



### From the Editor

*What will 2017 bring for Afghanistan? While the world looks with bated breath at developments in the USA, the UK and elsewhere in Europe, Afghanistan continues to be a battleground for world powers and the fundamentalists, creatures created through the actions of outside powers, and no one is taking notice any more. And it is not only the Taliban, the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and the warlords that make the population suffer. According to the UN the number of casualties caused by pro-government forces rose by 42% during the last year. At SAWA-Australia we are determined to keep Afghanistan in the spotlight and support those who work tirelessly and undauntedly for a better Afghanistan and better lives for its women. Our work remains as important as ever.*

Matthias Tomczak

### Women take up arms against IS

*The following information was obtained from the SBS website, where it was shown on 15 January.*

More than a hundred women in Afghanistan's northern Jawzjan province are taking up arms against IS in Afghanistan, saying the Afghan military has done nothing to protect their families.

The women are among those who have lost a husband, son or brother to the Taliban or the newly active Islamic State in the province bordering Turkmenistan.

"I lost nine members of my family. The Taliban and Daesh (Islamic State) killed my five sons and four nephews," Gul Bibi, an Afghan grandmother well into her eighties said by phone from Jawzjan.

The women approached a local police commander, Sher Ali, in December and asked him for guns and ammunition, but they are not part of a properly structured group, with no military training other than how to point a gun at the enemy and shoot.

The Taliban has carried out attacks in Jawzjan for the last decade, part of a country-wide insurgency to topple the Afghan government and drive out foreign troops.

Islamic State became active in the province - a gateway to Central Asia - in early 2016, when a Taliban commander and 50 of his fighters declared allegiance to the ultra-hardline group, said Mohammad Reza Ghafoori, a spokesman for the Jawzjan governor.

The deputy spokesman for the Afghan Interior Ministry said from Kabul they hope the women join the Afghan security forces, but the women accuse the Afghan army of failing to protect their families.

Thousands of civilians have been killed in Afghanistan in violence since the Taliban government was brought down in the US-led campaign of 2001.

The United States has announced plans to send 300 Marines to the volatile southern province of Helmand, large parts of which are under Taliban control, as part of a regular rotation of troops helping train and advise Afghan forces.

Meanwhile, Russia, China and Pakistan warned last month that the influence of Islamic State is growing in Afghanistan and that the security situation there is deteriorating.

Source: AAP, published 15 January 2016 at <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/01/15/bereaved-afghan-women-fight-against>



*On 13 November 2016 the Afghan news agency Khaama Press already published this photo with an article that says:*

Dozens of Afghan women have joined the fight against the Taliban insurgents who are trying to expand insurgency in key Northern provinces. The uprising has taken shape in the northern Jawzjan province under the leadership of a female militia commander to stop the Taliban insurgents seize control of the strategic areas in this province, including Darzab district.

The group led by a 53-year-old woman, Zarmina, has risen to 45 fighters, including mainly Uzbeks and Aimaqs, a Persian-speaking minority in Jowzjan, a multiethnic province that borders Turkmenistan to the north.

"The number of police personnel was too small, so we had to take up guns alongside our husbands," Zarmina told RFE/RL's Afghan Service. "As the Taliban attacked a police post, I put aside my scarf and fired from different places."

"I had 21 bullets and killed seven Taliban," she claimed.

The latest uprising by the Afghan women in the North comes as an Afghan woman killed at least 25 Taliban militants late in 2014 to avenge the murder of her son who was a police officer in western Farah province.

The woman, Reza Gul, was forced to pick up arms after her son was shot dead by Taliban militants in front of her eyes.

Her son was leading a small group of police forces in a check post located in a village of Farah province.

See the original story at <http://www.khaama.com/dozens-of-afghan-women-join-fight-against-taliban-insurgents-02266>

### Thousands of Shias protest against IS

*The following article was published on 3 January 2017 in Pakistan's The Nation newspaper.*

Around 2,000 Shia Muslims in western Afghanistan organised a protest on Tuesday against the growing sectarian attacks by the militant Islamic State (IS) group, as the government warned that the IS had expanded its foothold into 11 provinces.

Shouting slogans such as "Death to the enemies of Afghanistan!" and "Death to Daesh!", the Arabic acronym for IS, the protesters in the city of Herat marched to the governor's office, carrying pictures of Shiites killed in recent attacks.

