



FROM THE EDITOR Greetings for 2021.

The whole world is hoping for better times ahead in relation to overcoming Covid19, But sadly, it will take more than a vaccine to eliminate the virus and the underlying causes of illness, poverty, conflict and oppression against women in the developing world. We are all committed to continuing to support the women of Afghanistan through these difficult times.

*This issue has news of the AGM in Adelaide on **Page 1**. **Page 2** provides an uplifting summary of the Annual Report from the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul. But more disturbing news about the situation for people in the icy mountain regions of Afghanistan is contained on **Page 3**, along with news of the increased violence against Afghan women activists, journalists and judges. **Pages 4 & 5** have local updates, including stories from the project SAWA-NSW supports in Nangahar province.*

Margaret Gadd, Editor

Annual General Meeting Report (SA)



The AGM of SAWA-Australia (SA) Inc took place on 19 February 2021,

following a wonderful dinner at the Rumi Palace Restaurant. Twenty-two members, friends and supporters attended. Here are the highlights from reports read at the meeting:

- The past year was beset with fundraising challenges. However, SA was able to send \$42,000 to OPAWC during the 2019/20 financial year. (A further \$25,000 was sent in September 2020).
- SA and NSW shared in promoting a 'FaceMasks for Afghanistan' GoFundMe campaign. \$5000 was sent to the Vocational Training Centre in June. (This was topped up with an additional \$5000 in September.) Thousands of masks were distributed to people in need.
- The SA Committee consolidated SAWA's financial, communication and admin systems during the year. Thanks were extended to the NSW Committee for their support during the immediate period following the death of our founder, Professor Matthias Tomczak.
- We were very grateful to David Stokes in Victoria for organizing a film night in August 2019 which raised \$1050.

- The 'Making Marks' project of art and text exchanges between 20 Australian women artists and 43 Afghan women was a highlight of the year. The project strengthened the bonds between SAWA and the women we support, as well as raising additional funds through sales of the beautiful book.
- Minor amendments to the Constitution were approved at the AGM.

The amended Constitution, plus reports from the Secretary and Treasurer will be posted shortly on the website. (The full Annual Report can be sent to members on request.)



KABUL: Afghan authorities are planning to rebuild a 13th-century Islamic teaching complex in Balkh province that once was home to one of the world's most famous mystics and poets, **Jalaluddin Rumi**.

Rumi was born in the Balkh complex in 1207. The whirling dance of sama is associated with Rumi, whose followers practise it as a form of prayer and devotion

For more information about the rebuilding project, due to start this year, see:

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1799561/world>

Source: Arab News January 2021

"Making Marks" Exhibition

An exhibition showcasing the production of the book "Making Marks" is being held at the
**Counihan Gallery, 233 Sydney Road,
Brunswick, Victoria
from 6 Feb to 21 March 2021.**

The Gallery is open on Wed-Sat 11am-5pm, and
Sunday 1pm-5pm.

SAWA supporters are very welcome!

: <https://galiweiss.wixsite.com/making-marks-book/news>



Annual Report from the Vocational Training Centre: Jan-Dec 2020

Mursal Rahimi, Director OPAWC
(Summarised by Margaret Gadd, SAWA)

Target Population

The Vocational Training Centre (VTC) is located in the Afshar district of Kabul, which has a population of more than 100,000 people, the majority being Hazara. These are the poorest and most deprived in Afghanistan. Afshar is the poorest area of Kabul.

Almost 90 % of the VTC's beneficiaries are women and girls from this area. All have been deprived of education and training due to discrimination, poverty and years of war.

Students

- Three hundred and ten women and girls benefitted from classes at the VTC during 2020
- The annual budget was US\$54,595, donated by SAWA-Australia (SA) Inc

Tailoring Classes

Interest in the tailoring classes remains very high. Four classes of 20 women and girls each. were provided in 2020. The tailoring program is divided into various categories and levels, with the first level being for beginners where women and young girls learn the basics of tailoring. The advanced level is for relatively experienced women who learn how to make traditional Afghan clothes, as well as pant suits, coats, curtains and cover sheets.

On 28 December 2020 the tailoring students took their final exam, with most achieving good marks. Seventy-seven students graduated from this program while three had to leave in the last months due to family problems.

Production Workshop

A large room in the basement acts as a production workshop where up to 80



women are helped to make handicraft items for sale. The workshop is equipped with electronic machines. Work is supported and supervised by a designer and master tailor. During the Covid lockdown, the women produced thousands of facemasks for roadside workers and poor people.

