



From the Editor

2014 will be an important year for Afghanistan. President Karzai waits for his term to end so that he will not go down in history as the puppet who signed the country's sovereignty away by allowing US troops to remain in the country indefinitely. He will leave that to his successor. Australia has withdrawn its combat troops but promises to continue its support for military training and civilian projects. This may create the impression that the people of Afghanistan are in good hands and well looked after. The opposite is true. The billions of aid dollars that came in the past created a climate of corruption and fattened the few. Where progress has been made for poor families and oppressed women it came through the action of the Afghans themselves. SAWA-Australia works with Afghan women's organizations who work selflessly and knowledgeably to improve the lives of Afghanistan's women. They rely on our continued help. So whatever happens in 2014, please keep up your support!

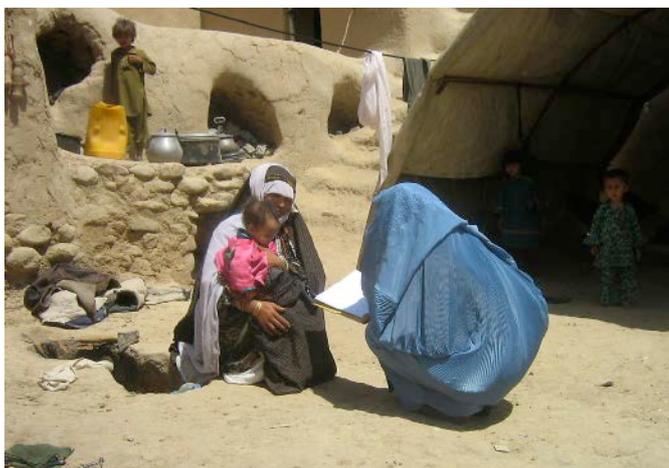
Matthias Tomczak

The occupation goes into a new phase

"Australia's longest war is ending, not with victory, not with defeat, but with, we hope, an Afghanistan that's better for our presence here." So said Tony Abbott in Tarin Kot on 29 October. On 16 December he announced the complete withdrawal of all Australian combat troops from the country.

But is this the end of Australian involvement? 400 Australian personnel, including special forces, will remain elsewhere in Afghanistan, chiefly in Kabul and Kandahar, to support the Afghan army. They will be in the country while 47,000 U.S. troops will continue the occupation for at least until December 2014, and the Obama administration is pressuring Afghanistan to sign a bilateral agreement to accept the presence of 10,000 troops beyond 2014.

The Afghan people know what to expect. The Asia Foundation, a non-profit international development organization headquartered in San Francisco, undertook a survey of 9,260 Afghan men and women of all provinces in July 2013. The survey showed that, while support for the Taliban has further declined because they kill innocent civilians, 77% of Afghans say they would be afraid when encountering international forces. Foreign forces are not the friend who is bringing peace to the country, they are an occupation force, a force people have to avoid at all cost.

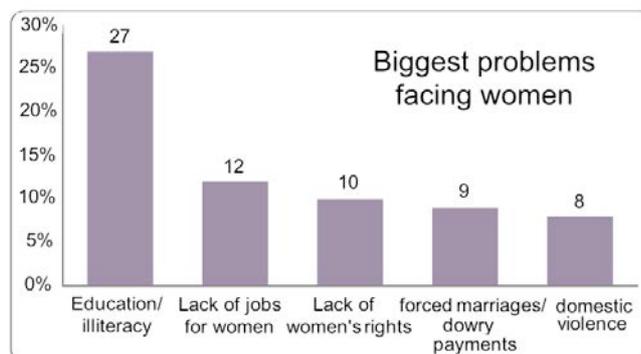


Australia's 400 military personnel still in Afghanistan will no longer be involved in combat, possibly no longer be seen patrolling villages. If they wonder what their role can be they can find plenty of direction in the survey result. Only 9% of the people surveyed gave the presence of the Taliban as a reason to expect a bleak future for Afghanistan. 23% gave corruption, 23% unemployment, the highest since 2006. Australia has promised to provide ongoing funding of \$100m per year and said that the 400 personnel will also be involved in civilian development. Creating jobs for Afghans is clearly more pressing than assisting the USA in bolstering the Afghan army.



