



From the Editor

Events in the Middle East dominate the news. Fundamentalist Islam spreads fear and terror through peace-loving Muslim communities. Our government exploits the situation, cutting social welfare and development aid to finance its military drive. Where does it all end? Is there a future for forgotten Afghanistan? This issue of the SAWAN introduces some of the democratic forces in the country, forces that do not receive support from foreign governments who want to shape Afghanistan to their liking by propping up old warlords, forces of democracy linked through their ideals with our partner organisations in Afghanistan. By supporting the projects of OPAWC, AFCECO and RAWA with our donations we do more for democracy in Afghanistan than all foreign governments combined.

Matthias Tomczak

Solidarity Party of Afghanistan - Hambastagi

During the preparations to the presidential elections in February Hafiz Rasikh, a leading member of the Solidarity Party of Afghanistan – Hambastagi, gave an interview to the Osservatorio Afghanistan of Italy. The following information is from that interview report.

Born in 2004, the Solidarity Party of Afghanistan today counts more than 30,000 registered members from across the country's provinces and rural areas, where the party is particularly active. Through local provincial representatives, the SPA pursues a political and social agenda of inclusion, by promoting literacy programs as well as the active engagement of the population in the process of the country's reconstruction.

The SPA firmly opposes the Afghan government and its corrupted political establishment formed by fundamentalists, criminals and warlords and strongly condemns the US-NATO occupation of Afghanistan. The Solidarity Party demands justice for the thousands of civilian victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Afghanistan since the communist era and demands the deposition of warlords who hold key positions in the Afghan government.

The SPA intends to offer a third way to all those seeking justice and a democratic alternative to the occupying forces, as well as to the fundamentalists in power. Three basic principles form the solid foundations of this young party: secularism, women's rights and democracy.

SPA political activity includes public protests which are attended by thousands of members of the civil society, including women, against the government and the US-NATO occupation of Afghanistan. Several members of the party have been arrested during the course of these protests and subsequently released with the help of international campaigns.

Hafiz Rasikh said: "We believe that without justice there cannot be any democracy. Afghans consider justice a necessary condition for peace, yet today they are still awaiting accountability for the human rights violations and war crimes committed by the same people that now rule the country. Under such circumstances, any election is pointless. The word 'democracy', in the present Afghan context, is a mere instrument of propaganda of US and of the country's Afghan puppets."

With regard to alliances with other organisations Hafik Rasikh explained: "First of all, they must not hold any criminal background; secondly, they must be willing to take a clear and firm stance against warlords and criminals who have dominated the political scene of



A demonstration against the foreign occupation of Afghanistan organised by the Solidarity Party, 7 October 2011

our country in the last three decades; thirdly, they must not be involved in any case of corruption or embezzlement; they must advocate human rights and gender equality; they should believe in secularism and lastly, recognise Afghanistan as a country occupied by the US forces and their allies."

The full interview can be found at

<http://www.hambastagi.org/new/english-section/readers-column/661-interview-with-hafiz-rasikh-member-of-solidarity-party-of-afghanistan-on-upcoming-elections.html>

Ramzan Bashardost



Among the members of Afghanistan's parliament Ramzan Bashardost stands out as a representative who has the respect of ordinary Afghans. Coming from a family of government employees, he finished high school in Iran and then went to Pakistan. In 1983 he took up studies

in France where he obtained Masters in Law, Diplomacy and Political Science and finally a Ph.D. in Law.

Bashardost believes that mounting disgust with warlord-dominated patronage networks has led Afghans to begin to shift away from traditional ethnic-tribal politics toward issues of substance like jobs and education. He criticises the government and the warlords and denounces foreign aid agencies for spending billions of dollars in reconstruction contracts without much result. As planning minister in 2004 he called for non-governmental organizations to be expelled and resigned in frustration. Now he supports real development but still says that 90% of NGOs in Afghanistan are sham setups.

