adult literacy education in 2008. Several women who learned to read and write under that program have gone back to their home provinces and begun to teach the girls of their villages. Now some of the refugees who attended the SAWA-supported Hewad High School in Pakistan are entering university, to become the future doctors, teachers, lawyers, engineers and leaders of Afghanistan. In 2012 SAWA started a scholarship program to support them.

SAWA's support projects span a range of activities, but they are all linked together as elements of a single program: to allow women to contribute to the creation of a modern democratic Afghanistan.



*Anticlockwise from top left. 1970s: A bus driver in a scene from a government movie to attract women into the workforce; 2011: a student of RAWA's Hewad High School receives an award for excellence; 2012: an OPAWC adult literacy student in a reading competition; 2013: Hassina, an AFCECO student of Information Technology at the Gharjistan Institute of Higher Education*

## A new book tells the stories of Afghan women



Our regular supporters will remember that more than two years ago Gali Weiss with 13 other artists presented a set of folding books – lino prints, etchings, drawings and other styles – to the women of the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul. She asked them to use their newly acquired skills to write their personal stories, or whatever they considered important, into the books. The books came back after six months and are now vivid testimonies of friendship between the women of Afghanistan and Australia. (The complete story can be read at [www.sawa-australia.org/art/](http://www.sawa-australia.org/art/))



The collection of books is now held by the State Library of Queensland, but it will soon be available for

everyone to cherish in a beautiful high quality coffee table book. SAWA (SA) raised \$12,000 through "crowd funding" to print 1,000 copies (see [www.pozible.com/unfoldingprojects](http://www.pozible.com/unfoldingprojects) for details), of which 267 are already pre-ordered. The book will become available in late April or early May; orders can be placed at the SAWA (SA) website [www.sawa-australia.org/products.html](http://www.sawa-australia.org/products.html).

Afghan peace activist and former parliamentarian Malalai Joya generously agreed to write the Foreword. The following is an excerpt from her text:

*Ever since I was evicted, back in 2003, from the Loya Jirga for denouncing the crimes committed by the warlords who sat next to me, I have maintained that the people of the world do not share the shameful actions of their governments in my country. What better example can there be than the action of a group of artists from Melbourne to apply their skills and donate their resources in a gesture of friendship and support to the suffering women of Afghanistan?*

*Eleven years ago the US and its allies in NATO occupied Afghanistan under the banner of women's rights. They try to justify their continued presence by saying how the situation of women has improved, if not in all provinces then at least in the capital. But in this book we meet women in the middle of Kabul who have to keep it a secret from their father that they attend literacy classes, who are beaten by their brother for wanting to learn, who have to run away and live in the streets to avoid being mistreated.*

*Education is important, very important in my country. I always say that it is the key to our emancipation, but emancipation cannot happen if you are on a leash. The women and girls who contributed their stories to the artwork of their Australian friends are the future of Afghanistan. In a world controlled by fundamentalism and foreign military interest they are determined to shape their own lives. They deserve our admiration and support.*

*Malalai Joya*

## Obama signs the "Afghan Women and Girls Security Promotion Act"

On 28 November 2012 eight senators (four Democrats, three Republicans, six women, two men) introduced the *Afghan Women and Girls Security Promotion Act* in the US senate. The bill was included in the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act, which President Obama signed into force on 2 January. The Department of Defense will now be required to report on its efforts to promote the security of Afghan women and girls during the transfer of security responsibility to Afghan forces, including the collection of data on their security as the transition takes place.

There are already plenty of data that show how the situation of women has deteriorated during the last years. The attack against the Pakistani school girl Malala in October made worldwide headlines; in Afghanistan 40 attacks were reported during 2012 but did not find their way into the international press. More than 2000 girls have been subjected to poison attacks. Reports of rape appear every week; often when a girl reports it to the police she is raped again by the officers.

