



### **From the Editor**

*Here is a story from Reuters from 6 months ago:*

*“Sayed Gul walked into a small mud brick room in eastern Afghanistan, a bundle wrapped in a shawl on his back. With a flick, he plonked the package onto a threadbare carpet and hundreds of voter cards spilled out. “How many do you want to buy?” he asked with a grin. Like many others, Gul left a routine job - in his case, repairing cars in Marco, a small town in the east - to join a thriving industry selling the outcome of next year’s presidential elections.*

*Gul, who had a long, black beard and was dressed in the traditional loose salwar kameez, said he was able to buy voter cards for 200 Pakistani rupees (\$1.89) each from villagers and sell them on for 500 rupees (\$4.73) to campaign managers, who can use them in connivance with poll officials to cast seemingly legitimate votes. From each card, Gul said, he made enough money to pay for a hearty meal like kebabs with rice, and maybe even a soda.”*

*Does anyone still believe in the value of presidential elections in Afghanistan? No campaign manager could amass enough voter cards to guarantee the absolute majority for his candidate, so a runoff election will be held. In the end the winner will be the one who is prepared to sign the “security agreement” with the USA that will allow the permanent presence of occupation forces in the country. We should not put our hopes on a new president; we have to concentrate on our support for the poor and oppressed women.*

*Read the full story at the [Reuters website](http://Reuters website). Matthias Tomczak*

### **Life in a Kabul camp for displaced persons**

*From a radio program of National Public Radio (USA):*

The Nasaji Bagrami camp for internally displaced Afghans in Kabul is a vast expanse of crumbling mud structures with tarps and tent sheets for roofs. Looking at these structures, they look like ruins from hundreds of years ago, yet they're actually only about five years old.

Niasbibi, who appears to be around 60, is the head of one of some 360 families here. She fled from southern Helmand Province two years ago after her village was hit by what she says was a NATO air strike. She lost a daughter, her husband, four grandchildren and one of her eyes during the incident. Today she and nine family members live in two small mud shelters, each about the size of a backyard tool shed in suburban America.

On this morning, Niasbibi is surrounded by several unwashed grandchildren in tattered clothes. One has two large scars on his head. He was hit by a car doing what many children here do: working in the streets to earn money for the family to buy food.

Mohammed Ibrahim is the camp elder. He says he fled southern Helmand Province almost five years ago along with about 80 other families who built this camp. He says it's still too dangerous to return home. A few families recently returned to Helmand, and they were killed.

The camp has no electricity, sewage system, or running water. Several times a day, 50-year old Rosadin, who lives nearby, tows a small water tank into the camp with his tractor. He fills dirty plastic jugs. Residents pay about 50 cents for 20 liters of water.



“I feel sad when I come here”, Rosadin says. “I feel that they have no alternative than to live in these harsh conditions.” Camp elder Mohammed Ibrahim says most of the people living in these conditions would prefer to die. “It’s a terrible life, and it’s an honour to die to leave this kind of life.”

And this is just one of more than 50 such camps across Kabul alone, where tens of thousands of people live in similar harsh conditions.

### **Hamoon’s new ambulance arrives in Farah**

As we reported already in the February SAWAN, the crowd funding drive ([www.pozible.com/ambulance](http://www.pozible.com/ambulance)) to buy a new ambulance for Hamoon Clinic was a great success. As soon as OPAWC received the news that SAWA had raised nearly \$15,000, OPAWC director Latifa Ahmady travelled to Herat to look for a suitable vehicle. The inauguration ceremony was held in March; photos can be seen at the Hamoon page of the [SAWA \(SA\) website](http://SAWA (SA) website). The new ambulance carries the SAWA logo on the side, with an acknowledgement of the substantial support from CISDA (Italy) to the fundraising success.



*“This vehicle was donated by SAWA-Australia with the support from CISDA (Italy)”*

Even before he had seen the new ambulance the Manager of the Clinic wrote us this email:

First of all I hope you are fine and doing well along your other colleagues. I on behalf of OPAWC staff in Farah and all deprived and poor people of this province would like to express my deepest warm regards to you.