Embroidery

Thirty women and girls took part in the embroidery program. After learning embroidery skills, they could produce handmade items in the production workshop. These items are sold to vendors in Kabul.



Literacy Program

The literacy class started on 4 January 2020. It consisted of two classes of forty women and girls who were taught reading and writing. A final exam was held on 28 December. Each class achieved excellent results, with all the students completely satisfied and wanting the classes to continue.



Computing Classes

The computer program started on 15 September 2020 with two classes of 20 students. During this time students learnt the following skills -- MS Word, MS Excel and Power Point



English Classes

The English language class activity also started on 15 September 2020. Forty women and girls benefited from the classes. Two books were used during the program, and a spelling test was held on the last day of each week. The class exam on the first book was held on 31 October 2020 with 98% of students achieving good marks. The second book started on 1 November and as



the level of learning improved, more grammar and English videos were added to help with speaking and listening.

Graduation Day at the VTC

On 9 January, a graduation ceremony was held in an open area at the VTC. Due to COVID-19 the students were divided into groups and invited to attend at different times during the day. Three hundred and ten women and girls graduated and all received certificates.



LIFE FOR MANY IN AFGHANISTAN TODAY

A news item from the Italian e-journal 'Rassegna Stampa' describes the situation which faces millions of Afghan people on a daily basis.

"The pandemic and winter storms have severely aggravated the humanitarian emergency in Afghanistan, where millions depend on assistance. The humanitarian situation in the country, impacted by 40 years of conflict, is dramatic. About 17 million people in Afghanistan today are affected by acute food insecurity according to UN statistics.

In the Afghan mountain regions, temperatures drop to minus 30 degrees at night, and snow and ice cut off entire villages from the outside world. With "the second highest number in the world of people living in a state of food insecurity, almost one in two children under the age of five, and one in four pregnant or breastfeeding women will be affected by malnutrition".

Source: Rassegna Stampa Feb 2021



Children in winter in Afghanistan

ASSASSINATION OF WOMEN ACTIVISTS



Gunmen have shot dead a women's rights activist and her brother north of Afghanistan's capital, as a wave of assassinations ravages the violence-racked country.

"Unknown gunmen on motorbikes assassinated **Freshta Kohistani** in the Kohistan district of Kapisa province," interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian told reporters on Thursday.

Kohistani, 29, is the second activist to be killed in two days after a prominent pro-democracy advocate was gunned down recently in Kabul.

Kohistani had enjoyed a relatively large following on social media, and regularly organised civil society events in Kabul calling for women's rights. In a Facebook post, she was described as a "brave and fearless" activist who was at the forefront of civil and social life in Afghanistan.

She had also condemned the ongoing wave of assassinations of journalists and other prominent figures. **"Afghanistan is not a place to live in. There is no hope for peace"** Kohistani tweeted in November.

The wave of assassinations has triggered fear across the country, especially in Kabul. Journalists, politicians, rights activists and judges have increasingly been targeted as violence surges in Afghanistan, despite peace talks between the government and the Taliban.

<https://www.google.com.au/amp/s/www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/women-judges-killed-shot-afghanistan-kabul-b1788514.html%3famp>

<https://www.google.com.au/amp/s/www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/afghanistan-journalist-killed-gunmen-b1769157.html%3famp>

<https://www.google.com.au/amp/s/www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2020/12/24/afghan-womens-rights-activist-shot-dead>



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



Introducing the SAWA-Australia (SA) Committee – photo taken at our last Committee meeting for 2020 at the Bamyan Hotel, Port Adelaide.

Left to right: Ruth Redfern, Farahnaz Haidari, Ruth Russell, Maureen Arnott (in front), Margaret Gadd, Julie Irwin, Chris Tomczak, Carol Shamsabadi, Christine Gamble.

Life Membership to Chris Tomczak

We were delighted that Chris Tomczak was able to join us at our Committee meeting on 1 December. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of Life Membership to Chris for her tireless work in SAWA with Matthias, particularly for her role as Treasurer for many years.

Chris then had a surprise for us - the gift of a beautiful rug which she and Matthias had bought in Afghanistan some years ago. The rug depicts a map of the provinces of Afghanistan and scenes of Afghan life. It will be treasured and displayed at SAWA functions in future.



Chris Tomczak and Maureen Arnott (SAWA Convenor) with the rug

- We thank SAWA member Marie Christodoulaki (Vic) for valuable assistance with the production of SAWAN.

Funds to Afghanistan

In previous years, we have always been pleased to be able to meet the VTC's budget requests. And again, we have just sent US\$51,000 to meet requirements for the calendar year January to December 2021.