The presence of the US and other foreign troops has done nothing to stop such violence. On the contrary, as the US rely on the support of tribal warlords to hold back the Taliban, these misogynist warlords and their henchmen can act with impunity. In fact, the USA have already abandoned aid projects in support of women; in 2011 the U.S. Agency for International Development decided that to include the improvement of women's rights in its aid projects is too hard when negotiating aid contracts with Afghan officials. (see SAWAN 31, August 2011) For nearly two years US aid contracts have now been allocated regardless of their consequences for women. Schools built with British aid money are being closed because the people in power divert public money into their own pockets, leaving no means to fund the schools. (see SAWAN 36, November 2012)

What will the *Afghan Women and Girls Security Promotion Act* achieve? Its major effect will be to soothe the conscience of the 399 members of Congress who voted for it. It will also produce six-monthly reports on the situation of women, compiled and presented by or on behalf of the military. It would be a miracle if reports can turn the desperate situation of Afghanistan's women into a successful outcome for a decade of occupation.

*Matthias Tomczak*

## Stay in touch with SAWA (SA)



Every now and then SAWA (SA) adds important news about Afghanistan to the news pages of its website and sends the occasional email about its work to subscribers. The information can now be obtained via RSS feed. If you want to receive it via email (one or two messages per month) you can subscribe to it by clicking on the RSS button at the top right of [www.sawa-australia.org](http://www.sawa-australia.org) or connect your email to [www.sawa-australia.org/rssfeedfolder/sawafeed.xml](mailto:www.sawa-australia.org/rssfeedfolder/sawafeed.xml). Send an email to [info@sawa-australia.org](mailto:info@sawa-australia.org) if you need help to do this.



**Enjoy a fun afternoon competing for the 2013 West Australian SAWA Bowling for Afghanistan Cup**

for young and old, even if you've never lawn bowled

Sunday 7th April, details [www.sawa-australia.org/groups/Perth.html](http://www.sawa-australia.org/groups/Perth.html)  
email [perth@sawa-australia.org](mailto:perth@sawa-australia.org) or phone 0407 165 753



**SAWA-Australia (SA)** PO Box 90, Flinders University PO Bedford Park SA 5042 sawa.sa@sawa-australia.org  
Bendigo Bank BSB 633-000 Account number 126035633 (SAWA-Australia SA)

**Convener:** Matthias Tomczak **Secretary:** Christine Gamble **Treasurer:** Christine Tomczak

**Committee:** Libby Drew, Kath Jones, Ruth Redfern, Aziza Zafari

**Newsletter editor:** Matthias Tomczak **Public Officer:** Ruth Redfern **Auditor:** Bob Shahinger

The regional groups in Melbourne, 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.

## The Vocational Training Centre during 2012



The Vocational Training Centre was initially set up in Afshar district. After two years most women of the district had attended its classes, and it was moved to Spin Kalay. For two years its classes served the women of that district. In 2012 the Centre was

moved again to a new place called Galay Gernail. The teachers went from door to door, and 500 women registered for its courses.

As courses began another NGO started work near OPAWC's Centre offering money, food, firewood and clothes. As a result most students left the OPAWC centre; only 120 students stayed. Poor families have great difficulty feeding their children, and even the smallest support is valuable for them; in January a family sold their one year old child for only 7000 Afghans (\$140) just to save the lives of its other children. But those women who decided to stay with OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre pointed to OPAWC's good reputation from previous years and said: "We don't want gifts that last a few weeks but we want to learn something that lasts forever."

The Centre follows the program prescribed by the Ministry of Education. It consists of a basic book called *Land Afghan*, to be taught for six months, and three additional books, each to be finished within one month. They cover the subjects Dari, Mathematics and Islamic issues. In addition to these books OPAWC includes its own subjects that cover Human Rights, Women's Rights, Health Care and Peace Issues.

As the year ends around 89 students will be graduated when their program ends after one more month, and 21 students who failed to pass the *Land Afghan* test will continue the program.