Few days ago I heard through Latifa Ahmady the Director of OPAWC that you finally, succeeded to collect the targeted money for an ambulance with a lot of efforts and hardworking. We appreciate in advance your humanitarian feelings and activities.

It is obvious that if there were no humanitarian support by people such as you, undoubtedly, this clinic would not be able to serve and resolve the problems of this remote suffering province.

I can say with confidence that if this health center gained its name and reputation it is because of you and your support. In particular the establishment of the laboratory was another issue which made the center even more reliable and now with the ambulance the center will become more and more famous in the community, and with a well equipped ambulance I assure you and the people of Farah that we will try to serve more women and children and will consider more patients, who are in need to be sent to neighbouring provinces such as Herat and Qandahar in case of need. We can bring the patients from remote district to the center for treatment in order to serve the people better as well.

At the end I want to assure you that penny and penny of the money you gathered with lots of efforts will be used for its purpose and for buying a vehicle and will be used for the clinic.

I hope one day can come to have you here in Farah to talk from near and to know each other deeper and deeper, as our thinking, ideology and goals are the same to serve the poor and handcuffed people. Therefore all of us regardless of belonging to any ethnic group and nation and in which corner of the world we are living, in fact we are following the same path. It is that goal which makes us closer and closer to each other and that is the feeling of humanity that we have.

With lots of love and hugs from far away  
Abdurrashid, Manager of Hamoon Health Center

## An interview with a member of Afghanistan's Parliament



Abdul Qayyum Sajjadi is the Member of Parliament for Ghazni province since 2005. During the Soviet occupation and Taliban

period he lived in Iran. In Afghanistan he teaches Political Sociology of Afghanistan at a number of Afghan universities, including Kabul University, and Islamic Diplomacy in various Iranian universities.

### What are the biggest challenges facing Afghanistan?

I believe the most fundamental problems that we face in our country arise because we don't have a real political culture, but rather the persistence of a tribal culture. For the past decade, the international community has been intent on establishing a range of different institutions in Afghanistan. These institutions now exist but what we are lacking is the mentality that underlies and supports them. By themselves, the institutions cannot guarantee democracy and respect and protection for human and women's rights.

Another challenge comes from the multitude of ethnic communities in Afghanistan, each with their own history. Some of them have been suppressed by the Afghan social structure throughout history. These policies of ethnic superiority and deprivation have become institutionalised in Afghanistan, and have given rise to aspirations among minorities who are seeking their rights.

### Is it possible that girls could once again be banned from schools and women excluded from social participation, as was the case under the Taliban rule?

One of our fundamental problems in Afghanistan is that we have never been able to free ourselves from our traditional and tribal ideas. The Taliban-influenced ideology towards women, for example, is deeply rooted in the tribal and traditional beliefs. However, I do not think that Afghanistan will allow schools to be closed to girls again. I think that even the Taliban mentality has shifted somewhat in response to the developments of the past decade, and in particular the increased social and cultural participation of women.

### Can you give us an example of a violation of women's rights you have seen in Afghanistan?

I have witnessed many violations of the human rights of women in my home province of Ghazni. For example, many girls are married to men they have never met. It has always tormented me to imagine a young girl living her whole life with someone she didn't have the slightest information about before they got married.

### What are the major factors limiting women's participation in social, economic, political, and cultural spheres?

A major problem originates with the dominant societal attitude towards women. The general attitude is that politics and the economy are not appropriate sectors for women. Another problem is the lack of a proper and reasonable model for women's political and social participation. On a related note, we also lack a secure environment and proper channels for the social and political participation of women.

### What do the women of Afghanistan want?

I think the first demand of women concerns their citizenship and human rights. Women must have the right to choose their lifestyle and their husband. These are the natural and basic rights of women.

### If you could have one wish for your daughters, what would it be?

As father, I wish that my daughters will be able to enjoy the political and social rights that I believe all women deserve.

### Any final messages you wish to share?

I believe that the political, social, and economic backwardness of our society has its roots in scientific and cultural underdevelopment. In a society where around 70% of the population are illiterate, it is difficult to leave the tribal, misogynist and monopolist approach behind. Our biggest problem is the traditional tribal mentality. If we cannot evolve beyond this mentality, we will not see any changes, even if we establish numerous modern, democratic institutions.