Bashardost lives a frugal life. As presidential candidate in 2009 he campaigned around the country, reaching out to the poor travelling on a bicycle, and came third after Karzai and current Prime Minister Abdullah Abdullah, beating the current President Ashraf Ghani into fourth place. (As no candidate had achieved absolute majority and a

run-off election between first and second was required, he was not included in the run-off election.) He did not run for presidency again since he too has realised that every potential candidate has to yield to the wishes of Obama and he is not willing to do so. Hafiz Rasikh of Hambastagi says about him :

"Mr. Bashardost is a reputable and charismatic man who gained the respect of our people with his honest conduct, however, we believe that he is not making the most of his power and mostly believes in individual struggle and not organised struggle by political parties and organisations. At the time, he was the only candidate to receive a considerable number of votes without having to get his hands dirty with corrupted figures or use his power in illicit ways. Eventually, he did not win the presidential elections and that's because the US did not approve of him. Even in the case of a victory, he would have been surrounded by many other criminals who would have prevented him from pursuing his political agenda."

Belquis Roshan



A fearless voice in support of the people in Afghanistan's upper house is that of Belquis Roshan. At a conference organised in Kabul on 23 May 2013 by the Human Rights Focus Organisation with the support of 100 other civil institutions she said: "The first crime the Americans committed against us was to raise the criminals to rule us. The president of Afghanistan promised the people he would not compromise with the criminals, but he allowed the

highest number of criminals to join him." She added: "Democracy arrived once from Russia and once from the US. Imported democracy has always been detrimental to the people. Democracy should arise from among the people."

When Hamid Karzai addressed the Loya Jirga in November 2013 and urged the assembly to agree to a continued presence of US troops, including permission to enter Afghan homes in "exceptional circumstances" when their lives are at risk Roshan said: "Every situation is serious for them. All those people who have been killed by American soldiers were exceptions." She was promptly escorted out of the room by security.

A good friend of Malalai Joya, Belquis Roshan was one of 150 guests at the wedding of Samia with 22 year old Faramarz, one of Joya's bodyguards for more than four years. It was not the usual wedding ceremony – Samia had been kidnapped and gang-raped by eight armed men, an event that usually means the end to any hope of a normal life. Her father, then a farmer, tried to get justice but was threatened and later imprisoned. "Faramarz, he really is a hero," said Roshan, "because in Afghanistan no-one marries a raped girl. It's nothing to do with the Koran; it's just a tradition." But Faramarz only said: "When I got the news that Samia would marry me, I was so happy, I didn't know whether I was on the earth or in the sky."

A new government signs away Afghanistan's sovereignty

Four years ago US Vice-President Joe Biden said that the USA would be "totally out" of Afghanistan "come hell or high water, by 2014." Last month President Obama signed an agreement with the

new Afghan government that allows US and NATO troops to stay in the country "until the end of 2024 and beyond."

The deal not only guarantees that the war will continue without end, it signs away Afghanistan's sovereignty:

- The agreement can only be terminated by mutual consent, so no future Afghan government can revoke it before 2024 if the USA do not agree to it.
- All foreign troops operate beyond the reach of Afghan law.
- In addition to the massive air bases in Bagram, Jalalabad and Kandahar the USA will have military bases in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Helmand, Gardez and Shindand, allowing its forces to reach into all corners of Afghanistan.
- The agreement sets no limit to the number of foreign forces in the country.
- By acknowledging "that the US military operations to defeat al-Qaida and its affiliates may be appropriate in the common fight against terrorism" the agreement gives the green light to military action of the USA without consultation with the Afghan government.

the guardian weekly 10 October 2014

Women overcome tribal traditions

Although the women enrolled in the literacy course of OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre have taken a decisive step on the way to freedom and independence, many still face problems stemming from entrenched tribal tradition and domestic violence. OPAWC has sought the assistance of HAWCA (Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan), a group of volunteers established in January 1999 by young Afghan women and men to assist with legal, medical and other aid.



In May 2014 HAWCA presented a series of seminars and training workshops in the OPAWC office about human rights, women rights, child rights, and the Law of Elimination of Violence against Women. The goal was to ensure that everyone in the society knows about these laws and how to defend one's rights whenever they are being violated by anyone in the society or in any government office.

The awareness program led to better relationships between male and female members of the families. Other cases were handed over to HAWCA lawyers and resolved with their assistance. One example is the case of Shazia, an 18 year old girl from Wardak. While Shazia was attending OPAWC's Literacy Course her father decided to marry her to his friend's son. When she was told about this arrangement she refused to marry the boy, but her father declared that she has no choice but to accept what her father is deciding for her. She cried and told OPAWC that she does not love the boy and wants to study for now. She said that if she is forced to marry him she will burn herself to death.