However, our funds are now very low because of the lack of fund-raising opportunities during last year's COVID restrictions. We have informed Mursal (Director, OPAWC) of this situation. While we will be doing everything possible this year to raise funds, we may not be able to send the same amount next year. Mursal's gracious reply to Carol, our Treasurer, was much appreciated, and will continue to spur us on!

Dear Carol,

I hope you are safe and well,

Thank you for the updated information. On behalf of the Afghan women who are suffering every day, I want to thank you and your team for your supports and hard working. You are a light in the darkness for these women and a beacon of hope for a better future.

Best regards

Mursal

Fundraising in 2021

Plans are being made for events large and small this year. When dates and venues are confirmed, we will send information to everyone.

In the meantime, please remember that we have copies of "Making Marks" available for sale at \$39.95. All proceeds of book sales go to OPAWC.

We also now have beautiful silk shopping bags available in SA, thanks to the generosity of our sister organisation in NSW. These bags, in stunning colours, cost \$12 each (plus postage). They make a great gift!



Email: sawacommitt@gmail.com



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Bendigo Bank Rozelle Branch BSB 633-000 Account number 141397471 (SAWA-Australia NSW)

Convenor: Robyn Longhurst **Assistant Convenor:** Margaret Hetherton **Secretary:** Shirley Allen

Treasurer: Margaret Bailey **Committee:** June Lunsman, Jenny Matkevich, Denise Fahey, Carolyn Allen **Public Officer:** Deanna Fekete.

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

OUR PROJECT and the SPECIAL APPEAL

Zeba and Shukriya below show how the program we fund in Khewa district of Nangarhar Province has been a life changing experience providing new skills and hope in very difficult lives. Reading their stories can only reassure you that any donations to SAWA-NSW make a real difference. In the Covid-19 world we cannot invite you to fundraising events. However, with the generous donations you sent last year, we have nearly enough for the second half of the project's current annual budget (\$US 19,198). But that will leave the "cupboard bare" for next year, due this October. Please, if you can, send a donation, perhaps what you might have spent on a SAWA lunch or dinner. You can see below your money goes to great work.

SHUKRIYA

For a long time, I had no idea what a machine isand did not know what tailor machine actually does or its usage, until I got



to know about this course of tailoring and stitching ... In just few months of hard work of the instructor I learned a lot about stitching and now I can design any kind of dress and stitch it by myself... I can support and run my family. ...I am very thankful to this OPAWC course and its supporters [who] have provided such classes and courses and wish them for much success.

AGM of SAWA-NSW

This was held on Wednesday, 18th November 2020. Your new Committee members are listed at the top of this page. The meeting farewelled Shirley Allen as Convenor. She was thanked very gratefully for her splendid efforts for SAWA-NSW over the last seven years. Our new Convenor, Robyn Longhurst, has recently retired from various administrative roles at the University of Sydney. Robyn has lived and worked in New Zealand, Japan and England and has travelled extensively. She is married with two adult daughters.

ZEBA



I am student of 9th grade at Qalatek Girls High School. I have a large family of 8 members, 3 sisters, 3 brothers and my both parents live in a rent house.

Our family is financially weak and my father has a stall of Shor Nakhod (kind of an Afghani snake) to run the house for 8 people. my mother has always been a supportive to us to go to school and learn but because of the financial issues that we have, my father cannot provide us stationaries that we need for school. My father stopped us of going to school, so my mother started stitching people's clothes to provide [what we need] for school.... The education system is not as good.... Now that I come to this English and literacy courses to learn something, I am extremely glad that I have an opportunity like this to learn more.

From the first day that I joined here, up to today I have noticed a big positive change in what I was a few years back and this positive change is just because of the opportunity that this course has given me. Today I can read and write fluently ... now I can teach my younger sister at home and she has much interest to go to school.

I am hopeful that this course can go on further in future so I could reach my dream one day which is to be a great doctor.

LOCAL NEWS

Keeping you informed

For the latest news visit our facebook page which committee member Margaret Bailey regularly updates

Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan SAWA-NSW.

Shopping bags still available

For \$12 you can be an ambassador for SAWA-NSW or pass on a great gift. The bags are lightweight, machine washable, extremely strong and commodious (hold 15Kgs), and fold to a tiny bundle (4x9cm). They are: red, ruby, pumpkin, gold, chocolate, emerald, aqua, peacock, purple, jacaranda, pink and burgundy.

Orders by email: shopping.nsw@sawa-australia.org with colour selection, address for posting and payment method, by Direct Deposit to our account as above or by cheque to PO Box.