FROM THE EDITOR
As the situation worsens day by day in Afghanistan, our hearts go out to the Afghan people whose lives will be so severely impacted by the resurgence of the Taliban. This issue of SAWAN brings a summary of recent news reports, focussing in particular on the potential future for women and girls, especially the loss of hard-won rights to education and employment. Also included below is an email received from Mursal, former Director of the Vocational Training Centre, revealing the personal hardships she and her family are already experiencing - plus an email from the VTC. SAWA will continue to monitor the projects we support and provide assistance in whatever ways we can. We will keep you informed of any updates from Afghanistan.

In happier news, we report on successful fund-raising activities in the first part of this year. We also send much appreciation to all members and friends for your ongoing support and donations.

Margaret Gadd, Editor

Latest email from Mursal, former Director, VTC.

I hope you are doing well. And thanks for your kind message. In this situation receiving such messages make me happy. My mother is well now. Still I am in Takhar province which is located in the north east of our country. Now all districts of our province are under control of Taliban and I am so worried about my future. All schools, universities, offices, international and local organisations are closed and no women can go out of home, even we can’t go outside to buy our necessary items. So we are really confused about what to do and how to continue my life. Love and best wishes, Mursal

(Ed: We have heard since that Mursal and her family are back in Kabul. But the future outlook is still grim)

REMINDER: HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2021-22? Go to the website: www.sawa-australia.org

News from the VTC … announcing a move to a new building

...The reason for our moving was that the old house didn’t have good security and it didn’t have enough space for our work. The new place has good security and has enough space where we could meet our needs.

The security situation is very concerning here. The Taliban have plans to take over all Afghanistan. We know that Taliban can’t take Kabul but we are scared as we don’t have strong security and even our government is apathetic. ... It is clear that the withdrawal of the troops will be an alarm for our safety, but our government must think about establishing permanent security for the country.

In addition to security problems, we have in our country, nowadays the third phase of the pandemic. Many people have been infected and we have high fatality as Afghanistan has no health care opportunity.

We are lucky to have you as our close supporter and thank you so much for being with us in our difficult moment.

Best wishes,
Muhammaduddin JANA
Financial Manager, Vocational Training Centre

AN ONLINE EVENT - 16 AUGUST 6.00pm EST
Hosted by the Refugee Action Coalition, Sydney.

Afghanistan and Australia - Refugees and the Unfolding Crisis.

This session is free to join, whether you are on Facebook or not. A zoom link is on the page: https://www.facebook.com/events/35160103635947/?ref=newsfeed
Reporters without Borders in Afghanistan report that violence against journalists and media outlets has increased “significantly” since the US and NATO troop withdrawals. The following excerpts from news articles paint a picture of the worsening situation.

1. **A humanitarian crisis:**

“Afghanistan is on the brink of another humanitarian crisis,” Babar Baloch, spokesman of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told a Geneva news briefing.

More Afghans are likely to flee their homes due to escalating violence, the U.N. refugee agency warned as the Taliban take control of more territory in response to the withdrawal of U.S-led foreign forces.

2. **A worsening situation:**

- More than one-quarter of the country’s 421 districts have been seized by the insurgents since early May, in a sweeping campaign that has largely targeted Afghanistan’s north and even seen some provincial capitals besieged by Taliban fighters.

- The UNHCR said an estimated 270,000 Afghans had been newly displaced inside the country since January, bringing the total population forced from their homes to more than 3.5 million.

- The government passport office has been jam-packed in recent days, even though visa options for Afghans are severely limited. Some of the humanitarian organisations said they would begin limiting the number of expatriate employees kept in the country, anticipating a worsening of the security climate.

- A failure to reach a peace agreement in Afghanistan and stem the current violence will lead to further displacement within the country, as well as to neighbouring countries and beyond.

*Reporters: Emma Thomasson, Reuters July 13*

3. **Women take up arms**

Women have taken up guns in northern and central Afghanistan, marching in the streets in their hundreds and sharing pictures of themselves with assault rifles on social media, in a show of defiance as the Taliban make sweeping gains nationwide.

In areas they control, the Taliban have already brought in restrictions on women’s education, their freedom of movement and their clothing, activists and residents of those areas say. In one area, flyers were circulating demanding that women put on burqas.

Even women from extremely conservative rural areas aspire to further education, greater freedom of movement and a greater role in their families. Taliban rule will take them in the opposite direction.

4. **Voice of America News (VOA):**

Several residents of Balkh, a district in a northern province, confirmed to VOA that the Taliban have distributed leaflets, ordering locals to follow strict rules that are similar to those they imposed on Afghans when they last governed the country from 1996 to 2001.