OPAWC introduced Shazia to HAWCA and asked HAWCA for help. HAWCA's defence lawyer and educational officer visited her home and explained to her father that it is against sharia law to marry someone against her consent and that it will destroy his daughter's life. They told him that her daughter will kill herself if he forced her to marry the man she does not love. After four visits her father decided to stop the marriage proceedings and thanked HAWCA for opening his eyes, and Shazia continues with her education.

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Convener: Matthias Tomczak **Secretary:** Christine Gamble **Treasurer:** Christine Tomczak
Committee: Maureen Arnott, Elaine Gouldhurst, Kath Jones, Ruth Redfern
Newsletter editor: Matthias Tomczak **Public Officer:** Ruth Redfern **Auditor:** Bob Shahinger

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.

Price reduction for *Two Trees* art book



Since July 2013, when *Two Trees*, our book of Australian art and Afghan stories, became available, its sale has raised over \$14,000. No sales have slowed, but we still have some 300 copies left. Our support projects in

Afghanistan are in need of funds, and it is of no help to have so many copies sitting in our storeroom. The committee decided to lower the price for *Two Trees* from its original \$38 to \$25 in time for Christmas shopping. You can order your copies at the new price from our shop at www.sawa-australia.org/index.php/shop.

One of the stories in the book was written by Shakila: "I have a story that every time I remember it, I feel embarrassed. At the time when I had not yet come to the literacy course, one day I went to the bazaar. I went and asked for the price of an item, the shopkeeper said that it was for thirty Afghanis but I told him that if he gave it for forty Afghanis I would buy it or else I would not buy it. The shopkeeper laughed and said: "Child! Forty Afghanis is more than thirty Afghanis." I became very embarrassed and returned home. I was embarrassed that our neighbours go to literacy courses and our father does not give us permission. I told my father this story and he agreed that I join the literacy course. I am very happy now and it is because of this literacy course."



Artwork by Annelise Scott with a story by Hamida

More artwork and stories can be seen at our online shop page.

Two new committee members

At the Annual General Meeting held on 17 September 2014 SAWA (SA) elected two new committee members.

Elaine Gouldhurst had been nominated before the meeting, and members had been informed about her candidature with the invitation papers. Elaine has been a member of SAWA for many years. She is concerned about children's and women's welfare. She visited refugees in the Port Headland Detention Centre every time she travelled to Port Headland to visit her daughter there and still has close ties with one of the Hazara families from that time.

As there were fewer nominations than committee positions, new nominations were called for at the meeting, and **Maureen Arnott** was nominated. Maureen is a member of WILPF, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and can look back on a long involvement with our work through WILPF's sponsorship of SAWA (SA). She is also a volunteer with the Australian Refugee Association and is currently providing English home tutoring and other support to a middle-aged widow from Afghanistan who typifies the women helped by OPAWC.

Visit the new SAWA (SA) auction site

We live in an affluent world and often acquire things over the years that end up dormant in cupboards but can be of use to others. You now have the opportunity to sell or buy a selection of items and help Afghanistan's women at the same time through SAWA (SA)'s new auction site <http://www.ebay.com.au/usr/sawa-australia>. New items will be added to the site as items are sold, so check it out regularly.



At the moment all items traded are based in Adelaide. If you have an item you want to donate for the auction we can organise this for other locations as well, but it will require a bit of preparation. So please help our fundraising and email support@sawa-australia.org.

The plight of teachers in Afghanistan

Teacher's Day was celebrated at the Vocational Training Center on 15th October 2014.

The plight of Afghanistan's teachers is untold. The country has the lowest salary for teachers in the world. Compared to other professions teachers are among the financially worst hit people of the society. A teacher's salary in Afghanistan is about 5000 Afghanis (100 USD). Apart from this low salary teachers are suffering in several ways, from lack of attention from the government to serious problems such as killing or kidnapping by opposition groups like the Taliban. For the last five months the Government has not paid the majority of teachers across the country. Such a serious issue has never been highlighted in the media; nor did the Education Minister bother to notice the issue. The financial troubles aside, most teachers across the far-flung rural parts of the country are untrained and non-professional; most have not completed their school graduation.

At present there are 217,000 teachers teaching 11 million students. (6 million students are unable to go to school in unsecured provinces.) Because of the lack of professional teachers the students' level of education is very low. The Government pays little attention in this regard. Professional teachers that complete their graduation with an education degree from Kabul University are reluctant to join the unattractive profession in the country, where they are not paid salaries for months.

