From the Editor

Trying to manage the flow of refugees from Syria, the European Union has decided to cut down on refugee intake from other countries. It has declared Afghanistan a "safe country" and intends to forcibly return 80,000 Afghans. Those who are allowed to stay are given so little support that more than 1,000 Afghans have filed applications for voluntary repatriation. They prefer to build themselves a future in their own country. We should do all we can to help the women in Afghanistan and do our best to improve their lives and their country in these difficult times.

Matthias Tomczak

Australia revisits the war

"In their own words & using never-before-seen helmet-cam battle footage, Australian fighting men & women reveal their war." That's how the ABC announced its three part series Inside Australia's war aired over three weeks in February and March. It was not the government's official assessment of a decade of military involvement in Afghanistan (we are still waiting for that), but it showed the Government of Australia logo in the credits as one of its financial supporters, so it is at least semi-official.

What did we learn? The first thing that became evident was that the soldiers did not know a thing about the country they were going to invade: "16th century, that's generous, I would say first century. It was so, so primitive. I couldn't believe that in the 21st century there could be a country so primitive." Obviously nobody had told them anything about Afghanistan of the 1960s and 1970s, during the modernisation drive of king Zahir Shah, so it is at least semi-official.

"You got young Americans, kids, down there; they are going to get killed unless we do something about it." [I could not help thinking]: "You are doing more harm than good, and you should leave."

Ordered by politicians to fight a war that could not be won, young men and women tried hard just to stay alive. ("I remember saying: You got young Americans, kids, down there; they are going to get killed unless we do something about it.") 41 did not make it, as did more than 80,000 Afghans.

There are some moments in history when our soldiers could come home proud of their achievements; East Timor was one of them. Even in Afghanistan there were occasions where they could have been justified to feel good. Hila Achekzai, senator for Uruzgan, says: "The Australians have a good name. They brought change in Uruzgan and helped people a lot." Afghan women's rights activist Tajwar Kakar agrees: "Whenever I asked for help the Australians never said no. So I have good memories of them." But when asked...
The corresponding edition of the SAWAN.

As Elyas Alavi, but where are they? To find the answers to these and many more questions you can now go to the index on the new SAWAN website.

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How many of us remember, or know at all, when Malalai Joya visited Australia and supported SAWA? We printed two beautiful poems by Malalai Joya in SAWAN 47 August 2015.

One year after the brutal murder of Farkhunda (SAWAN 47 August 2015) a huge crowd assembled at the very spot where Farkhunda was killed to witness the unveiling of a memorial by the Solidarity Party. Built by women and carrying her image it rises over the embankment of the Kabul river, dwarfing the surrounding buildings. A reminder of a barbaric crime and an exhortation to fight for the liberation of women, it will become a landmark in the war-torn city.

The women build Farkhunda’s memorial

The completed monument unveiled

The SAWAN now has an online index

For more than 10 years the SAWAN has been reporting not only on our work but also on developments in Afghanistan. Its many issues contain much information, but it is difficult to remember where a particular story is. So on the occasion of the 50th issue of the SAWAN our website now includes an index to all SAWAN issues.

How many of us remember, or know at all, when Malalai Joya visited Australia and supported SAWA? We printed two beautiful poems by Malalai Joya, but where are they? To find the answers to these and many more questions you can now go to the index on the newsletter page http://www.sawa-australia.org/newsletter and get directed to the corresponding edition of the SAWAN.

Screenings of Frame by Frame continue

The documentary about the lives of four Afghan press photographers in Afghanistan continues to resonate with audiences around the country. On 19 March 39 people filled the Port Adelaide library to capacity and raised $273. Through the initiative of a local SAWA supporter the movie was shown on 6 April at the Regent Cinema in Munwillumbah and raised $816 (see page 3).

Forthcoming screenings in Adelaide are scheduled for 19 May at Amnesty International, 19 June at the Mercury Cinema and 25 June at Gallery Yampu. In Victoria Frame by Frame will be screened in Montmorency on 21 May and in Kerang on 25 June. Details can be found in the SA and Vic group pages of the SAWA web site.

SAWA-Australia featured in a new book

What makes an activist? What makes one person speak out against injustice while another will be content to get angry at the TV news? A new book published by Wakefield Press tries to answer the question. “Breaking the boundaries”, edited by SAWA (SA) member Yvonne Allen and Joy Noble, tells the stories of 46 activists from all parts of Australia and all walks of life. Among them are three people well known to SAWA’s supporters.

