



From the Editor

Every year that passes makes life harder for many and better for a few. The women of Afghanistan are trying hard to improve their lives. How much longer can we come to their support? The following account does not give much hope, unless we lift our efforts.

Matthias Tomczak

Will the world abandon Afghanistan?

We all want to do good in this world. The problem is, there are too many situations that call for compassion. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, the Rohingya genocide ... who are we going to help? Afghanistan is no longer high up in this list; too long has its war gone on, and too bleak seems to be the future. So support for Afghanistan's people in need is going backwards.

In January *Save the Children* announced that it will withdraw its services from Jalalabad after gunmen attacked its Jalalabad office, killing five of its staff. The *Red Cross* announced a "drastic reduction" in its operations in October last year, having lost seven staff from attacks during that year.



The scene at Jalalabad when gunmen stormed the office of Save the Children (ariananews.af)

The rising insecurity has led other NGOs to think twice whether to continue work in Afghanistan. So far the attacks have been directed to foreign NGO personnel, and our work with OPAWC and AFCECO has not been affected yet. But NGOs usually inspect the projects they fund, and some of OPAWC's sponsors are unwilling to continue support for projects they cannot visit on site because of a lack of security.

The security situation is particularly bad in Farah province, the location of Hamoon Clinic. For six years Planet Wheeler, a prescribed ancillary fund established in 2008 by Maureen and Tony Wheeler, founders of Lonely Planet Publications, provided the funding for the Clinic, beginning in 2011 with US\$30,000 and raising the support to US\$73,000 in 2016/17. Now Planet Wheeler decided that it is no longer possible to support a project that cannot be visited safely.

As a result the Clinic was forced to close when the funding ran out in October last year. It was rescued by CISDA, the *Coordinamento Italiano di Sostegno alle Donne Afghane* (Italian Coordination to Support Afghan Women), who had supported Hamoon Clinic in the past and recommitted itself with support until June 2018. So the Clinic is open again, but its future is far from secure.

The situation of OPAWC's Vocational Training Centres is not much better. Of the two Centres in Kabul one, which had been supported

by COSPE, the *Cooperazione per lo Sviluppo dei Paesi Emergenti* (Cooperation for the Development of Emerging Countries), had to close after COSPE terminated its support, and the Centre in Afshar, which also received some funding from COSPE, now relies entirely on funding from SAWA (SA).¹

Funding a Vocational Training Centre that includes literacy, English and computer classes and also sewing, handicraft training and other life skills requires at least US\$45,000 (currently more than AU\$55,000) annually. SAWA (SA) managed to send US\$42,239 in February, sufficient to keep the Centre operational until the end of the year if some economies of operation can be achieved. And this could only be achieved through the magnanimous donation of AU\$20,000 by one individual.

The current annual fundraising result for SAWA (SA) is insufficient to keep the Afshar Centre operational at its historical level. The back bone of its base support are of course our donors who donate to SAWA (SA) on a regular schedule, either monthly or quarterly.

This raises about AU\$5,000 per year, less than one tenth of what is required. The remainder has been raised through various activities, such as film nights, annual dinners, concerts and talks to community organisations. Such activities depend on the willingness of members and supporters to devote time and effort for the women of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, as Afghanistan moves out of focus of world events this willingness is fading as well.

When we organised nationwide screenings of the documentary *Frame by Frame* in 2016 we could show the movie in Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth, Hobart, Sydney, Murwillumbah and Kerang and raised \$7,000. With our current movie *The Judge*, which the producers gave us for fundraising at very generous conditions, it looks as if Hobart may be the only city besides Adelaide and Sydney that can muster enough help to organise a screening.

As time goes on it has become clear that SAWA (SA) depends more and more on my personal determination to keep the organisation going. I shall try my best to keep its work up, but how much longer the women of Afghanistan can rely on help from SAWA (SA) is difficult to say.