[The Huffington Post 19 March 2014](#)

## SAWA-Australia supports Bendigo Bank for upholding tolerance and inclusiveness

Freedom of religious worship in a secular state is one of the corner stones of SAWA-Australia's work. As we strive towards that goal in Afghanistan we also support religious freedom in Australia under our country's secular constitution. We applaud Bendigo Bank, with whom we have been banking since our inception in 2004, for the decision to close a fundraising account designed to finance objections against a planned mosque near Bendigo's airport. The "Concerned Citizens Fund" was planned as the financial backbone of a hateful campaign.

A statement from the bank said: "We respect everyone's right to voice their opinions. Equally we have a right to ours, and we want to do business with organisations whose values align with our own. Our bank values tolerance and inclusiveness, qualities which are an important part of a strong community."



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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.

## International Women's Day in Adelaide

International Women's Day has always been an important day for Adelaide's Afghan community. Last year lack of organizational support prevented it from celebrating the day through a cultural event. This year SAWA (SA) assisted committee member Farida Forogh and SAWA (SA) member Aziza Zafari to organize an event. More than 250 members of the Afghan community listened to speeches and poetry readings and enjoyed music and performances of martial art students.



SAWA (SA) member Reyhana Akhy speaks to the Afghan community

## Teacher, a poem by literacy student Fanosha

Teacher, you are like a burning candle,  
Teacher you are like a flower in the garden,  
Teacher, you are like a patriotic song,  
Teacher you are the instructor of children of the country,  
Teacher you are the symbol of brotherhood,  
Teacher, you teach love and honour,  
Teacher, you are the beauty and pride of the world,  
Teacher, when you are here, there is no pain and sorrows,  
Teacher, you are the light in orphan's way,  
Teacher, you are the world's luminous sun.  
I am Fanosha "Tanha" being happy to serve always my teachers.

Teacher brings light into darkness and ignorance. Teachers have the values of precious beads and circles of flowers in the life. Teachers are those who protect us from darkness and ignorance. Teachers are so bright on land as the sun is on the sky. Teacher is someone who helps us in our study and guides us how to seek issues. If there were no teacher, all the people would have remained in darkness and ignorance. It is mentioned in Hadith: The best one of you is that who learns and teaches others. The ranks of the teacher are after the prophets. Teachers are like candles that burn but give light to others. Teacher is a best humanity leader, and teacher is the destiny maker of country's children.

Written by Fanosha "Tanha"

## A big thank you to our generous donors

Several large donations came into the SAWA (SA) bank account during the last three months.

In **Brisbane** \$800 were raised at an Irish-themed craic and concert around St Patrick's Day in collaboration with Amnesty International's Afghan Women's campaign.

Helicopter pilot Genevieve Rueger, who had been the speaker at a meeting of the Zonta Club of **Adelaide Hills**, asked the Zonta Club to

direct her \$800 speaking fee she had received for a presentation at an Australian Dental Association Golf Day meeting to an organization that supports Afghanistan's women. The Zonta Club suggested SAWA, a suggestion that found the donor's full-hearted support.

In **Hobart** the Tasmanian branch of the Australian Education Union (AEU) screened the documentary *Mary meets Mohammad* on International Women's Day and raised \$1,900.78 in support of OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre.

The **Latrobe Valley** branch of the AEU sent us a cheque over \$1000. We express our deepest thanks to these generous donors. Without your support we would not be able to continue our work. Every cent received from you goes to the support of our projects in accordance with your instructions.

## Adelaide's Bowling for Afghanistan Cup

The Adelaide SAWA group held its second Bowling for Afghanistan Cup on 1 April. Unfortunately last year's winning team could not attend



WA (SA) secretary Christine Gamble shows her bowling skills

due to illness of one of its members, but the teams assembled on the night did not lack in competitive spirit. While enjoying the company of other supporters of Afghanistan's women, they

did not give an inch to the competitors. In the end the night ended in a draw, and the teams decided to compete again in October. Until then the trophy is still sitting in a cupboard.

