



From the Editor

The last edition of the SAWAN focussed on reports from OPAWC's and AFCECO's websites. This edition concentrates on life in Kabul as it develops and changes, unfortunately not always to the better for women. It also has reports on fundraising efforts around the country, evidence that the generous helping spirit is alive in our communities. Please keep it up and do not forget the women of Afghanistan.

Matthias Tomczak

Two recent movies available for fundraising

SAWA-Australia (SA) has obtained copies of two movies about life in Afghanistan that can be shown for fundraising. Both are of excellent quality but very different in storyline and content.

An Apple from Paradise tells the story of an illiterate farmer who comes to Kabul in search of his son. He had enrolled him in a madrasa to study the Koran and return to the village as a mullah but learns that his son has decided to become a divine suicide bomber so as to go to Heaven. Torn between paternal feelings and religious fundamentalist ideas he wanders through a city beyond his understanding. Religious extremism, corruption of officials and attempts to improve life make a dangerous mix. An Afghan production shot in Kabul in 2010, it gives a vivid image of life in Afghanistan.



The Patience Stone is a French-Afghan production of 2012 made with support from various European TV networks. A young woman cares for her husband, who is in a vegetative state after a shooting. One day she begins to explain her feelings about their relationship to the silent husband. She talks about her childhood, her suffering, her frustrations, her loneliness, her dreams, her desires. She says things she could never have done before, even though they have been married for the past 10 years.



The Patience Stone runs for 100 minutes. It comes with separate video and subtitle files and requires VLC for screening, and VLC is

also recommended for *An Apple from Paradise*, which runs for 85 minutes. VLC is free software and can be downloaded for Windows, Mac, Linux and phones from www.videolan.org. Anyone wanting to organise a screening should send an email to convener@sawa-australia.org or write to the SAWA (SA) post box.

Life in Kabul, for women and others

In an interview with British journalist Christina Lamb on ABC Radio National Geraldine Doogue noted that the situation of women in Afghanistan is in "regression". While it is true that the security situation has been deteriorating even in Kabul, the interview painted an extremely bleak and one-sided picture for the women of the country. The interviewee tried to give it some balance but to little effect.

There is no point denying the difficult situation for women, but to provide a more comprehensive picture of life in Kabul one has to report on achievements as well as threats. So here are some stories of women enjoying life and being recognised.

◆ In 2014 the City Park, Kabul's first amusement park, opened its doors. It has become a popular outing for families and is visited by thousands every day. Women from all districts enjoy its rides.



◆ 20 year old Fatima Haidari got her first bike at age 9, she rode it all the time. Having lived and studied in the USA, she returned to Kabul and started a bike-riding club for girls. Shannon Galpin, the first woman known to mountain bike in Afghanistan, donated ten bikes to club members. For each of the girls, it was her first bike. Before then, they were given bikes from a male friend or relative. Back in the USA for further study Fatima put the club in the hands of

a good friend while she's away. In 2015 more than 20 regularly got together each week to go cycling.



◆ *Afghan Star* is a reality television show that searches for the most talented singers across Afghanistan. The program is broadcast on Tolo TV; it premiered in 2005 and is one of the most-watched shows in Afghanistan.



As was customary with the previous seasons, the Grand Finale for this year was held on Nowroz day, 21 March. The overall winner was the rapper Sayid Jamal Mubariz, the first rapper to win in the contest. More importantly, the second placed contestant was Zulala Hashemi, the first woman to reach the finals. Various prizes went to the top three finalists. When the prize for Mubariz was announced he declared that he gives his trophy to Hashemi, to show respect for women in Afghanistan, considering the dangers and hardships they face everyday in the country.

Respect and support for women is clearly increasing in Kabul, but it cannot be denied that attacks against women are also on the rise. Fatima Haidari described one of them: "There was an instance when this guy tried to stop one of my friends and made her fall from her bike. It was right in front of the Ministry of Education, where there were guards. And they didn't do anything! The Ministry of Education is supposed to inform people about human rights and that women

should use their freedom. But the guards were just staring. It was really ironic that there was nobody to protect us."

Incidents such as this are unrelated to the general deterioration of the security situation, which exposes everyone in the community to the risk of bomb attacks from Taliban and ISIS. Such incidents are directed specifically against women going after their daily lives and come from misogynist members of the public, who are emboldened by the lack of government action to protect women.

The situation is of course not new. Wherever a government abrogates its responsibility to uphold the law and protect its citizens from extremism – whether it is Trump in the USA or conservatives in Australia pandering to Pauline Hanson – the dark forces of misogyny feel emboldened and come out of hiding. Afghanistan has laws to eliminate violence against women and support human rights, but its current government is moving further and further back towards fundamentalism. Times are getting difficult for the women of Afghanistan, but they are determined not to be put down.

