



From the Editor

Most of this SAWAN is dedicated to Amnesty International's report on Afghanistan of last month. It confirms that the security situation in the provinces is deteriorating and that security concerns are now taking precedence over any improvement of the situation of women. We have to admire the women of the Vocational Training Centre who increase the Centre's security through the support of the local community (page 3). Let us secure their success by keeping the Centre alive through our donations!

As I am currently travelling in Europe and Afghanistan the printed version of this SAWAN will be mailed after my return to Australia in early June.

Matthias Tomczak

Amnesty report: *Security* replaces *Development* as priority political objective

Between August and November 2014 Amnesty International interviewed more than 50 male and female human rights defenders from 13 provinces. Its report, published in April, summarizes the results. The following is an edited extract from its 88 pages.

When the USA entered Afghanistan following the 11 September 2001 attacks, women's rights and gender equality were high on the agenda. The 2004 Constitution guaranteed equal rights for women and men, education for all and a minimum quota for women in the Afghan parliament. The National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) became the government's main vehicle for implementing policies to advance the status of women through 2018. The adoption in 2009 of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law was a major initiative against gender violence.

However, these legal and policy advances have not translated into sustained change on the ground. Entrenched social and cultural barriers created a growing backlash against women's rights amid a renewed conservatism within the country. This is reflected in the 2013 election law, which rolled back the quota for women's representation in provincial councils from 25% to 20% and removed it altogether for district councils. It can also be seen in the response to the EVAW Law, passed by parliament in 2013 (after being signed into law by Presidential Decree); in a heated debate in parliament, the law was called "un-Islamic" and questions were raised about the minimum age of marriage for girls, the prohibition against forced marriage and the existence of shelters for abused women and girls, which were called "immoral."

Against this backdrop, there has been a significant increase in threats, intimidation and attacks against people at the forefront of promoting and protecting women's rights, in particular in the south and south-eastern parts of the country. Many women human rights defenders have been threatened and their homes or family members have been attacked. Some have even been killed for their activities, while others have had to flee the country for fear they will be next.

Today concerns are growing that human rights will be deprioritized as economic and security problems increase and international interest and foreign aid decline.

The backlash against women's rights and the corresponding increase in violence against women human rights defenders in all areas of public life has also had a significant effect on the broader

environment in which they work. In some districts it is too dangerous for women to work as teachers and in most districts girls are taken out of school at 11 or 12 years of age. In 2009, 11 women ran for provincial council; in 2014 only five women were willing to run.

Women human rights defenders face threats and violence not only from the Taliban and other armed opposition groups but also from state actors, and in particular, law enforcement and security officials. They are also at risk of harm from powerful commanders and warlords, who are either connected to state authorities or are the local officials themselves. As one of the interviewees explained: "The threats now come from all sides; it is difficult to identify the enemies. They could be family, security agencies, Taliban, politicians."

One likely reason for the Afghan government's dismal performance in fulfilling its international obligations is the lack of legal clarity in the Constitution between the adherence to international human rights norms on the one hand and the primacy of Islamic law on the other. Article 7 affirms that Afghanistan "shall observe the United Nations Charter, inter-state agreements, as well as international treaties to which Afghanistan has joined, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." However, Article 3 states: "No law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan." This is backed up by Article 130, which affirms that Sunni Hanafi jurisprudence takes precedence "if there are no provisions in the Constitution or other laws about a case."

Although EVAW Commissions have now been established in 28 provinces, only 16 of them are currently functioning. In Faryab, although the Commission had been set up four years ago, its members had not met for over two years after the UNDP's initial financial support stopped.

In 2005 Family Response Units (FRUs) were established inside local police stations. FRUs are responsible for addressing domestic violence cases, including harmful traditional practices, such as early or forced marriage, and the exchange of girls to honour a debt or settle a feud. In addition to the FRUs, the EVAW Law requires police to investigate complaints of violence against women and girls and other women's rights abuses.

Very few FRUs are staffed by female police officers, who face particularly high levels of harassment and at times sexual assault. As a result the number of female police officers remains below 2%.



A female police officer is accompanied by male colleagues after an investigation in a village. (The Wall Street Journal)

In an interview on 12 December 2014 an international NGO said: "Women and policing is one of the most intractable issues. The general environment for gender is difficult, but within the police it's like promoting veganism in a den of lions."