SAWA (SA) convener Matthias Tomczak reports on his contribution to the development of SAWA-Australia from 2004 to today. Gali Weiss remembers how she brought together 13 artists in Melbourne and initiated the project Two Trees, SAWA’s wonderful art book. Anne Riggs, one of the contributing artists to Two Trees, describes how she brings art to communities around the world to inspire and educate. The book is available for $29.95 from bookshops and can be ordered through the Wakefield Press website.

International Women’s Day at Hamoon Clinic

OPAWC’s aim in all its work is to free the women of Afghanistan from the shackles of a misogynistic tribal society, help them to get on their feet and empower them to take control of their lives. It is easy to see how literacy, English and computer courses in the national capital can contribute to that aim, but what is achieved by supporting a health centre in a remote province? Is it just charity, or does it go beyond that?

This year, for the first time, International Women’s Day was celebrated in Hamoon Clinic in Farah, one of the poorest provinces of the country. Many patients participated with interest, and the staff and some patients presented speeches and poems. The program was very good for the staff and for the patients, it gave them confidence that they are not alone in these critical times, and that OPAWC, and in particular the Hamoon Health Center, is on their side.

In the past the women in the provinces were not ready to get involved in such awareness programs. OPAWC hopes that one day all Afghan women become educated and aware of their rights and free from all kinds of violence in the community and that they gain equal rights, with peace, justice and harmony in Afghanistan.
Chamber music raises funds in Adelaide

On Sunday 3 April nine talented musicians offered a wonderful concert to an audience of 60 music lovers, who were captivated by two rarely played works of 19th century romanticism. The Notos Nonet presented two nonets for strings, wind instruments and horn, Opus 38 by Louise Farrenc and Opus 31 by Louis Spohr, as a fundraiser for SAWA (SA) at Flinders Street Baptist Church.

A most enjoyable, wonderful and inspiring concert raised $1,530 for the Vocational Training Centre. Our thanks go to the Notos Nonet for a generous offer of support and to the Flinders Street Baptist Church for letting us use the church, one of the best concert venues in town.

AFCECO relocates, celebrates National Day

AFCECO’s Mehan orphanage has a new home. The move had become necessary because the old location had received threats from fundamentalists and security could no longer be guaranteed. The new house is big and beautiful and has a large secure yard that will allow the girls to enjoy the outdoors in a secure environment.

The first important event in the new home was the New Year celebration. Nowruz is a special time of year for Afghans, a tradition that goes back thousands of years. Afghans welcome the spring, the beginning of the school year, a time to shake off the bitter cold, clean the carpets, organize the cupboards, pat one another on the back and roll up their sleeves for another season of regeneration.

The celebration lasted till midnight. The girls prepared Samanak, a sweet paste made entirely from germinated wheat (young wheatgrass), prepared especially for Nowruz in a large pot. This practice has been traced back to 3000 years ago. They also decorated a Haft (seven symbolic items traditionally displayed at Nowruz:

- Sabzeh (lentil sprouts) symbolizing rebirth, Samanak symbolizing affluence,
- Senjed (dried oleaster) symbolizing love, Seer (garlic) symbolizing health,
- Seeb (Apple) symbolizing beauty,
- Seen (water) symbolizing life,
- Somq (sumac fruit) symbolizing the colour of sunrise and Serkeh (vinegar) symbolizing old age and patience.

New Entertainment Books for 2016/17

As in previous years we offer again the Entertainment Book for 16 major cities and regions around Australia. Every book contains hundreds of lunch and dinner vouchers, two for one offers for movies, concerts and theatre, special accommodation deals in many cities and much more. You will find it excellent value for your region; having dinner for two only twice will often already recoup the price of the book, and you will continue to save and save for 12 months. 20% of the purchase price goes to SAWA (SA), so you can save and support our work at the same time. The books are available online at http://www.sawa-australia.org/shop/entertainment-books-nationwide.

Funds raised at Murwillumbah film screening

In January a SAWA (SA) member belonging to the Uki Refugee Project in Uki, NSW, decided to bring Frame by Frame to the local cinema in Murwillumbah. The documentary screened on 6 April at the impressive art deco Regent Cinema. The owners and operators, Ken and Mia, were exceptionally generous and charged only $300 for rent and for four hours of their labour, so $816 of the $1,116 taken in ticket sales were raised for Afghanistan. Another $100 were raised through follow-on sales of greeting cards from the SAWA (SA) website, and a SAWA supporter from Toowoomba who had come to see the movie donated $100. Our heartfelt thanks go to the Uki Refugee Project, Ken and Mia, the greater Murwillumbah community and the donor for their support.