Matthias Tomczak

Families dictate what girls can study

Etilaat e Roz is one of more than 70 newspapers across Afghanistan. Initially started with a focus on entertainment, it folded after only a few months. Reborn with a focus on politics, corruption and social issues it now has 10 staff. Its 3,000 print copies are distributed by students on bikes across Kabul; 500 copies go to Ghazni province by public transport. The paper's website and facebook page have 300,000 subscribers. The following is from a recent article by Etilaat e Roz journalist Zainab Pirzad:

A number of female students are not interested in studying in their field of study, which families forced on them because they think that women should not study and work in men's environments. Some girls say they have sacrificed all their career aspirations for the dignity and tradition of their fathers and brothers and are pursuing disciplines they are not interested in.

A Kabul University student says: "I was successful in engineering, but my father and brother prevented me from continuing, saying that it is not right for a girl to study the same as boys. Now I have to read the doctorate and become a teacher."

Excuses rooted in the perceived role of women in a traditional society are more likely than any other issue to cause girls not to be able to pursue their desired academic discipline and favorite jobs. "I wanted to be a judge, but my dad said that a daughter cannot be a judge," Haditha said at a private university in Kabul.

Narges Mokem at one of the private schools in Kabul says that her job is boring for her and she has no desire for it. She added: "I was interested in reading journalism and becoming a journalist, but because of the sensitivities and pessimism that my father had on this profession, he warned me and did not allow me to read that. I had to read the doctorate for teaching."

The Ministry of Women's Affairs says: "We had an illiteracy elimination campaign aimed at raising women's awareness of the education sector." Still, all these efforts have not had much effect. Many girls have been reluctant to study or pursue their work due to lack of family support, which is largely due to social traditions. These traditions continue: Women should be at home, but sometimes they can study to become a teacher. It does not help the teaching profession if women are forced into jobs they do not like.





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

SAWA members raise funds around the country

The last few weeks have seen fundraising activities in several cities. In Tasmania Yabbo Thompson followed up on her screening of the documentary *Frame by Frame* in March at Tasmania's main art festival *10 Days on the Island* by showing the movie again on 7 August at **Launceston** College as part of the Tamar Peace Festival. About 90 people attended two screenings, with \$290 donated.

In **Adelaide** the Notos Nonet, who gave a wonderful concert in support of SAWA (SA) last year, again offered its support with a new program of romantic music. More than 50 people attended the performance on 12 August. More than \$1,300 was raised.



Then, before the Annual General Meeting on 7 October the Mondegreens, who also had given a fundraising concert already in 2016, entertained some 50 people again with their arrangements covering music from the Beatles, the Staple singers and others. The concert raised \$570.



Finally, **Ballarat** had a screening of *Frame by Frame*, organised by Libby Drew, on 15 October. Libby has been a longstanding SAWA member; she joined the SAWA (SA) committee in 2012 and had to leave her position when she moved from Adelaide to Ballarat in 2014. The move brought positive change for her and now for SAWA as well, as Libby worked tirelessly to bring *Frame by Frame* to Ballarat. More than 30 people attended the screening and raised over \$480.

We thank Yabbo, Libby and the Adelaide committee for the work they put into some successful fundraisers. Our most sincere thanks go to the Notos Nonet and the Mondegreens for their continued support and dedication to our work.

International Film Festival with Leena Alam

The Ghan International Film Festival is an event organised by the Afghan community in South Australia. Now in its second year, it was held in Adelaide on 13 – 14 October. The festival was attended by Afghan film actress Leena Alam, who is also a dedicated activist for women's rights in her country.

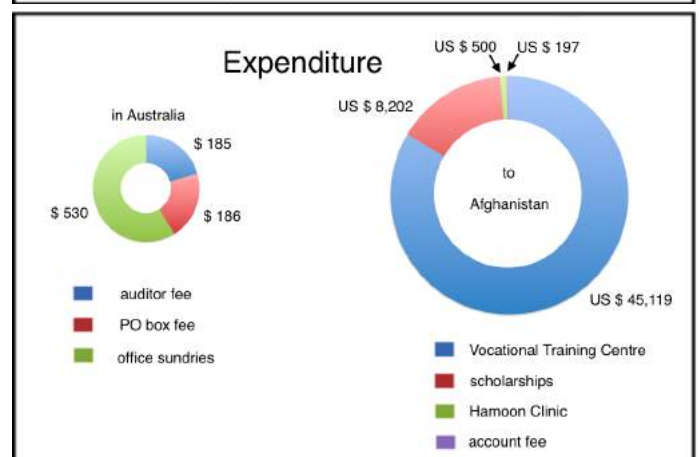
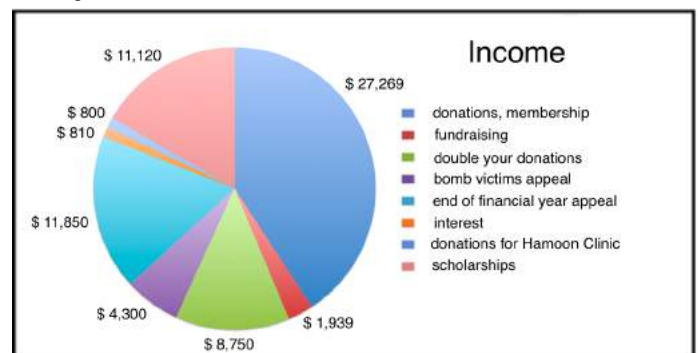
Leena Alam was born in Kabul but moved with her parents and family to the USA in 1989, during Afghanistan's civil war. She returned to Kabul in 2007, where she lives now. In 2015 she played Farkhunda, the 27 year old woman who was beaten and burnt to death in public in Kabul, in a public re-enactment of the murder. (see [SAWAN 50, May 2016](#)) She plays the lead role in *Qamar*, a new 17 minute short movie about forced under-age marriage that can be watched and downloaded at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYbc1Krr5zk>.