## OPAWC embroidery from AFCECO drawings

In April 2014 a reporter from BBC (Persia) visited OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre for an interview with OPAWC director Latifa Ahmady. He noticed some embroidery done by women of the Centre and asked about them. Latifa told him that an Italian community action group had commissioned OPAWC to produce embroidery for a planned exhibition. The proposal was to ask children from AFCECO's orphanages to make drawings that women of OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre would convert into embroidery. The journalist took photos of the first completed embroidered pictures and included them in his report.



The banner (left): We want peace, we want freedom!

Latifa says that the women have marvellous potential and just need guidance to move on to perfection. The initiative has opened a new area of income generation that the Handicraft section of the Centre will develop further.



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Bendigo Bank Rozelle Branch BSB 633-000 Account number 141397471 (SAWA-Australia NSW)

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

## **BIRTHING KIT ASSEMBLY DAY**

This annual event on March 3rd drew a happy crowd of willing SAWA supporters. By midday 1000 life saving kits were assembled. A frequent comment heard that morning was that it was a pleasure to be able to do something concrete and practical to really help women who live in a country where it is dangerous to have a baby. We had a great morning tea by the water too!

The components of each kit from the Birthing Kit Foundation of Australia cost \$3.00. We are about \$1000 short of the cost of the kits but we hope the Mothers' Day card suggestion sent to all our supporters will generate this shortfall and contribute also to the kits for 2015.

## **AFGHANISTAN: Hidden Treasures**

It may come as a surprise to know that in the past Afghanistan had a remarkable cultural history. The Silk Road brought it in touch with the major civilisations of the ancient world. Its natural resources e.g. gold, copper, tin, lapis lazuli and garnet were fashioned into beautiful artefacts which are represented in this exhibition along with Afghan holdings from around the known world up to 200CE – glassware and porphyry from Roman Egypt, lacquered bowls from China and ivory from India.

These treasures were collected by the National Museum of Kabul. In the 1970s it held more than 100,000 precious objects. War, general unrest and looting have reduced these to some 2,000 pieces. They were courageously rescued by museum staff at the risk of their lives and hidden from the Russian invaders and the Taliban rulers. They are now touring the world and have been seen by over 1.7 million people.

So that Afghan people in Sydney could enjoy the heritage of their homeland, the Art Gallery of NSW organised a free Afghan Community Preview with talks, Afghan musicians and complimentary refreshments and transport. For most Afghan people who attended it was their first opportunity to see much of this rich culture.



*Busy volunteers at the birthing kit day. Photo Jenny Templin.*

For SAWA, Dawn Atkinson with Jenny Matkevich and her sister organised two groups of 25 supporters to tour this exhibition. We are grateful for the \$500 the groups donated to SAWA NSW. Videos of this wonderful exhibition are at [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/afghanistan](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/afghanistan).

## **FILM NIGHTS**

In February, our showing of *I am a Girl* proved very popular, raising \$1700; thanks to St Scholastica's College for providing the venue and to Rebecca Barry for talking about her film on the night.

On March 26th, 85 SAWA supporters attended a film night at the Palace Cinema to see *Wadjda*. The film tells the story of an 11-year-old girl in Saudi Arabia who wants to ride her own bicycle. In ways which parallel the oppression of many Afghan girls, she comes into conflict with authority and challenges the repression of women. Over \$1000 was raised for SAWA-NSW.

## **DATES FOR DIARY**

**Tuesday 17 June 2014 6.30 for 7.00pm:**

Banquet at Bamiyan Afghan Restaurant, 175 First Ave, Five Dock NSW 2046 Cost \$65.00. Book through [bookings@sawansw.org.au](mailto:bookings@sawansw.org.au) or phone 0425 718 996

**August 2014: CBD location**, 12 noon on a date to be notified. Sydney Presentation of *Two Trees*, a coffee table art book published by SAWA-SA. This beautiful book grew from the collaboration of Australian artists and Afghan women who tell their stories. These are the women who bravely attend the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul (funded by SAWA) often in danger of abuse and violence from the male members of their family because of their attendance.

**October 2014:** Circle Cafe Balmain on date to be notified. Talk by expert on the situation of Afghan women, followed by supper.

**November 2014:** Annual SAWA Lunch on date to be notified.



*Musicians playing at the Afghan exhibition. Photo Maliha Said.*