A fun afternoon to raise funds in Adelaide

The Mondegreens are a nine voice a capella and accompanied choir who performs original arrangements covering music from The Beatles, The Staple singers, Randy Newman, Van Morrison along with a generous mix of standards from the 40s and 50s. They have generously offered to give a concert to raise funds for SAWA. The concert will be on 14 May 2 pm at Clayton Wesley Uniting Church, 280 Portrush Road, Norwood. Tickets $15/$10 concession at the door.
NEW PROJECT WITH OPAWC

A new project is the main news from SAWA-NSW. We were sad to hear, as previously indicated, that RAWA has had to close our last project, the HEWAD school in Rawalpindi. However, we are delighted to now offer funding to OPAWC (Organization Promoting Afghan Women’s Capabilities), an effective NGO that operates on educational principles similar to those of RAWA. OPAWC was established in 2003 by a volunteer group of Afghan women eager to empower Afghan women through developing sustainable opportunities for them to escape the vicious cycle of dependence and victimization in a male dominated and fundamentalist society. Unlike RAWA which is an underground organisation, OPAWC is officially recognised as an NGO in Afghanistan.

Promoting women’s literacy, practical wage earning skills and health are OPAWC’s key objectives. It believes that if a significant number of women have access to these basic human rights they will have a foothold on the journey to achieve their constitutional right of equality and even legislative support for their rights.

In 2008, OPAWC established a Vocational Training Centre in Kabul teaching literacy and handicrafts. This centre is funded by SAWA-SA and has been extremely successful in reaching large numbers of women. OPAWC also took over the running of the Hamoon Health Centre in Farah province when its founder, Malalai Joya, was attacked for her strong political stand. SAWA-SA was able to find funding for it through Planet Wheeler. OPAWC also has mobile health teams which deliver much needed care to remote areas where the simplest level of support (such as assisting a woman in labour) can save lives.

Since 2003 OPAWC has organised hundreds of literacy classes across the country. They are held in back rooms or schoolrooms, wherever women can meet safe from opposition to their pursuit of knowledge. Income-generating projects such as poultry farms, tailoring, carpet weaving and handicrafts have also been established. These are programs that do not require a high level of education and training but effectively put women in a position to earn wages, often for the first time.

Other activities include the establishment of orphanages and schools, participation in events such as International Women’s Day and reconstruction projects such as power supply to villages in Dara-e-Noor. Always women are encouraged to speak out for their rights, to stand before a crowd and inform the public of their plight and their mission to become productive, contributing, equal members of a civil society.

OPAWC has recently had a request from Nangarhar province to establish literacy support classes there, including English and computer classes in Jalalabad. Nangarhar, in the eastern part of the country, is one of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. It has a population of about 1,436,000 and Jalalabad its capital is about 150 km from Kabul.

It is these English and computer classes which SAWA-NSW will support as its new project. We are pleased that this will also bring us into closer alignment with the focus of SAWA-SA.

RECENT EVENTS

The documentary "Frame by Frame", on conditions in Afghanistan, drew a capacity audience of SAWA-NSW supporters on Thursday 11th February in the CBD. A number of people were disappointed not be able to attend and we plan to show the film again in Balmain. $560 was raised.

The Annual Birthing Kit Assembly Morning on Monday, 7 March at the Leichhardt Rowing Club was well attended and again many commented on how rewarding it is to do something practical to save the lives of mothers and babies. The morning tea on the veranda overlooking Iron Cove was also enjoyed. We are grateful for $2850 in donations to the $3000 cost of the kits.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Also see our Facebook page for information and photos of events

- Dinner at Bamiyan Restaurant, Tuesday, May 10
  175 First Ave, Five Dock 6.30 for 7.00pm. Cost $65 per person. All profits go to our new OPAWC project.

As our webpage is temporarily inactive, we have e-mailed supporters with the information that bookings may be made by 5 May through email: bookings@sawansw.org.au or phone: Shirley, 9818 5319. Please notify our treasurer if you make a direct deposit treasurer@sawansw.org.au.

- Frame by Frame Documentary shown again on a Sunday evening at the Uniting Church 344 Darling St, Balmain. Date TBA.

Volunteers gloving up again after morning tea at the birthing kit day - photo courtesy Jenny Templin. Jenny has been a regular participant at birthing kit days as well as donating her excellent photos.

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