Left and above: Scenes from the survey (Asia Foundation)

This is particularly true for the women of Afghanistan. When asked about the most pressing problems facing women today, both the women and the men consistently identified education and illiteracy (27%), a lack of job opportunities for women (12%), women's rights (10%), forced marriages and dowry payments (9%), and domestic violence (8%). While men and women reported many of these issues with equal frequency, women cited job opportunities with significantly higher frequency than men. The largest difficulty for finding a job is the lack of education: 76% of women and 44% of men said that they have had no education.



It is high time for the Australian government to cut itself loose from any military involvement, whether in combat or in a training role, and concentrate on supporting the efforts of the Afghan people to educate themselves and create jobs for themselves. The improvement of conditions for women has to be at the top of the list.

Read the full survey at the [Asia Foundation](http://AsiaFoundation.org).

Matthias Tomczak

The ambulance funding drive: a great success!

It was a trying 60 days, starting from zero and aiming to reach \$12,500 before the time was up, but we made it! 142 generous donors helped us and raised the money needed to buy a new second-hand ambulance for Hamoon Clinic .

When, during my visit to Kabul last September, I told OPAWC director Latifa about the possibility of crowd funding the idea was new to her, and she said: "You just go ahead with this new method of raising funds that you discovered, and we'll see what comes from it." I had used crowd funding before (to raise the money for the printing of *Two Trees*), but that was easy, because SAWA could offer copies of the final book as reward. What could we use as rewards for an ambulance in Farah province? Pozible, the Australian crowd funding platform, is focussed on the arts, publishing and music; how would it perform for a charity drive?

The only way to find out was to give it a try. The drive "went live" on 5 December at www.pozible.com/ambulance. Within 24 hours it received its first enthusiastic comments and pledges of support.

OPAWC watched its progress closely. An email from Latifa came:

"Women of Afghanistan are the most innocent and forlorn creatures in the world. They have been deprived of basic rights for decades in Afghanistan. After 13 years of the presence of international troops still the situation of women is getting worse. Every 30 minutes a woman dies during pregnancy and child birth in Afghanistan. Self-immolation is becoming more and more common, every day we are observing young girls putting themselves on fire because of pressure from their family.

Therefore, these women are highly in need of our support. By chance Hamoon Health Centre, the only reliable clinic in Farah province, has been a hope for the poor and suffering women for years. But it is in need of support to serve these women better. An ambulance is very urgently needed at the moment. Last month a woman lost her precious life during child birth while she was being brought from a district to the centre. If Hamoon had had an ambulance it could have saved the lives of the woman and her child. Therefore we plead with our friends and supporters to help us in providing an ambulance for this important health centre. We express our deepest thanks to all those human loving supporters who contributed in raising funds for the Ambulance, we make it sure that every penny of your support will save the lives of these handcuffed women in this province."

We did not let OPAWC down. In addition to the donations coming in to the Pozible drive supporters sent cheques, donated at the SAWA (SA) website online or sent money to the SAWA (SA) bank account, so we raised a total of \$14,785. OPAWC will now shop around for a used ambulance and see what can be done with that amount.



Schoolgirls suffering from suspected poisoning sit inside an ambulance on their arrival at a hospital in Kabul, August 2010.

We thank all supporters, particularly Friends of RAWA Japan, Zonta Salisbury, WILPF, and the Quaker congregation. Very special thanks go to CISDA, the Italian support organization for the women of Afghanistan who contributed \$1,500 to the campaign.

Finding a suitable vehicle is only the first step. It may require an upgrade of the life-saving equipment. More donations will certainly help. The pozible drive is closed, but donations can still be sent through www.givenow.com.au/sawadoctorsforhamoonclinic.

AFCECO director steps down

Ten years ago 21 year old Andeisha Farid opened an orphanage serving Afghan children of war. She employed widows of war to help her raise the children. It was a first step in devoting her life to what she saw as the only path toward peace and prosperity for her war-torn country: giving the children, girls and boys, a future through education. To empower one life, she said, means to empower one family, maybe a village, and if so, perhaps even a country.

Ten years later AFCECO, the Afghan Child Education and Care Organization, has grown into twelve *pawarishgas*,

foster havens where Tajik lives with Pashtun, Hazara with Nooristani, Pashae with Uzbek; sanctuaries for children of war, a place of true democracy. Democracy means everyone is cared for, everyone has equal opportunity to basic human rights, and human rights include the right to health and the right to good education.