“They want to impose the restrictions that were imposed on women under their rule,” said Nahida, a 34-year-old resident of Balkh district.

Before their ousting by the United States in 2001, the Taliban mandated that Afghans follow a strict interpretation of Sharia law, forcing women to cover themselves from head to foot and preventing them from leaving their houses without a male companion. That changed after 2001 when the new Afghan government, supported by U.S-led forces, introduced laws to encourage more girls to attend school and to have more women participate in the workforce.

Nahida, said the group’s new restrictions will be difficult for women to follow “since many women are the breadwinners of their families and they have to work outside”.

*Reporters: Gul Rahim Niazman, Roshan Noorzai*
Schoolgirls sit inside a classroom with bouquets of flowers on empty desks in May as a tribute to those killed in the brutal bombing of the Syed al-Shahada girls’ school on May 8. CREDIT: AP

...The Afghan government seems detached from the onslaught on its soldiers and citizens. ... Not a single official showed up last month to a memorial for the nearly 70 schoolgirls who were killed in a suicide bombing attack in Kabul in May. Grieving mothers wept quietly into their black robes; the government sent a bare handful of police officers to protect the mourners, who like the victims were vulnerable members of the Hazara ethnic minority. Reporter: Adam Nossiter

OTHER NEWS ... Fundraising

Members and friends continue to be very generous in supporting the work of our organisation. Several recent fund-raising events have helped significantly to increase the bank balance. The Committee assures all donors and supporters that every effort will be made to ensure that this money reaches OPAWC safely for the benefit of the women and girls who will be needing our help even more in the current circumstances.

We will keep you informed of plans and actions in getting the funds to Afghanistan.

ADELAIDE: Afghan Dinner on 20 May

An evening of fantastic food, fun and frivolity at Rumi Palace Restaurant. (more photos next page)

With a raffle, silent auction and a table of books, bags and other items for sale, the dinner was a huge success and raised $4773 for the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul.

Guests shared a traditional Afghan dinner, served at tables on beautiful platters. Musical entertainment during the evening was provided by Trio Montagne and the Tea Tree Gully Orchestra Ensemble – with poetry-reading by Carol and Shaheen Shamsabadi.

Grateful thanks are extended to the following businesses and private individuals who provided prizes for the raffle and silent auction:

- Abaché, Glenelg; Aesthetic RX, Parkside; Anne McMenamin; Esplanade Apartments, West Beach; Banner Hardware, Blackwood; Brian and Maureen Arnott; Christine Tomczak; Deb Smith
- Photography, Blackwood; Denise Maddigan; Fiona Bennett; Jodie Prymke, Florilegium Gallery, North Adelaide; Jan Coveney’s Hanji Crafts, Strathalbyn; Jo Sayce; Julie Irwin; Kath Jones; Llewellyn Jones; Malcolm Bartsch; Margaret Gadd; Marilyn Prior, Medi Pedi, Glenelg; Murattis Cakes and Gateaux, Prospect; Oxfam Books, Adelaide; Phone Smiths, Blackwood; Purple Maiden Bath and Body, Bowden; Rumi Palace, Prospect; Ruth Russell; Snazzi Boutique, Blackwood; Terry White Pharmacy, Blackwood; Woolworths, Blackwood

MELBOURNE: A film night in May

SAWA member, Don Stokes, organized a successful film night with the Banyule U3A in Melbourne, which raised $400. Thanks Don!

The email below tells the story ....

Hello,
I am writing to you as the Public Lecture Coordinator for the Banyule U3A. Our member, Don Stokes, who is also a SAWA supporter kindly forwarded your contact details.

Yesterday we were very pleased to screen to 50 of our members the informative, compelling and inspiring social justice documentary, “The Judge”. Don facilitated the session which attracted positive responses from participants. The session was also an opportunity to promote and learn about the fine advocacy work of SAWA and attract a contribution from participants. We are very pleased to contribute $400 to support the valuable work of SAW Australia, and have forwarded the funds to the organisation’s account.

Further information about Banyule U3A is available via https://www.u3abanyule.org.au/

Kind regards, Maria (Banyule U3A)
Farewell to Kath Jones

Kath Jones has resigned from the SAWA Committee and will be sincerely missed. Kath brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Committee when she joined in October 2010. Thank you, Kath, for your valued contributions over the years.

Kath (left) celebrating her birthday at the SAWA dinner at Rumi Palace in May – pictured with Maureen Arnott, Convenor of SAWA, South Australia

Let's unite for Afghanistan!

We are all feeling very helpless in the face of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILFP) has asked SAWA to assist with a campaign to call for the UN Security Council to intervene in Afghanistan and ensure peace and security. We invite you to join us.

The situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating sharply and the safety of civilians is increasingly at great risk. It is time for the UNSC to perform its role in ensuring international peace and security.

Jamila Afghani, Chair of WILFP’s Afghanistan Section, has taken the matter into her own hands by sending a letter to the UNSC to demand for the Afghan people what is rightfully theirs: security, protection, peace, and human rights for all. Now it's our turn to act and expand this movement. We are asking you to join our efforts by participating in our campaign in solidarity with Afghanistan #CoherenceNotChaos!

Now we invite you to read Jamila Afghani’s letter to the UNSC and share it as soon as possible!

In order to unite our efforts in one voice and to make it easier for you, WILPF have put together a complete toolkit in which you’ll find everything you need. Check their dedicated webpage on wilpf.org.

Kabul Peace House event postponed

Unhappily Sydney’s Covid-19 lockdown meant Mark Isaacs, author of “The Kabul Peace House” was unable to travel to Adelaide for the planned event in June. We hope to reschedule Mark’s talk later in the year.

Copies of “The Kabul Peace House” are available on Mark’s website: www.markjisacs.com

YOUR FEEDBACK AND IDEAS ARE WELCOME
Contact SAWA: sawacommitee@gmail.com
OUR PROJECT IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE

We have had no direct news about what is happening with our project beyond the positive response in mid-April reported in the last SAWAN. A recent email from Mursal, the previous Director of OPAWC, indicates that she is living in fear and housebound in a rural area. We have fear for all women in Afghanistan. We will continue to try to keep in touch with the women in our project to understand the best way of currently funding their work.

We know that the COVID 19 spread is a major problem, made worse by poor medical facilities, very limited inoculation and the difficulty of any effective isolation in such a poor country. Every day the news brings awareness that the Taliban are increasingly dominant. A recent BBC News report (on 27th July 2021) stated that they have taken more territory in June and July this year than at any time since they were ousted from power. Significantly, they control more territory than at any time since 2001. The article maps the districts in which the Taliban have effective control i.e. of the administrative centre, police headquarters and other government institutions. Nangarhar Province appears to be still under Government control but that does not mean that incidents of Taliban oppression do not occur.

We are aware that many women fear that gains made since 2001 will be lost. Some report that they are too fearful to continue any teaching activity. Others report that in Taliban controlled areas women are forced to wear the burka and cannot walk outside the home without a male escort. Taliban harassment of schools has also occurred, including death threats. (TIME: Atefa Alizada and Amie Ferris-Rotman July 7, 2021)

On the slightly less negative side it is reported that the Taliban may be less doctrinaire than in the past. They have been pressured in negotiations in Doha not to dismantle the gains in education for girls, and that they may continue to allow education of girls until at least the age of puberty recognising the value of educated women to themselves in areas like health e.g. midwives.

FUNDRAISING FUNCTION

We were delighted that 72 attended SAWA’s Afghan lunch in June at the Bamiyan Afghan Restaurant in Five Dock. We made a profit of over $4,000 which included some donations in lieu and a beautiful quilt for auction as well as a raffle on the day.

It was a great pleasure to have as speaker, Maryam Popal Zahid who is a Project Officer in the Domestic Violence Prevention Project of SydWest Multicultural Services and the recipient of many awards recognising her voluntary community work for Afghan women, including the 2019 Blacktown Woman of the Year Award.

Maryam spoke of her struggle to be allowed to enrol in high school at the age of 20, matriculate and go to university as a refugee arriving in Australia from Afghanistan without older members of her family. As a university graduate now, Maryam was motivated by her own difficult struggles to found Afghan Women on the Move which aims to create a safe platform for women as survivors of war and trauma to gather and participate in arts and cultural programs, outside of religious and political influences. She is now the Director of that 3000 strong movement. She is also a bi-lingual health educator at NSW Refugee Health and casual voice dubber at SBS.

You can find further details of Afghan Women on the Move on their website or Facebook page.

ITEMS FOR SALE

The street stall planned for August will not be able to go ahead but the items below can be bought by email to:
足够shopping.nsw@sawa-australia.org
or phone Shirley on 0412 438 110.

• “Making Marks”, the beautiful book produced by a group of artists decorating handkerchiefs which were then sent to Kabul to be embroidered by women from the Vocational Training Centre funded by SAWA-Australia (SA). $40 details of the book may be found online at: galiweiss.wixsite.com/making-marks-book.

• Jars of Bronwyn Monro’s wild plum jam, marmalade and wild plum sauce $10, a few small jars at $5.

The Jam and Making Marks can be delivered in the Sydney area. Payment by direct deposit or cheque - see header for details.

• SAWA Eco silk shopping bags, strong, light, capacious and washable available all the colors $12 incl. postage.