Matthias Tomczak

A new fundraising movie on tour

The team that produced and distributed the outstanding documentary *Frame by Frame* that was such a wonderful fundraising tool for us approached us in February with another suggestion for fundraising. They had produced *The Judge*, a documentary about the first woman ever appointed as a judge to a Shari'a court in the Palestinian Territories. We were offered to screen the movie for fundraising at the reduced rate of US\$100 per screening. We were happy to take up the offer and are in the process to organise screenings around the country. The first screening, in

¹ Outside Kabul, English and computer classes in the Vocational Training Centre of Nangarhar near Jalalabad continue to be funded by SAWA (NSW), and Lala Association from Japan funds a small OPAWC centre for women in Herat with US\$15,000 until May 2018.

Adelaide, has already been a success and taught the audience much about the Muslim legal system. Future screenings are planned for Sydney, Hobart, Murwillumbah and hopefully other cities.



There are many ideas about Shari'a law in our society. People who want to spread Islamophobia point out the amputation of hands for theft or stoning for adultery, trying to paint this as the normality of Shari'a law. This is of course the Shari'a version of ISIS and other fundamentalist terrorists, but as an element of statehood it cannot prevail, as *The Judge* will show very clearly.

Australia has several court systems. Among them the Criminal Court handles indictable offences, while the Family Court handles matters of family disputes such as divorce, domestic violence, custody of children etc. In Palestine the same system applies, but while the Criminal Court system is based on rules and regulations and a prison system similar to our own, the Family Court is based on Shari'a law.

It is in the area of Sharia family law that women can be disadvantaged in several respects, particularly in inheritance and in custody cases. The documentary *The Judge* shows how a determined and strong woman can work against traditional biases and serve justice in family disputes that takes the rights of all parties into equal consideration.

But the movie is not restricted to the courtroom. It paints a living portrait of everyday life in the occupied territories away from the cameras of the news channels.

Being a journalist in Afghanistan

NAI, a non-profit organisation advocating for free media in Afghanistan, has filed 190 cases at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague against terrorist groups that have committed violence against journalists and media workers since 2003.

The crimes include attacks that led to 48 murders and 74 injuries, as well as 15 kidnappings and 53 threats against media personnel, NAI Executive Director Abdul Muiib Khalwataqar said January 22.

Eight of the cases involve female journalists, according to NAI. The Taliban, Haqqani Network and "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) were responsible for most of the offences, said NAI. In 2003, Afghanistan became a member of the ICC, which has the jurisdiction to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes -- which includes violence against journalists. The court is ready to begin investigating war crimes and human rights violations in Afghanistan, ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said last November.

"For decades, the people of Afghanistan have endured the scourge of armed conflict," she said, according to the ICC website. "Following a meticulous preliminary examination of the situation, I have come to the conclusion that all legal criteria required ... to commence an investigation have been met."

Violence against journalists last year reached the highest level ever recorded in Afghanistan, according to the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee's report for June-December.

A total of 169 cases of violence and threats against journalists, including 20 murders, were recorded in 2017, a 67% increase from the previous year, according to the report.

Salaam Times 14 February 2018

Afghanistan's minefields

Afghans have lived through decades of war and instability. One of the biggest threats they face now are landmines, left from either the Soviet invasion or the fight against the Taliban.

In 2017, more than 2,000 Afghans were killed or injured by landmines. That is about five times the number of civilians killed in 2012. The aid group, Halo Trust, estimates there are up to 640,000 landmines laid in Afghanistan since 1979. Although most recorded battlefields have been cleared, Afghanistan remains one of the world's most mined countries.



A demining team at work, clearing agricultural land



Children pick up metal to sell as scrap, with disastrous outcomes

This report is based on a video, that also provided the images, from Al Jazeera journalist Jennifer Glasse. The ABC News 24 channel used to show important Al Jazeera news during nights. In late January ABC management caved in to constant harassment from Cory Bernardi and Eric Abetz and dropped Al Jazeera from nightly transmissions. So news items such as this one will no longer be accessible through the ABC.