Two months ago SAWA (SA) and many others around the world received an email from Andeisha: "I am writing to announce that I am planning to step down as Executive Director of AFCECO. This past year AFCECO has come up against a variety of pressures that among other things have threatened our security. The extreme elements both inside and outside government have made things difficult, and I myself have been targeted. The reason these people give for their actions is they believe I am "westernizing" the children, pulling them away from hardcore Islamic values.

"My stepping out of the light will allow AFCECO to continue without the attention that these extreme elements have focused on me personally. I am very concerned that if I stay much longer, there may be more harassment of the children in our care.

"Right now we have a solid group of "graduates" who are now in university and are tremendously devoted to AFCECO, since they were raised in the orphanages. They more than anyone in the world understand the value of AFCECO. This is the investment you have made, patiently, and now it is coming to fruition."

SAWA (SA) is proud to sponsor Shazia, Mursal, Sosan, Pashtana and Zubaida, five of the young women who will continue Andeisha's work. If you want to be part of this way into a bright future, go to www.sawa-australia.org/sponsorships and sponsor a student!



Andeisha (right) with a volunteer student and a teacher at OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre



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Regional groups in Melbourne, WA, Tasmania, 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.

Two Trees launched in Melbourne

Following successful launches of SAWA (SA)'s art book *Two Trees* in Hobart, Adelaide and Perth, November and December saw three very successful launches in Victoria and Queensland.

The launch in Melbourne was supported by the Australian Education Union, who generously provided the venue, and organized by our Melbourne members under Janet Watson-Kruse's oversight. Janet was in the fortunate position to live in the city of the artists involved in the production of the book. Gali Weiss, lead artist and co-editor, was the guest speaker, and eight of the 14 artists were present:



Gali Weiss (3rd from left), Janet Watson-Kruse (5th from left), Afghan reader Zainab Sediqi and eight artists at the Melbourne book launch.

The joint effort of Janet and SAWA (SA) members Emma Waheed, Ben Martin, Susan Peterson and others could get more than 50 people to the event. Geeta Akrami from Kabul House Restaurant at 247b Belmore Road in Balwyn North provided the food. Books for more than \$1,400 were sold. SAWA (SA) thanks everyone involved and appreciates the assistance of the AEU.

"Mary meets Mohammad" fundraiser

On 3 December the Adelaide SAWA (SA) group and Amnesty International organized a movie fundraiser in the North Adelaide Community Centre. *Mary meets Mohammad*, the movie shown on the night, documents the experiences of inhabitants of Pontville near Hobart when the government chooses the town as the location for a new detention centre. The women of a Christian knitting group are initially strongly opposed to having refugees as their neighbours but decide to knit beanies for them and visit them, curious to see the 'luxurious life' of the detainees.



Their friendship with the Hazara deepens as they help with the craft activities that develop in the detention centre. The women shed many prior beliefs about asylum seekers and witness the centre's first hunger strike.

Asylum seeker Mohammad provides revealing insights of life inside the detention centre for elderly Christian woman Mary. When Mohammad is discharged from the centre, they develop a close friendship, but Mary remains uncomfortable with Mohammad's Islamic beliefs. The documentary can be obtained for fundraising from www.marymeetsmohammad.com.

Two Trees launched in Ipswich and Brisbane

In Queensland SAWA members are thin on the ground, but when SAWA (SA) member Jean Mellor, who lives in Ipswich, heard about the successful book launches in the southern states and in the west she was determined to have the book launched in Ipswich as well.



Jean Mellor and Linda Cupitt advertise the Lismore launch

A few days after Jean contacted Adelaide, Linda Cupitt, development manager for the *Act for Peace* action of the National Church Council of Australia, also suggested a launch in Brisbane.

Jean and Linda got together and managed two very successful events. In Ipswich the book was launched by mayor Paul Pisasale with SAWA (SA) member Senator Clair Moore as guest speaker. In Brisbane the guest speaker was Sonia Caton, Chair of the Refugee Council of Australia. We thank the mayor and two guest speakers for their support.

More than \$1,400 were raised through the sale of 30 books and various handicraft items.



Left: Senator Claire Moore at the launch in Ipswich.

The new face of the SAWA (SA) website

Our website www.sawa-australia.org has been operational for several years and proved useful for members, supporters and the general public to contact SAWA (SA) and learn about our work. It showed some unchecked growth and was in need of pruning. The new design, which will go online this month, uses the latest web technology and displays therefore on mobile devices very well, too. Its online shop is now also based on modern online sales technology, so it is very easy to order copies of our book, greeting cards, shopping bags and other items. It is worth checking out!