We presented Leena with a copy of our art book *Two Trees*.

SAWA (SA) finance report for 2016/17

The two graphics give a compressed overview of SAWA (SA)'s financial status for the financial year 2016/17. A full financial report is included in the Annual Report for 2016/17. The Report is available at <http://www.sawa-australia.org/about-us/annual-reports> for online reading and download.





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www.nsw.sawa-australia.org; Facebook *Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan SAWA -NSW.*

FROM 2017 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

"You won't allow me to go to school. I won't become a doctor. Remember this: One day you will be sick."

This title is an Afghan landau. Landaus are part of Afghan women's culture. As short usually anonymous poems, written by women and passed on orally between them, they are particularly relevant in a largely illiterate women's population.

The landau above is attributed to 15-year-old girl, Lima Niazi and quoted in a **2017 Human Right's Report** conducted into women's education in four Afghan provinces including Nangarhar Province where the SAWA-NSW project is.

Officially the Afghan Government is committed to providing universal education for children including girls to year 9. However, this Human Rights Report is sober reading. It points out that Government statistics on the education of girls are unreliable and likely to inflate the numbers in education. In contrast World Bank literacy statistics show that, only 37 percent of adolescent girls are literate, compared to 66 percent of adolescent boys. Among adult women, 19 percent are literate compared to 49 percent of adult men.

Certainly, the situation is better than under the Taliban who prohibited education for girls but the limited progress is a result of many intractable factors not least of which is the security situation. The Government appears to lack the drive to meet its stated objectives. Culturally there are strong barriers to girls' education too. Particularly in backward rural areas, but not confined to them, there is strong family opposition to girls' education. At best it is seen as acceptable only for a few years before puberty. Early marriage, which is legal at 16 and often happens earlier, means girls are pushed out of education. (One third of girls marry before age 18 in Afghanistan).

Poverty is another factor. The Report points out that even before children are old enough to go to school they are often pushed into paid or informal labour: at least a quarter of Afghan children between ages 5 and 14 work for a living or to help their families, including 27 percent of 5 to 11-year-olds. Only half of Afghanistan's child labourers attend school.

Additional limiting factors relate to schools themselves which can involve long walks by pupils to reach them. They are also hampered by: overcrowding, lacks of adequate large enough or undamaged buildings and appropriate furniture and supplies. The demand for gender segregation causes many schools to work in shifts segregating boys and girls so the full curriculum cannot be covered by either group. According to the Human Rights report 30 percent of Afghan government schools also lack safe drinking water, and 60 percent do not have toilets which is a particular problem for menstruating girls.

This 2017 Report concludes: "It is therefore urgent that the Afghan government and international donors redouble their efforts to remove or mitigate the barriers to girls' education enumerated in this report".

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/17/i-wont-be-doctor-and-one-day-youll-be-sick/girls-access-education-afghanistan>

EVENTS

• 2017 Biennial dinner

The dinner and silent auction at the Balmain Bowling Club's Crack-a-Jack restaurant in late July was a great success, raising \$5,000 which enabled us to send most of the current year's budget to the English and Computer Centre in Nangarhar.

• **AGM: 19th September:** This was well attended and received the report of our Convenor Shirley Allen, on our last year. This was circulated to members after the meeting. A highlight was a talk from Associate Professor Nina Burrige of UTS which provided a stimulating account of her survey of attitudes of 40 young women in Kabul to their tertiary education goals. She also interviewed 12 men on their attitudes to women's education.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

• 12th Annual Lunch 15th November 2017

12 noon to 2.00 p.m. at The Apprentice Restaurant, Level 7, Building E, 731-695 Harris Street, Ultimo. Cost: \$60 (3 courses with tea or coffee, drinks available at reasonable prices BUT no cash, card only).

The Guest Speaker will be Najeeba Wazefadost. Najeeba was only 12 when her Hazara family fled Afghanistan. She arrived by boat in 2000 and after some time in Curtin detention centre, finally settled in Sydney. She has since gained a Bachelor of Medical Science and has won numerous awards, including finalist for the Young Human Rights Medal in 2010 and the UTS human rights award in 2012. She has established a business and is currently a case manager for Settlement Services International and President of Hazara Women of Australia. She is a truly amazing young woman.

• Stall outside Woolworths: 2 December 9.am-1.00pm

We have jewellery, jams and bags to sell. Any donations of cakes etc. would be gratefully accepted at the stall.



Winner of raffle, Russell Fountain a long time supporter of SAWA, with Denise Kelly from Bendigo Bank which supported the function and Convenor Shirley Allen.