A **female police officer** from Helmand was abducted and killed, the fourth policewoman from the province to die in the past year. Helmand has become the most dangerous province for women to serve in the police, with gunmen killing Helmand's senior police-woman in September, just months after her predecessor died in a similar attack. To date, no one has been arrested or charged with either murder and their families are unaware of any investigation into their deaths.

Attacks on **female politicians** are also becoming more frequent. Nadia Kayyani, a provincial council member from Baghlan, was attacked in a drive-by shooting in April 2010. In Ghazni province female parliamentarian Fariba Ahmadi Kakar was kidnapped and senator Rohgul Khairkhwah attacked in 2013. In November 2014 another parliamentarian was wounded in a bombing in Kabul. In February 2015 a roadside bomb planted near a school in Jalalabad was detonated as Angeza Shinwari, a member of the Nangarhar provincial council, drove past. She was seriously wounded in the attack and died five days later. Her driver was also killed and four other civilians were wounded.

Adeena almost quit politics even before she was elected to the Lower House in 2005. She said in her interview: "When I was running for Parliament, my brother was killed campaigning for me. I wanted to resign then, but my mother who was grieving told me, 'how can you give up after everything we have been fighting for.'" This kept her going following a hand grenade attack on her home in 2011, while she was an MP.

Mirwais, a **male lawyer** who is 27, works for a women's shelter. He is proud of his role in defending women's rights but has not told his



A female lawyer defends a woman in court

family where he works because of the misconceptions about the purpose of shelters. Many people, including lawmakers and community elders, believe that

shelters are places of prostitution and that 'immoral women' occupy them. Mirwais also is often fearful because of his work. He says:

"My main fear comes from cases where the perpetrator has been prosecuted and convicted. I worked on one high-profile case. In court, after one of the perpetrators, a member of the Afghan Local Police, had been sentenced he turned to me and said, while people were listening, 'it doesn't matter who it is – you, your son, we will come and seek revenge for your doing this.'"

The government's **Department of Women's Affairs** (DOWA) has been a target of many attacks. In Laghman province two DOWA directors have been killed. All DOWA directors in the country have been allocated three bodyguards as a result, but Dr Shah Bibi, the current Laghman province director, says:

"If the enemy decides to harm, they will harm, even if we have 100 bodyguards. Since I became DOWA director I have received many threats. I was told 'we will kill you the same way we did your predecessors. We will kill anyone else who dares to take this

position after you as well. You are encouraging women to divorce, you break up families; this is why we want to kill you. Women should stay at home and have nothing to do with politics.'



Sha Bibi, according to the US military the "brave woman who accepted the most dangerous job in Afghanistan"

"The first DOWA Director Hanifa Safi apparently received many threats but no one took them seriously. The second DOWA director Najia Sediqi received threatening phone calls and other threats but no one did anything for

her until she was killed even though her husband was a respected Hezb-e-Islami commander during the Jihad times. But when it comes to targeting women, the Taliban and Hezb-e-Islami have no mercy on anyone, even on their own people.

"There are three categories of threats. The first is the Taliban. I have received many night letters and telephone threats. They have also threatened my relatives. I survived two suicide attacks. The second is the government itself. They create as many obstacles as possible. I received a direct threat from a district governor when I refused to give him a bribe to implement a project. There is also harassment from the police and the National Directorate of Security. The third is the discrimination I face. Because I am a woman and belong to an ethnic minority there is a lot of character assassination against me."

More women forced into begging in the streets

The BBC Persian service held a debate between the Deputy Ministries of Social Affairs and Women Affairs and an OPAWC representative in Kabul.

Latifa Ahmady, the representative of OPAWC, said that the number of beggar women in Afghanistan increases day by day. The representatives of the Deputy Ministries argued that most of the women beggars are professionals and that they developed the habit to beg. Latifa Ahmady rejected this and said that no woman is interested in going for begging and self-abuse in the streets, that we must find the true reasons for begging and we know that it's because of poverty, unemployment, insecurity, inequality and corruption in the country, which has led the majority of women and children to beg.

Ahmady asked the Deputy of Women Affairs to have a serious look into the affairs of NGOs who misuse much of the funds under the pretext of supporting women, but the Deputy said that unfortunately this right has not been given to her ministry; she added that they even don't know most of the NGOs working for women and receiving big funds.



OPAWC director Latifa Ahmady (centre) in the debate

**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

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Regional groups in Vic, WA, Tas and Qld contribute to the support for the Vocational Training Centre and Hamoon Clinic.