184 women were graduated during a function held on the 10th of April and attended by representatives of the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Education, the Deputy of Literacy, the Head of NGOs in Afghanistan, the Head of Security for the area and other members from NGOs. OPAWC was praised for its work and received again the highest score among all NGOs working in adult literacy programs.

A big problem is the lack of a nursery. Most of the women miss classes because of their young children. To open a nursery would require a teacher to teach the pre-school children and look after the babies as well. OPAWC would also have to arrange some lunch for the children. Hopefully funds will become available in the coming year.

The full report is available at [www.sawa-australia.org/vocationalcenter](http://www.sawa-australia.org/vocationalcenter).

## A course on dental care

Nellie Fatehi from the Afghanistan Dental Relief Project (ADRP) presented a workshop on dental problems in the Vocational Training Centre. Her visit was organized by the West Australian group of SAWA (SA). Nellie explained how to protect teeth from decay and how to help small children to save their teeth. The students had different questions and learned different ways of teeth protection. Nellie distri-

buted tooth brushes to the students and asked OPAWC to send anyone with tooth problems to the dental clinic of ADRP in Kabul for free treatment. 20 students took up the offer.



## University scholarship program seeks sponsors

As we reported in SAWAN 34 of April 2012 the first students from AFCECO's orphanages are now entering university. Afghanistan's university entrance system is rife with corruption and nepotism, and many of AFCECO's students have no choice but to go to private tertiary education institutions. Though the cost is miniscule compared to universities abroad (usually around \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year) it is prohibitive for the children and AFCECO. Without a scholarship Afghanistan's young future leaders and professionals will not be able to make the next leap toward success.

It is vital that students obtain their education in Afghanistan rather than abroad. 80% of scholarship recipients from Afghanistan who go to other countries to study remain in their host country, and SAWA (SA) does not support the export of Afghan talent to countries that are already well off. Last year we therefore started a scholarship program that allows supporters to sponsor AFCECO students and develop a personal relationship with them.

Jane Hamilton of Sydney took the initiative as the sponsor of Shazia, who studies law at the Gharjistan Institute of Higher Education. (see SAWAN 35, November 2012 for details) Meanwhile two other students, Sosan and Zubaida, have found sponsors.



Sosan is 21 years old and was born in a district that is home to the Hazara minority. When she was seven her father and many of her relatives were killed by the Taliban. Now she assists the doctor at the AFCECO orphanage and studies medicine at the Maulana Jalaluddin Balkhi Institute of Medical Science.



Zubaida is 20 years old and was born in a little village in Nuristan province. Her parents and brother were killed during the Mujahidin period, and Zubaida lived with her uncle's family. Now she runs AFCECO's New Hope Orphanage. She manages the orphanage and studies law at the Gharjistan Institute of Higher Education.

Several more students are waiting for sponsors. Please contact SAWA (SA) if you want to sponsor one of them. Detailed information can be found at [www.sawa-australia.org/sponsorships](http://www.sawa-australia.org/sponsorships).



**SAWA-Australia (NSW)** PO Box 1741, Rozelle NSW 2039 [www.sawansw.org.au](http://www.sawansw.org.au)  
Bendigo Bank Rozelle Branch BSB 633-000 Account number 141397471 (SAWA-Australia NSW)

**Convenor:** Dawn Atkinson **Assistant Convenor:** Shirley Allen **Secretary:** Margaret Hetherton

**Treasurer:** Carolyn Allen

**Committee:** Maryellen Galbally, June Lunsman, Susan Martin, Helen Toner. **Public Officer:** Deanna Fekete

## Thank You

Since the last SAWAN in November your generosity has been wonderful. SAWANSW raised just over \$4,000 at the 7th Annual SAWA Lunch; US\$750 to provide an Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) for HEWAD school; \$850.00 to provide some needed teaching aids; about \$1,600 for Birthing Kits and about \$2,000 in donations.