SAWA-Australia (SA)

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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 Vocational Training Centre depends on us

As explained in the overview on page 1, OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre in Afshar now relies entirely on funding from SAWA (SA). The OPAWC administration reorganised its work and SAWA's funding now employs the Principal, two literacy teachers and two instructors for the sewing and handicraft centre. The overall investment of this project is based on the understanding that a secure, well-rounded literacy education augmented by earning skills will create a foundation from which the students who otherwise would be lost to the statistical tragedy of Afghanistan's girls can develop into productive and healthy citizens.

The current enrolment comprises 140 girls and 80 mature students. 180 of them completed the 9 month program prescribed by the Literacy Department of the Ministry of Education that includes Dari or Pashto languages, mathematics and social studies and graduated successfully. 40 students were enrolled in English classes, and it is hoped that the computer class can be restarted with the help of volunteers from AFCECO.

The Vocational Training Centre continues to be a shining example of women's programmes. Journalists from BBC's Persian language program and Afghan TOLO TV visited and reported on the Centre.

More than 1,500 women could improve their lives by attending the classes of the Vocational Training Centre during the 10 years of its operation. If we want to continue this success more of our supporters will have to commit to regular monthly donations. Please consider to set up a regular donation at <https://www.givenow.com.au/sawa>. Every dollar counts!

We asked OPAWC to send us some biographies of teachers and students. Here are some we received.

Literacy teacher Rakia



Rakia joined OPAWC in 2008 when the Vocational Training Centre was established and she was 26 years old. She began as the Centre's accountant and administrator and became a competent literacy teacher. This is what she says about herself:

I am a mother of three girls, married when I was very young right after graduating from high school. Two years after our wedding my husband had a stroke that made him completely

paralysed. Since then I had to run the family alone and raise my children as well. I had wished to continue my education but became trapped in family problems that literally faded this dream for me, at least for now. In the beginning of my marriage I had to resist hard the pressure from my in-laws and also my husband who kept telling me to stop teaching as they felt I was going against the societal traditions.

I have been teaching at OPAWC's Vocational Training Center for almost ten years, an opportunity that changed my life and kept the hope alive for me. In addition to the salary which my family depends on, here at OPAWC I established a wide contact with the staff and the students. This network of support has so far been very helpful for me.

Sewing teacher Frishta



Frishta joined OPAWC in 2009 when she was 18 years old and has been a sewing instructor ever since. She says about herself:

I have four sisters and one brother. I lost my father when I was a child. When the Taliban came we lost everything and had to move to Pakistan. We returned to Afghanistan in 2002 and were faced with many problems

and had nothing for living.

Despite hundreds of problems I managed to go to school and completed it successfully but could not continue with higher education.

I have been teaching at OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre for almost nine years, an opportunity that changed my life and kept the hope alive for me.

My mother and small sister are sick and with the money I receive from OPAWC I treat my mother and sister and. I joined one of the nursing institutes in Kabul, but unfortunately my brother didn't give me permission to work at a hospital my aim remains unfulfilled.

However I am glad that I can serve the suffering women of my country by teaching sewing and enabling them to make a living.

Student Alia



Alia joined OPAWC's classes in 2013 when she was 22. She says about herself: My family lost all their possessions during the civil war (1989 – 2001) and moved to Pakistan. There we had a very poor life, and it was difficult to continue living there. So we returned in 2007.

I went to school and studied up to grade eight. Unfortunately, due to financial problems, I was unable to continue my education, and all my childhood aspirations and desires remained incomplete.

Expenses of four siblings and my old and sick parents were on my adolescent brother's shoulders, who spent day and night to get a little money. Poverty and rigor of life were twisting my shoulders day by day until I heard from one of my friends about OPWAC's Training Centre, and I decided to enrol in courses as soon as possible.

I was able to professionally learn and begin to work in the tailoring and embroidery section. With assistance from my brother, our life became a little better. However, the loss of my brother in a traffic accident made our lives darker again.

After the death of my brother, the responsibility for the family was left on my shoulders. I began tailoring and embroidery at home. Now, with the help of the skills I acquired from OPAWC, I do not need help from others, I can live as a single breadwinner.

OPAWC helped me to change my life. So I decided to open a class for women who do not have permission to go out of the house to be able to be a tailor and make embroidery. This class is free for all women. It is still going on.