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Convenor: Shirley Allen **Secretary:** Margaret Hetherton **Treasurer:** Carolyn Allen
Committee: Dawn Atkinson, Maryellen Galbally, June Lunsmann, Susan Martin.
Public Officer: Deanna Fekete

SAWAN'S 10TH BIRTHDAY

As February 2004 marked the first issue of this quarterly newsletter, it seems a good time to look back on our origins now SAWA is a wide network of Australian volunteers raising funds to support the human rights, education, health and welfare of Afghan women and children.

In August 2003 a small group of Victorian women led by Grace McCaughey in Castlemaine became very concerned about women in Afghanistan. They met Tahmeena Faryal who was visiting Australia to raise support for RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan dedicated to non-violent action for women's rights and welfare. Based inside Afghanistan and in neighbouring Pakistan, this underground organisation, formed in 1977 at Kabul University, evolved in defiance of the Taliban and other Fundamentalists. It runs clandestine schools, health clinics, orphanages, self-help classes and provides emergency relief in refugee camps. Meena, its founding leader was assassinated in Quetta in 1987 at the age of 30 because of KGB and Fundamentalist opposition to her work.

Tahmeena Faryal was 10 years old when the Soviet invasion forced her family from Afghanistan to a Pakistani refugee camp. Her mother was an early member of RAWA and she was educated in RAWA schools in Pakistan. The timing of her visit to Australia in 2003 was critical because, having decided Australian help could best be provided through an existing Afghan led NGO, RAWA appeared to be the perfect match for the support group in Victoria and the groups emerging in South Australia and NSW which linked together.

SAWA in Australia began by funding RAWA's Nasima Shaheed High School and the Malalai Clinic in Khewa refugee camp. This camp was eventually closed under pressure from the Taliban. SAWA then began its association with Hewad School in Rawalpindi with which you are all familiar.

In July 2010 it was decided to restructure SAWA. By the end of 2010 SAWA-Australia (NSW) Inc. and SAWA-Australia (SA) Inc. were formalised as the two parts of SAWA Australia. Hewad High School became the major project for SAWA-NSW and also helps with birthing kits. SAWA-SA chose to focus on the Vocational Training and Literacy Centre for widows in Kabul and is also involved in funding for Hamoon clinic in Farah province, University scholarships for girls graduating from some Afghan orphanages and an ambulance.

Our thanks to Matthias Tomczak for his ongoing editing and production of the SAWAN.



BIRTHING KITS DELIVERED

All our wonderful supporters who assembled 1000 birthing kits in March 2013 will be pleased to know that, despite some exceptional difficulties in Afghanistan, they are now in the hands of one of the Birthing Kit Foundation's partners involved in primary health care. They are being delivered in conjunction with traditional birth attendant and midwifery training.

In thanking us for the kits, the Foundation wrote:

"your donation of time, money and effort has a tremendous impact on the maternal and infantile health in the areas of need that your birthing kits have been sent to. We can never underestimate the value of these kits in providing the simple requirements for a sterile birthing site".

8TH ANNUAL LUNCH

The lunch at the Leichhardt Rowing Club was a very pleasant event – beautiful harbour outlook, quiet, airy, spacious venue, good parking, great food and inspiring talk from Rebecca Barry, Director of "I am a Girl". Even more significantly our supporters enjoyed meeting each other and we achieved almost \$3,300 net for Hewad School for Afghan refugee children. Thank you to all who came.



Shirley Allen recently elected Convenor on the much regretted retirement of Dawn Atkinson, our tireless Convenor since SAWA NSW's formation.

DATES FOR DIARY

1. Sunday 16 February 2014: Film "I Am A Girl" at St Scholastica's College, 4 Avenue Rd, Glebe NSW 2037, 4.30 for drinks before film at 5.00pm. \$20 or \$15.00 pensioner. Ample street parking. Book through bookings@sawansw.org.au or phone 0425 718 996.

This highly praised film takes us sensitively into the lives of six very young women around the world, including Aziza from Afghanistan, and will be introduced by director Rebecca Barry.

2. Monday 3 March 2014: Birthing Kit Assembly Day 10.00am (sharp). Leichhardt Rowing Club, Glover St, Leichhardt. bookings@sawansw.org.au

For all events detailed information is available on our webpage www.sawansw.org.au closer to the event.

Rebecca Barry who was guest speaker at the lunch and who will introduce her film "I am a girl" on 16 the February.