Officials of the Education Ministry are attending symbolic celebrations in Kabul every year. They make some speeches, praising teachers and their role in society, but nobody speaks of the troubles teachers are facing in Afghanistan.

The new President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai has promised to provide housing for teachers. We will have to wait and see whether this promise comes true this time or whether it is just like previous ones.

The difference between teachers in government schools and teachers in the Vocational Training Center is that the teachers in the Vocational Training Center are fully respected, paid on time and receive other additional support from OPAWC's office.

Latifa Ahmady, director of OPAWC



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

HAVING a BABY in AFGHANISTAN

"I am going on a difficult journey; I may not be able to come back but I hope you will have a new baby".

A statement similar to this is what many pregnant women in fear of death tell their children in Afghanistan, explained Sabera Turkmani, to a shaken SAWA-NSW audience after our AGM in October.

Sabera is the former Director of the Afghanistan Midwives Association, the largest Afghan women's rights organisation and was recently awarded an International Leadership award and a Human Rights award at UTS where she is a post-graduate student.

Sabera spoke of hope of reducing mothers' deaths in Afghanistan from recent advances there. In 2000, at the end of the Taliban era, there were as many as 16,000 deaths per 100,000 births. At that time, except in some large centres, virtually all women faced birth without help from a skilled birth attendant (SBA) and with no help for the common and manageable causes of maternal death e.g. postpartum haemorrhage, obstructed delivery and infection.

Now with an energetic program of training midwives up to 15% of home births have an SBA and about 28% of mothers are within reach of a newly established general health clinic.

The impact of the Taliban induced a generation of illiterate young women and the culturally ingrained belief that women have no right to special help, made it particularly difficult to find women who could be trained as midwives. Education and health are hence closely connected. Initially the challenge was to find at least 20 women in a local area of about 10,000 who were literate and allowed by their family to train. But by 2010, midwives schools had been established in 28 of the 32 provinces of Afghanistan. As many as 4000 SBAs were trained - about half the number needed.

The establishment of health clinics has helped. Although the Government of Afghanistan now claims that 80% of the population has cover, Sabera pointed out that, even with this advance, 73% of pregnant women are too far away from a clinic and have no access to SBAs. Still 89% of women are illiterate; only 30% of girls are in primary school and of these only 5% go on to secondary schools. In the last two years with the American withdrawal and increased violence and Taliban influence, the rate of midwife training has slowed.

Sabera encouraged us to advocate with our government for aid which helps directly in the area of women's health and education and to continue to publicise the situation of oppressed Afghan women.

TWO TREES PRESENTATION

SAWA - NSW and SAWA - SA held their first joint function in August when they combined for a

presentation in Sydney of the art book "Two Trees" produced by South Australia

Emma Ayres from ABC Radio National spoke about her time teaching at the Kabul Music School and Matthias Tomczak, Convener of SAWA - SA showed photos of and talked about the Vocational Training School in Kabul where the art works were annotated by women who had learned literacy skills there. Both Emma's work and the project "Two Trees" exemplified the role the arts can play in promoting intercultural understanding.

Books are still available from SAWA-NSW with the proceeds supporting both Hewad School and the Kabul Vocational Training School funded by SAWA - SA.

SAWA AUSTRALIA's two branches

- SAWA-SA and SAWA-NSW

Originally SAWA - AUSTRALIA was a single organisation, but divided in 2010 into two separately incorporated associations with the same general mission but distinct projects and their own constitutions and membership lists. A few people are financial members of both associations but occasionally requests for donations reach people who are not a member of a particular state association. We hope this explanation reduces confusion.

DATES FOR DIARY

27 November 2014: 12 for 12.30

Annual SAWA Lunch at Alegrias Spanish Tapas Restaurant 332 Darling St, Balmain. Cost \$60 or \$55 for Centrelink pensioners.

RSVP to Maryellen Galbally <mailto:bookings@sawansw.org.au> or phone: 0425 718 996

Payment can be made by cheque to SAWA-Australia NSW, PO Box 1741, Rozelle NSW 2039

or by Direct Deposit to Bendigo Bank Rozelle BSB 633-000, A/C 141397471, description "your surname Alegrias" and please also email treasurer@sawansw.org.au

Monday, 2 March 2015 Birthing Kit Assembly Day

See our webpage for up to date details.



Recent photo of students at Hewad School