The Vocational Training Centre strengthens its security through ties with the local community

The following is an excerpt from the Annual Report of the Vocational Training Centre in Afshar district of Kabul, run by the Organisation for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities (OPAWC), for 2014. The full report is available on the SAWA (SA) website. A printed version can be ordered by writing to the SAWA (SA) mail address.

Afshar District is one of the poorest areas in Kabul city, where warlords are still in power. One of the warlords still dominant in this area is Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.* All luxury buildings near muddy houses or tents of the poor people belong to his commanders and followers. One of OPAWC's students said: "Sayyaf is the killer of my father, but instead of being punished now he is rolling in our area, he has built his university in the name of Wahdat** and teaches our young generation his own misogynist ideas."

Now Afshar District is undergoing important changes in the lives of its people. OPAWC has been working continuously in this area to help people come out of their misery and forge their destiny themselves.

OPAWC decided to set up groups of women elected by them to represent all women in each particular section of the Vocational Training Centre, to encourage them to think that this centre belongs to them and that they have the right to make decisions and to suggest things they want.

OPAWC worked hard among the women to make them ready for the committees, to follow their own cases and cooperate with the main office. Soon many women were ready to join the committees, and their trust in OPAWC grew. Each section of the Centre set up its own committee. The committees have their own meetings every fortnight and then share their discussion with OPAWC's main office.

OPAWC believes that change will be brought to a community by those who are dominant and influential members of the society. OPAWC therefore made it one of its goals to establish a new influential committee in Afshar that is quite unique. OPAWC together with members of the Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA) met the various legal representatives of Afshar*** and participated in their meetings. We introduced our goals and our project, and it was highly appreciated and supported by the members of the Committee of Representatives, who promised us to support us in any way they could.



Members of the women's committees meet representatives of Afshar district

* Abdul Rasul Sayyaf is a fundamentalist warlord of the Wahhabi faith with close connections to the Saudi king family. He fought against the Soviet occupation, financed already then by Saudi Arabia, and formed a close relationship with Osama Bin Laden. He was involved in the Afshar massacre of 1993 and responsible for hundreds of deaths of Afshar's Hazara population. He is a member of parliament and calls for a general amnesty for all war crimes. In 2014 he was a candidate for the presidency and received 7% of the vote.

** Wahdat (Unity) university teaches mainly religious subjects with emphasis on fundamentalist views.

*** Afshar district has 12 streets. Each street has its own committee and selects a legal representative who passes issues on to the higher authorities.

Hamoon Clinic report for 2014

During the 13 years since the establishment of the Hamoon Health Centre Hamoon has earned the reputation of being the only reliable medical centre in the province. As the entire population of Afghanistan's largest province with a population of around 900,000 people depended on the ill-equipped state run hospital, establishment of this clinic was a blessing for them. Today the Hamoon Health Centre is famous in the province. Wherever one goes to any corner of the province everyone knows about Hamoon Health Centre and speaks highly of it.

For 2014 OPAWC planned to build a laboratory and a physiotherapy room. Eventually, after a long wait, funds were found to convert one room into a laboratory, while the physiotherapy room is still on the list of projects. We hope that in future we will be able to establish a physiotherapy room with the



support of our kind and humanity loving donors and supporters.

Establishing a blood test laboratory was a real revolution for the people of Farah, and the Hamoon Laboratory has become very important in the city within a short time. Before it became available people had to go to Herat or Kandahar or even Kabul for a simple blood test and had to borrow money for going to other provinces to save their lives. Now they are happy to get their result in their own home town for free.

In March 2014 OPAWC was able to buy a new ambulance with the help of its Australian supporters and CISDA Italy.

Recently Hamoon received a well equipped ultrasound machine from its supporters from Australia. It was originally expected to become available in December, but a suicide bombing in Kabul delayed its arrival to January 2015. Having the possibility to check pregnancies with ultrasound is another step to challenge the various fundamentalist parties in the region that try to impede Hamoon's progress and a great step forward to serve the people day by day. Soon a qualified person will be hired to start the operation of the machine. OPAWC and staff in Hamoon and their patients express their love and thanks to all loving supporters.



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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.

AN AFGHAN STORY

A Student's Courage in Face of Taliban persecution

SAWA-NSW was fortunate to have a young Afghan man, Zaki Hadari as the Speaker at our Art Sale Opening on March 27th at the Balmain Watch House.