Most of this will go to Hewad's 2012-2013 budget of US\$38,686.44. The UPS will save pupils from the discomfort of constant interruptions in Pakistan's power supply. They were losing light and heating/cooling almost every two hours before!

THANK YOU. The report below confirms again the importance of SAWA's support for the education of Afghan children especially girls.

## My Visit to Afghanistan, September 2012

by Dr Nina Burridge (Speaker at our 7th Lunch)

I went to Kabul to speak with educators, politicians and officers in NGOs on the education of girls and women and to discuss the situation for women in a country where human rights abuses are commonplace. My experience confirmed why the work of SAWA is so necessary. As a small not for profit, donations go directly to those in need.



*Streetscene, Kabul photo Nina Burridge*

Afghanistan has been a site of conflict for over thirty years as invading forces have sought to gain ascendancy over a fiercely independent state. Western governments have poured billions of dollars into Afghanistan. Reports from aid agencies and security firms note some gains in strategic areas such as education and health (socio-economic benefits), but most importantly they note a regression in civil society indicators, governance and rule of law and civil and political rights, particularly in the last few years.

While the gathering and reliability of statistics is often difficult, they show that over 7 million children attend schools today compared to 1 million in 2001. Of these 38% are said to be girls who rarely attended in 2001 but still only 13% of women are literate. For girls, insecurity, lack of proximity to schools, lack of female teachers and family and community attitudes are major problems. There is a real need to improve access to higher education - for both men and women.

During my short stay I met with Dr Sima Samar, Head of the Independent Human Rights Commission in Afghanistan, Ms Latifa Majidi from Action Aid, Ms Fawzia Koofi a leading female politician in Afghanistan. I also met with Mrs Susan Wardak, Senior Advisor to the Minister of Education and Dr Amir Mansory a senior officer in the Ministry of Education.



*Women in Kabul photo Nina Burridge*

These people I spoke with commented on the complexity of the issues. A great deal of corruption exists at all levels with political and ethnic rivalries interwoven with poor short term planning and lack of accountability in the delivery of programs. Much of the international aid is allocated to security firms and overseas organisations and does not reach those that need it most.

In addition there is a perceived problem with imposing western values and liberal ideas in an Islamic country that is fiercely independent and highly sceptical of western views of what constitutes women's rights. On a personal level I had to constantly remind myself that I was a western woman with particular views on women's roles, trying to understand the situation for women and girls in Afghanistan where women are largely invisible in the public sphere.

Despite these cultural difficulties, I am certain that more Afghan women need to be included in decision-making processes for Afghanistan's future. The introduction of a quota for women parliamentarians has made a difference, however women need to be more visible and included in policy making. It is important that school education is accessible to both boys and girls and that discussions about gender equity are part of the curriculum. Finally and most importantly, in our campaigns on gender equity issues, we need to weave a delicate balance between asserting western liberal notions of democracy while at the same time challenging the status quo to ensure that Afghan women and girls are educated so that they can make their own choices about their future in their own country.

## Dates for Diary

### • Artists for Afghan Aid - SAWA's art show

**Opening 8 February 2013** 6pm at Balmain Watch House  
179 Darling St, Balmain by Dorothy Hoddinott AO

RSVP to opening [info@sawansw.org.au](mailto:info@sawansw.org.au) or 9810 9093 asap.

Then Sat and Sun (9 & 10) 10am - 5pm. The event is sponsored by the Balmain Association, the artists are donating their work and ALL proceeds to SAWA-NSW.

### • Birthing Kit Assembly Day

**Monday 4 March 2013** 10am Leichhardt Rowing Club, Glover St, Leichhardt. Please come and help to assemble 1,000 kits to save lives in rural Afghanistan.

RSVP 0425 718 996 or at [info@sawansw.org.au](mailto:info@sawansw.org.au)  
Morning tea will be provided.