"Daesh attacks on our mosques are increasing everyday. They want to create a rift between Shias and Sunnis," Qurban Ali, a 40-year-old demonstrator, told AFP. "This is a dangerous trend and we want the government to protect us."

The rise of IS has raised the spectre of sectarian discord in Afghanistan, something that the country has largely been spared despite decades of war.

Until a few months ago, IS was largely confined to the eastern province of Nangarhar bordering Pakistan, where it is notorious for brutality, including carrying out beheading despite a US-backed offensive against the militant group.

But the government this week said the group was steadily expanding into other provinces.

"Our initial information shows Daesh is behind the recent attacks in Herat. They are expanding and are always looking for new geographical areas," Najeebullah Mani, head of counter-terrorism at the interior ministry, told reporters in Herat.

"They are present in at least 11 (of Afghanistan's 34 provinces). Their main goal is to create sectarian divisions between the locals."

Herat, which borders Iran, has recently witnessed a surge in attacks on the minority group's mosques.

A prayer leader was killed and five others wounded in one such attack on Sunday. The group did not officially claim responsibility for the assault.

"We will not allow Daesh to make Afghanistan another Syria," said 30-year-old Jawad, another protester. "The government must come up with a plan to protect Shias."



Last year Afghanistan witnessed a wave of attacks on the Shia community claimed by IS.

At least 14 Shias were killed in October 2016 in a powerful blast at a mosque in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, hours after gunmen targeted worshippers in a shrine in Kabul and killed 18 people.

In July 2016, the IS militants targeted members of Kabul's Shia community in a suicide bombing that killed more than 80 people and wounded 130.

See the original story at <http://nation.com.pk/international/03-Jan-2017/thousands-of-shias-protest-against-isis-in-afghanistan>

## Warlord Rashid Dostum again in the news

Afghanistan's Vice-President Abdul Rashid Dostum, whose private army has been accused of war crimes many times, is well known to readers of the SAWAN. In SAWAN 12 of November 2006 we reported on the inauguration of his swimming pool with the US Special Forces. In SAWAN 38 of May 2013 we reported that his villa was cut off from the electricity grid because he never paid for the electricity, but he had the house reconnected through someone else's property within hours. Now Afghanistan News reports on 25 January that

Afghanistan's attorney general has ordered the arrest of nine of his employees, the majority of them Dostum's personal guards, in connection with allegations of the kidnapping and torturing of one of his political rivals.

Dostum runs his own political party, Junbesh-i Milli-Yi Islami or the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan. He faces allegations of ordering his men to detain a former political ally of his party, who says that he was kidnapped on November 25 by Dostum's men in the vice president's native Jowzjan Province.

He says he was assaulted by Dostum himself and then taken to one of Dostum's properties where Dostum's men severely beat him, sexually assaulted him with a Kalashnikov rifle, and threatened him for several days while he was held against his will.

Dostum's chief of staff claims that the detained man "was under investigation for providing support to militants" but his family says that he was beaten and kidnapped over a personal feud between the two former allies.

See the original report at

<http://www.afghanistannews.net/news/251177745/afghan-attorney-general-orders-arrest-of-nine-employees-of-vice-president>

## Germany deports Afghan refugees to Kabul

Escorted by 80 German police officers, 26 young Afghans arrived in Kabul Tuesday with only one thought in mind: fleeing this war-torn country. "What would you have me do here? There is only death!" said 19-year-old Ramid Afshah, returning from Germany after five years - a country it had taken him six months to reach.

Several of the migrants told AFP they had been arrested on Monday morning at dawn and sent to Kabul with just a small piece of luggage or a backpack containing their belongings. "The police came to pick us up yesterday morning at 04:00 and we were treated like animals," said Arash Alkozai, 21.

Alkozai, who had come to Germany when he was 16, was living in Munich with his family before taking a room in the city. After leaving school he had studied auto repair, all the while learning to speak his adopted tongue "perfectly".

"I cannot say anything negative about this country that helped me. I respect its decision but now I'm living a nightmare. I've left behind my three-month pregnant girlfriend, I won't find work here and there's no security," he said.

Some 250 people staged a protest against the deportations at Frankfurt airport on Monday night, Sarmina Stuman of the Afghan Refugees Movement told AFP.

A first flight carrying 34 men arrived in Kabul in December, a third of whom had been convicted of crimes ranging from theft to homicide, according to the German authorities.

That did not appear to be the case on Tuesday, when the passengers were able to leave the airport freely.

They will be sheltered by the government for at least two weeks. After that they face an uncertain future, with Afghanistan already so overwhelmed by people fleeing fighting that officials have warned of a humanitarian crisis.

Standing just outside the airport, appearing lost in the fog and melted slush, a man called Milad said he had spent 11 years in Germany and wanted a "cigarette and a drink" before he set off in search of an uncle whose address he did know.

Told his second wish could not be fulfilled in the conservative Islamic republic, he said: "I don't actually know this country."

See the original report, published on 25 January 2017, at

<http://www.afghanistannews.net/news/251170803/germany-sends-afghan-refugees-to-kabul>



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**Patron: Penny Wright, previously SA Senator and member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights**

**Partner NGOs: OPAWC (Organization for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities), AFCECO (Afghan Child Education and Care Organization)**

## The art project continues

In the August 2016 edition of the SAWAN we reported that we were trying to receive an art grant for Zarmina, one of the AFCECO students sponsored by SAWA (SA) members, who hopes to become a sculptor. The plan was for Zarmina to produce two sculptures, one for Kabul and one for Adelaide, of two women, one Afghan, the other Australian, to indicate the friendship between the people of Australia and Afghanistan.

Unfortunately the grant application was not successful; we only learnt recently that the grants we applied for are for South Australian artists or art projects. But the project will still go ahead through the support of friends and donors. Zarmina has already bought a machine and some materials and will start work on the sculptures soon. We intend to reimburse her on her costs and raise the money through a special appeal. In the meantime, if you want to support the project you can donate to our scholarship program with the reference "Zarmina" (at <https://www.givenow.com.au/cause4037>).

## International Women's Day

Every year on the 8th of March people all around the world celebrate International Women's Day. Originally called International Working Women's Day, it was introduced following an International Women's Conference of 1910, at which German socialist Louise Zietz, seconded by the famous socialist and later communist Clara Zetkin, proposed the establishment of an annual event.

Today women around the world hold meetings, marches and demonstrations to reaffirm their determination to equal rights, equal wages and protection from violence. SAWA supports all women in their struggle and stands particularly with the oppressed women of Afghanistan.



*International Women's Day 2015 in the Vocational Training Centre*

## Graduation at the Vocational Training Centre

182 women graduated from OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre on 23 January 2017 after one year of study and received their Merit and Completion Certificates. It was a very special day for the students, who learn thousands of new things, thus making changes to their

lives, turning from beggars to confident women. They had prepared the entire event themselves and celebrated it with enthusiasm.

OPAWC executive director Latifa Ahmady gave brief but important information about the current situation of women in Afghanistan and the importance of learning for the women.

Several guests gave speeches, among them General Saber Aryan from the 5th department of the security police, Marukh Usifzai the head of social coordination of the Women's Ministry, and Mr Zafari the representative of the Literacy Department of the Ministry of Education. All speakers praised OPAWC and gave it high scores for its work.

There were songs, sitar playing, poems and a theatre performance based on real life events, the painful story of one of the many thousand women of the country.

A woman and mother reported the story of her life, recalling the worst moments of her life before saying that now OPAWC is changing her life, opening a new world for her. Her story was very painful, but she is feeling happy now because she can work and send her children to school and provide her daily expenses. She presented her story herself, and after her presentation OPAWC had a small gift for her.



*A student proudly receives her certificate of course completion*

## Another student finds a sponsor

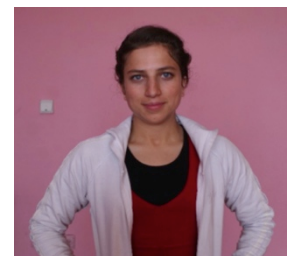
Having witnessed the death of a woman during childbirth because in her home province there were no midwives or even a doctor, Malalai wants to become a midwife herself.

Malalai is from Nuristan province, a mountainous isolated area. She joined an AFCECO orphanage in 2007 along with her two smaller sisters who are now both studying professional music. She finished high school in 2015 and works currently with AFCECO's sponsor-child communication team.

She is also an exceptional soccer player and a member of Afghanistan's National Women's Football Team.

Malalai is sponsored by SAWA member Cookie Lloyd of Austinmere, NSW, who has been and continues to be one of SAWA's most determined supporters. In 2015 Cookie sponsored Zarmina, who has completed her course. Before that she sponsored medical student Sosan.

Other students waiting to be sponsored can be found at <http://www.sawa-australia.org/projects/student-scholarships>. Please consider sponsoring a student or sharing a sponsorship with others.





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Joan Long, Glenda Foster, Denise Fahey. **Public Officer:** Deanna Fekete.

## **THE OPAWC (Organisation Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities) PROJECT FUNDED BY SAWA-NSW.**

The Centre for the project is in QalaTak village north-east of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province of Afghanistan. In the last SAWAN we reported that 500 women had applied for the first 60 places hoping to learn English and Computer Skills and attend the additional sessions on women's rights and health. OPAWC told us that preference was given to widows and others most in need.

A recent *Trust in Education* report explains why life is particularly difficult for Afghan widows. There are as many as 1.5 million widows in Afghanistan with a mean age of 35. This is one of the highest proportions in the world and is primarily due to the high death toll of men in the wars in Afghanistan. It is also related to the early age at which women marry - quite a few as child brides. Some girls are bartered into marriage to repay debt or resolve a dispute. Widespread poverty still compels many parents to get their daughters married to avoid the cost of caring for them. Older, wealthier husbands are sought as they will pay a larger bride-price for a girl.

Married girls do not continue their education and remain illiterate. Moreover a traditional culture which prohibits women appearing in public confines them to home and housework further limiting their economic opportunities.

Recent statistics indicate that as many as 94% of widows are illiterate and most commonly they are supporting more than four children. The family of their husband's brother often supports them but widows without male protection have few options and many are forced to beg or engage in prostitution.

This background helps us understand the very strong demand for a place in the centre we are now funding. Hopefully our contributions will help many of the women find some new opportunities to improve their situation.

## **RECENT ACTIVITIES OF SAWA-NSW**

Our most significant recent activity was the Annual Lunch on 17th November, at the Leichhardt Rowing Club, which raised over \$5,000 and was widely praised as a very enjoyable event. Our Guest Speaker, Phil Glendenning, Director of the Edmund Rice Centre and President of the Refugee Council of Australia has made many visits to Afghanistan. His talk bore directly on the situation above as he emphasised how important it is to support the efforts of Afghan women leaders such as those in OPAWC to improve the very difficult situation of many Afghan women. At the lunch, one of our members, Ruth Shatford sold Christmas puddings as part of a fund-raising drive by St. Alban's Church, Epping. We are delighted to report that the church decided that SAWA should have a large share of the proceeds from the puddings and we have received a further \$5,000 from them. Our sincere and grateful thanks to Ruth and St Alban's.

## **COMING EVENTS**

**1. STALLS** These are as much about publicising SAWA's work as fundraising, but if members are available SAWA-NSW welcomes a visit or assistance on:

• **Saturday 11th February from 9.30 a.m.** - outside the ANZ Bank in Balmain to promote donations to cover the cost of purchasing Birthing Kit components. A number of items will also be for sale including SAWA shopping bags, plum jam from Bronwyn Monro, and some jewellery left from last year's bric-a-brac sale.

• **Wednesday 8th March from 5.00 p.m.** - at International Women's Day event organised by Inner West Council in Pioneer Park, Norton Street, Leichhardt.

**2. BIRTHING KIT ASSEMBLY** Monday, 6th March, 10.00 a.m. at the Leichhardt Rowing Club, Glover St, Leichhardt. Many of our members enjoy the opportunity to contribute directly to safer births in Afghanistan and elsewhere through assembling these simple kits which afford the possibility of a hygienic birth environment in isolated locations without medical support. Each kit costs a mere A\$3.00 for a large plastic ground sheet, soap, sterile gloves, cord cutting blade and cord ties. Such simple things can be life saving for mother and child. Morning tea with donated cakes for the participants in view of Iron Cove is also a pleasant interlude.

**3. MID MAY LUNCH** of Afghan food at the Bamiyan Restaurant Five Dock.

**4. SAT 29 JULY DINNER AND SILENT AUCTION** at the Leichhardt Rowing Club, Glover St Leichhardt.

**5. MID NOVEMBER LUNCH** The annual lunch will be held as usual - date and venue will be decided a little later in the year. Further details for all of the above as they are confirmed will be supplied by e-mail, in future SAWANs and on our website [www.nsw.sawa-australia.org](http://www.nsw.sawa-australia.org) and Facebook page

**OUR FACEBOOK PAGE** - *Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan SAWA -NSW*. We strongly encourage members to visit this page and encourage others to visit and "like" it too. With a larger readership we hope to be able to develop crowd-funding initiatives here.



*Phil Glendenning speaking at the lunch*