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

WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

"Beyond investing in protective security measures, the only way to ensure women's human rights in Afghanistan and to truly empower women in the long run is through offering primary, secondary, and higher education that will foster literacy, free-thinking, and knowledge of international human rights standards."

This is the view of Razia's Ray of Hope, a non-profit US organization, founded by an Afghan woman, Razia Jan. It is dedicated to improving the lives of women and children in Afghanistan through education at all levels in a safe, nurturing environment in villages and beyond. Razia Jan lived in the USA for 38 years but since 2008 has lived back in Afghanistan. The strong endorsement of education as the way forward for women parallels that of OPAWC, the Afghan women's organisation SAWA supports.

It is shocking to realize that before the Soviet occupation, Afghanistan had a progressive outlook on women's rights. At that time Afghan women made up 50% of government workers, 70% of schoolteachers, and 40% of doctors in Kabul. However, the effects of war (Soviet occupation (1979–1989) tribal civil wars (1990–1996) and the oppressive rule of the Taliban (1996-2001) have been massively hard on women. Afghanistan now has about 2 million widows. They have few options for supporting themselves and their families and are considered bad omens in Afghan culture. Options for remarriage are limited: sometimes a widow can marry a relative of her late husband, but if she chooses to remarry outside the family, she can lose custody of her children.

Under the Taliban, women were also forced to wear an all-encompassing burqa in public and barred from working outside the home. They were also banned from attending schools, riding bicycles, wearing brightly coloured clothes, and even laughing loudly. The effects of over two decades of oppression, much of which continues today, have been very hard on women and girls.



In SAWA we can be confident that the help we offer in this situation is well directed through OPAWC.

2018 Razia's Ray of Hope, PO Box 81052, Wellesley, USA

RECENT EVENTS

• **STALLS:** The first, held on 10 February in Balmain, aimed to publicise our Birthing Kit day, raise awareness of SAWA and raise money for the kits. Approximately \$500.00 was raised. A stall was also held at Petersham Town Hall as part of the Inner West Council's International Women's Day Celebrations with similar goals.

• **The annual BIRTHING KIT ASSEMBLY** was held on Monday March 5th 2018 at the Leichhardt Rowing Club. This very successful event, with 58 people attending, is a good way for SAWA to publicise the difficulties of women in underdeveloped countries especially Afghanistan. The day also attracts quite a number of new faces, many of whom became SAWA supporters. 1200 kits were happily assembled and Bronwyn Monro organised an excellent morning tea. Donations covered the cost of \$3.00 for each kit.

We have received information that the kits have reached many countries. Those going to Afghanistan have been delivered by partner organisation World Vision Australia.

Many thanks to everyone who participated.

• **STRATEGIC PLANNING** An update of SAWA-NSW's Strategic Plan was achieved at a special dinner meeting on 20th March with 12 people attending. A number of improvements were suggested especially in ways of better presenting SAWA's objectives to various audiences and improving contact with Afghan people in the Sydney community.

• **DIRECT DONATIONS** have continued to be a very significant part of our fundraising. In this SAWAN we particularly want to thank St Albans Anglican Church in Epping for their donation of \$3,500 raised from Ruth Shatford Christmas pudding enterprise

COMING EVENTS

• **Thursday, May 31st 2018 Afghan Lunch** at the Leichhardt Rowing Club, Glover St Leichardt 12.00 noon for 12.30. This is a lovely waterside venue in which to experience Afghan cuisine prepared by our friends from The Bamiyan restaurants - \$60.00 per person BYO wine. All profits go to the OPAWC project we support teaching English and Computer skills as well as providing health and other information to women in the Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan. Phone Shirley Allen 98185319 for more information.

• **Films:** We expect to show the film *The Patience Stone* at the Hannaford Centre in Rozelle in late August. Details will be circularized by e-mail. We also hope to show *The Judge*, later in the year with the help of SAWA-SA. This film is about a Palestinian woman who is a judge under Sharia law.

To the left: Deanna demonstrating details of assembling the birthing kits to Suzanne Burrows and Janice Haworth.

Photo courtesy Jenny Templin, Photography.