Zaki at the opening of the Art Sale, SAWA members deep in thought, and Shirley Allen, Convenor, SAWA NSW on the RHS.

Zaki spoke about his life in Afghanistan. He grew up in an isolated village. Unusually for their community, his father highly valued education and was able to obtain some medical qualifications and subsequently, after quite a struggle, became a doctor. Zaki said he was enormously proud of his father and of the fact that his work had saved hundreds of lives. Both Zaki's parents wanted their children to be well educated and Zaki and his brother were both sent to secondary school in faraway Kabul.

When the Taliban became prominent in Afghanistan the situation of the family, as Hazaras, became tenuous. Zaki's father's regular journeys to Kabul to obtain medical supplies became very dangerous. The route to and from secondary school for the brothers also meant they sometimes had to pass through Taliban checkpoints. On one of his father's journeys the Taliban found that he had written material in English relating to medication. At the roadblock he was accused of working for the foreigners and the Afghan government and was summarily shot and killed. A similar thing happened to Zaki's elder brother who had forgotten to leave behind his school identity card and when this was found at the roadblock, he was also killed. The Taliban let his family know that Zaki himself was now targeted and that he would have to join the Taliban or be killed.

His mother was able to get him a passport but not a Visa. Zaki then fled Afghanistan by himself eventually to arrive, via Indonesia, in Australia as a boat person aged 17. His 5 day journey on an overcrowded little boat with minimal water and no food was terrifying, he had never seen the sea before and could not swim. After some time on Christmas Island, as a child refugee, he was moved to Tasmania. He is now living in shared

accommodation in Sydney on a Bridging Visa E with no right to work or enrol in formal education. All his living expenses including rent and food have to be met by a grant of \$220 per week.

After four years his refugee case has not been determined even though it is known that virtually all Hazara asylum seekers are genuine refugees under the Refugee Convention and in danger if they are sent back to Afghanistan.

The audience seemed much moved by this story and undeterred that it took much longer than the allotted 5 minutes to tell! Zaki has achieved an almost perfect English accent and fluency and still has a desire to go to university to fulfil his parents' dreams as well as his own. Generally there was a sense that a young man with Zaki's courage, English skills and ambition, would make a splendid Australian citizen. We wish him well.

SAWA-NSW ART SALE

The sale was held on 27-29 March at The Watch House, Balmain kindly provided rent free by the Balmain Association. Members and others donated a wide range of paintings and art works. About 50 people attended the opening night and the \$5045 raised is a good addition to our funds for Hewad School. We hope that some of the remaining works will be sold on E-Bay or by private arrangement. The committee is particularly grateful to June Lunsmann for masterminding the exhibition so skilfully.

DATES FOR DIARY

(See also our webpage www.sawansw.org.au)

Wednesday May 13 Lunch at Bamiyan Afghan Restaurant,
175 First Avenue, Five Dock 12.00 for 12.30; cost \$60.00 The invitation is below so please let Maryellen Galbally know if you can come: <mailto:bookings@sawansw.org.au> or phone: 0425 718 996. Payment details below.

Wednesday 22nd July Christmas in July
Dinner and Silent Auction at Finola's Restaurant, Balmain Bowling Club, Darling St East Balmain 6.30 for 7.00 cost \$90.00 . For booking mail to: bookings@sawansw.org.au A formal invitation will be sent to all on our data base closer to the date.

Other events in the planning are October AGM , a Film Night and the annual November Lunch.

Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan (SAWA-NSW)

*Invites you & your friends to a buffet lunch
of traditional Afghan food*

**Bookings essential –
RSVP by Friday 8 May...**

Phone **Maryellen 0425 718 996**

Email **bookings@sawansw.org.au**

Payment after booking:

– direct deposit to Bendigo Bank Rozelle
BSB 633-000 / acc no. 1413 97471

– or send cheque to SAWA-NSW
PO Box 1741, Rozelle, NSW 2039

**All profits will go to support
Hewad School for Afghan Refugees
in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.**



Wednesday 13 May 2015

**12 noon for 12.30pm
at Bamiyan Restaurant
175 First Avenue, Five Dock**

Cost \$60 per person
(drinks available at very reasonable prices)

More information www.sawansw.org.au

SAWA Australia NSW Inc.
SUPPORT ASSOCIATION FOR THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN