



### From the Editor

*Some of you may have noticed irregularities in the operation of SAWA-Australia, particularly in the distribution of the SAWAN. Unfortunately I had to spend more than two months in hospital, which limited my capacity to look after my editorial responsibilities. The May edition of the SAWAN was only distributed by email, so those of you who are not on email will receive it together with this edition – belated, but hopefully still instructive.*

*I am still in recovery mode as I write this, and as a result this issue of the SAWAN is somewhat light on information on our projects and relies on the availability of photos and reports taken from our partner organisations. I hope that it gives an insight into life under constant threat of attacks and into the determination of the women of Afghanistan to improve their conditions in the face of adversity, and motivates you to continue your support for our work.*

Matthias Tomczak

### Trump's change of heart on Afghanistan

Since 2001 more than 2,300 U.S. troops have been killed in action and more than 17,000 wounded. No wonder, then, that in 2013 when Washington and Kabul signed the *Bilateral Security Agreement* (BSA) under which some 10,000 U.S. troops will remain until “the end of 2024 and beyond” Donald Trump tweeted: “Do not allow our very stupid leaders to sign a deal that keeps us in Afghanistan through 2024 – with all costs by U.S.A. MAKE AMERICA GREAT!”

Two years later he said in an interview: “We made a terrible mistake getting involved there in the first place. (...) It’s a mess, it’s a mess and at this point we probably have to (leave U.S. troops in Afghanistan) because that thing will collapse in about two seconds after they leave.” Now he has authorized the Secretary of Defence James Mattis to decide what troop levels are needed to “defeat the Taliban.” Mattis told the Senate Armed Services Committee: “We are not winning in Afghanistan right now. And we will correct this as soon as possible.”

Senator John McCain questioned General Mattis on the volatile situation in Afghanistan during the hearing and said that the United States needs “a change in strategy, and an increase in resources if we are to turn the situation around.” Mattis acknowledged McCain and said that “we recognize the need for urgency.” The New York Times reported on 18 June that the “Pentagon is moving ahead with plans to send 3,000 to 5,000 troops to try to stabilize the country.”

### A new academic year brings new skills

Nowruz marks the Afghan New Year on 21 March. It is also the time which marks the beginning of the academic year. Schools as well as other educational institutions open after the long three month winter break. At OPAWC, the Vocational Training Centre started also again with the arrival of spring. This year is the beginning of new plans, hopes and dreams for all students of this Centre.

With the start of the new academic year students have left behind the distresses and problems of the long winter. Just like the flowers blooming, the students are also refreshed, wanting to learn new skills in the course of the year.

OPAWC’s Centre employees are glad that their hard work is producing positive results. Their students are learning a lot of skills.

In the tailoring course, the women have reached a level that they can provide their needs and they are self-sufficient now. Moreover, from the literacy courses, a number of women have been admitted in different grades to public schools and are continuing their studies.



Spring at the Vocational Training Centre



Handicrafts, a sector which has been practiced in Afghanistan for centuries, has also seen improvements in the Centre. These products: beautiful bags of laptop, pretty mobile cases, wonderful table cloths, dresses and tops with a variety of hand-made embroidery are the result of students’ hard work in the Centre.



Information and photos taken from OPAWC’s website

### International Women’s Day in OPAWC Centers

International Women’s Day is the day of solidarity of women across the globe. On this day the organizations, parties and democratic and revolutionary individuals, especially those freedom loving women who struggle for their rights, vow once again to continue their tireless efforts for women’s rights and equality. OPAWC has been a pioneer in all issues related to women and has been an active participant in

all social programs to raise its voice and to defend the women to every degree possible.

This year OPAWC celebrated International Women's Day in four provinces: **Kabul, Herat, Farah** and **Nangarhar**. Each province had its separate program with speeches, national songs and theatre performance. The themes of all speeches were approximately the same, about the present worsening conditions for women and the bad situation of the country in general.



*International Women's Day 2017 in Hamoon Clinic*

The celebration in Hamoon Clinic in Farah Province was different from those in other provinces. Staff and patients took an active part in it and held an all-encompassing function. The staff expressed their solidarity with the families of doctors and patients who were martyred in the recent attacks on the Military Hospital, where more than 250 professional doctors, nurses and patients were killed and more than 500 wounded.

The function in other provinces including Kabul were held in the presence of guests from related ministries and foreign supporters. The main points in the speech of OPAWC director Latifa Ahmady were: "I congratulate you on this important day and warmly hold the hands of all freedom loving women of the world and salute the brave women of Kurdistan for their recent active part and struggle for their rights. OPAWC's long term experience shows that if chances be given to women they have the capability to play their role in political, economical and social fields even better than men."



Ahmady gave brief information about the present condition of women, mentioning the example of a 14 year old girl in Ghore province who was put on fire by her husband and her mother-in-law and died with a baby in her belly, and another two similar cases from Kabul and Takhar. "We are witness of violence against women in every corner of the country and we should know that the domestic violence is not a separate issue from the political system of the

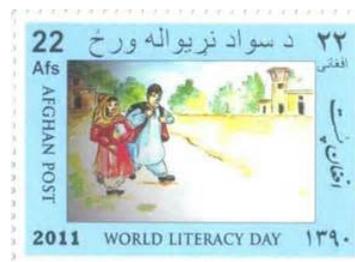
country. The women are still exchanged against animals, they are sexually abused, they are stoned to death, their body parts are heinously cut off, or they are burned alive. More than 25% of the four million people addicted to drugs are women. The conditions of women in prisons are worse. But we women should not be without hope, we should not loose courage as we know where there is war there is struggle. We women must struggle fearlessly and be strong in our decision to enhance our knowledge and become self-confident so we can break the chains of barbarism and slavery and can make ourselves free of all these disasters."

The Kabul function ended with a theatre performance which showed the real condition of an Afghan widow and her struggle to defeat all problems and violence and become independent with her children.

Information and photos taken from OPAWC's website

## Illiteracy still high among Afghan women

During the 2016 World Literacy Day, an event held on 5 September every year, a public function was held at the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University (ACKU). OPAWC members participated in the event, which was also attended by high



ranking members of educational institutions including the Director of Kabul University, the Deputy of Literacy, and representatives of different institutions. Dr. Sardar Mohammad Rahimi, the Deputy of Literacy, said that he is not satisfied with the process of education in the country. He said: "Around 850 – 900 schools are completely closed in the country due to war and lack of security, and those schools that are operating are facing obstacles and the process of teaching is not satisfactory. In general the quality of education in both schools and courses is low and we are not satisfied with the achieved result."

Rahimi continued: "Since president Hamed Karzai's period till now the Literacy Deputy along with its national and international partners has educated around 40% of the population, but 60% of citizens remained illiterate due to insecurity and poverty in the country. The Literacy section of the Ministry of Education receives only one per cent of the Ministry's budget, which is very low in relation to its needs."



OPAWC is pleased to always receive a high score in educating women and works honestly in this field. We believe that the range of illiteracy in the country is higher than the percentage that has been announced by the Deputy of Literacy. OPAWC accepts all risks and promises to continue its reliable work in the education field in this war-torn country.

Information taken from OPAWC's website



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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)**

## Membership renewal now due

SAWA (SA) membership is \$30 every year, with \$15 concession and \$5 for students. The membership year goes from July to June. If you have not yet received your membership card for 2017/18 you have to renew your membership. You can do that by paying your membership fee into our bank account (above), sending a cheque to our PO Box (above), or – the easiest and most efficient way – by paying online at <http://www.sawa-australia.org/about-us/membership>, where you can choose between bank transfer, cheque or credit card.



While we need membership fees to operate, we have very low administrative overheads, so the larger part of your membership fee goes to our projects in Afghanistan – another reason to keep your membership financial. If you have not yet renewed your membership please do so [now](#).

## Fundraising chamber music in Adelaide

The nine accomplished musicians who gave us last year's wonderful fundraising concert in Flinders Street Baptist Church have offered to do another fundraising concert for us! They already played it at a public performance, and all who attended thought it was as good as if not better than last year's well attended concert.

**THE NOTOS NONET:** Susan Currie (violin) Iarla Bastians (viola) Sally Stephenson (cello) Lucy Hatcher (double bass) Mandy Hutchinson (flute) Ming-Lyn Hii (oboe) Philip Stephenson (clarinet) Caryl Lambourn (bassoon) and Paul Hampton-Smith (horn), present three beautiful works for winds and strings rarely heard in Australia:

**Muzio Clementi** (1752 – 1832) Nonetto in E-flat major, WoO 31

**Bohuslav Martinu** (1890 – 1959) Nonet No 2, H 374

**Josef Rheinberger** (1839 – 1901) Nonet in E-flat major, Op. 139

We are sure you do not want to miss this most enjoyable musical event and suggest that you reserve your tickets by buying them online at <http://www.sawa-australia.org/shop/tickets-to-events>.



**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> August at 2:30pm**  
**Flinders Street Baptist Church Adelaide**

## Fundraising in Hobart

Yabbo Thompson, our contact in Tasmania, has maintained a range of fundraising and promotion activities. The documentary *Frame by Frame* was shown in March at Tasmania's main art festival *10 Days on the Island*, organized through the Migrant Resource Centre for an event about and with the Hazara community. It had already been shown by the United Nations Association of Australia in November.

SAWA brochures were handed out during an International Women's Day event organized by Amnesty International and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), at a Gender Pay Gap forum at the University of Tasmania. Yabbo also organized an IWDA breakfast at her home, which was attended by 32 women.

## AFCECO girls win at karate tournament

We are super thrilled that our girls' karate team has excelled again! A tournament was held among Kabul Female Karate Teams in November 2016, organized by the Afghanistan Martial Arts Federation.



Ten of our girls participated in the tournament and they all beat their opponents. Three of them won first position, two of them second position and five of them won the third position. We are very proud of our girls!

Information and photo taken from AFCECO's website

## Annual General Meeting with the Mondegreens

The Mondegreens, a nine voice cappella and accompanied choir who performs original arrangements covering music from the Beatles, the Staple singers and others along with a generous mix of standards from the 40s and 50s, will perform again for us. They entertained a cheerful crowd of SAWA supporters last year, and we can expect their offering for this year to be as light-hearted and enjoyable as last year. It is still some time away, but take note of the date and put it in your diary – it would be a shame to miss it:



**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October at 2:30pm, Clayton Wesley Uniting Church, 280 Portrush Road Norwood**

The performance will be followed by our Annual General Meeting, where SAWA (SA) secretary Christine Gamble will report on our work during the last 12 months and treasurer Christine Tomczak will present the financial report. We invite everyone to attend the meeting and learn first-hand how much progress we have made in our support for the women of Afghanistan.

An invitation to the AGM with information on nominated members for committee positions, a nomination form to suggest new committee members and a proxy form will go out separately with this edition of the SAWAN.



**SAWA-Australia (NSW) PO Box 1741, Rozelle NSW 2039 website: [nsw.sawa-australia.org](http://nsw.sawa-australia.org)**  
**Bendigo Bank Rozelle Branch BSB 633-000 Account number 141397471 (SAWA-Australia NSW)**  
**Convenor:** Shirley Allen **Assistant Convenor:** Margaret Bailey **Secretary:** Margaret Hetherton  
**Treasurer:** Carolyn Allen **Committee:** Maryellen Galbally, June Lunsmann, Jenny Matkevich,  
Joan Long, Denise Fahey. **Public Officer:** Deanna Fekete.  
[www.nsw.sawa-australia.org](http://www.nsw.sawa-australia.org) Facebook *Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan SAWA -NSW.*

## **AFGHAN INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

Both positive and negative developments in Afghanistan in relation to women were highlighted by Dr Sima Samar, Chair, Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in addresses she gave at UTS and Sydney University Law School in May.

The Afghan Human Rights Commission began in 2002 following the Bonn meeting after 9/11. Its role is to promote, monitor and protect human rights. Among its successes Dr Samar listed its recording of war crimes, its inquiry into rape and honor killing and into abuse of young boys, promoting research into female genital abuse (hymen testing research) and development of MOUs with the army and police to improve their respect for human rights and treatment of women. Many of these initiatives have not been to the liking of the Government and Warlords in Parliament, but have progressed nevertheless.

## **LAW ON ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

On the positive side Dr Samar listed a number of significant improvements for women. The Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women is an important milestone. It made domestic violence a public, not just private matter. The process of getting it accepted by Parliament after the Presidential decree in 2009 was a difficult one with sticking points for men in Parliament on the age of marriage (16 for girls and 18 for boys) and polygamy.

Another positive development is the emergence of new public roles for women unthinkable in Taliban times. There is a quota of women elected to Parliament and currently there are 10 women Ministers, 4 in Cabinet. There are also more than 3,000 women police and 1,500 in the armed forces, some in Intelligence. These roles demonstrate raised confidence in women and help women assert their rights. There are some examples of women in business and in non-traditional areas of work even outside of Kabul.

On the negative side, the main challenge is lack of political will to enforce laws which protect women, a corrupt and weak judiciary, the strength of patriarchal norms in public behavior and especially in rural

areas, as well as the widespread prevalence of domestic violence.

Poverty, dependence of women and lack of control on the number of children they bear holds women back. With less children and more independence there can be more employment opportunities and a reduction in poverty. Better access to health care and education on reproductive issues is thus essential. Dr Samar has made a significant contribution here through the Shuhada Organization which she set up in 1989. It runs numerous health clinics and hospitals in Afghanistan.

Dr Samar also argues that education generally will help women's access to rights, employment and justice. Elsewhere she has said that "You educate a girl in Afghanistan and you educate a whole society".

There has been significant improvement since the Taliban but still about half as many females as males go to school. The quality of education is frequently low. There is a lack of infrastructure, not enough well qualified teachers, and not enough women teachers - older girls must be taught by women. Even so, some women are reaching tertiary education. Public universities are free, which helps grow the number of women.

Dr Samar has contributed here too. Shuhada also runs 55 schools across most provinces of Afghanistan. In 2010 Dr Samar also founded the Gawharshad Institute of Higher Education (GHIE) in Kabul. Now over 35% of students there are female; 90% of students are from non-dominant ethnic groups and 40% of graduates in 2016 were women. These results are helped by scholarships for women and 20% discount on fees for all women. Scholarships are provided by overseas international organisations or individuals including some from SAWA(SA).

## **EVENTS**

Buffet Lunch at Bamiyan Restaurant in Five Dock on Tuesday 9th May 2017 was again much enjoyed. This opportunity to taste traditional Afghan food was complemented by a short talk on Afghan cuisine by Haseeb Miazad the owner of the restaurant.

A net profit of \$1,200 was achieved.

Dinner and Silent Auction was held at the Balmain Bowling Club on Wednesday 26 July and we hope to make a substantial contribution towards the current year's budget of US\$19,630 (\$25,000 AUD) for the English and Computer skills Centre in Nangarhar Province.

## **DATES FOR DIARY**

- AGM September tba check our website Circle Café Balmain Uniting Church
- Mid November Annual Lunch Details later.



*Dr Samar flanked by Nina Burrige and Verity Firth (UTS) and other delegates from Gawharshad Institute.*