

THE SAWAN

SAWA-Australia

SUPPORT ASSOCIATION FOR THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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SAWA OBJECTIVES

- * Raise funds for Afghan women and children;
- * Increase community awareness of the forgotten needs of Afghan women;
- * Encourage women, men and young people to join SAWA-Australia;
- * Set up SAWA/RAWA support groups throughout Australia.

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FROM THE CONVENER

The response to Mariam's visit in April and May has been extraordinary. The SAWA committee thanks all those groups and individuals who helped in so many ways to get us to this point. Every donation is important to us and to the donor who makes that material commitment.

Two donations require special mention. Penny Blazey of Diggers Seeds, Dromana, Victoria, gave \$10,000 after meeting Mariam. Penny was one of the 650 who heard Mariam speaking at Mount Eliza.

Katie Fischer, Australian actor and model, who lives in Los Angeles gave \$4,000. Katie read Robyn Smythe's article in the April newsletter and immediately decided that she had to make a documentary about Afghan women's health. Thanks also to Di Pearson of Mildura who has agreed to do be Newsletter Editor. Please email/mail her your stories:

rustysridge@bigpond.com

Grace McCaughey

MARIAM RAWI'S TOUR 2004

April 2004 will be a month to remember – Mariam Rawi, invited by Deakin University to present the opening address at the "Community Development Human Rights and the Grassroots" Conference, April 14-18, was in Melbourne. This event commenced an extremely successful 4½ week Australian speaking and fundraising RAWA tour from Townsville to Tasmania, including Canberra, Melbourne, Launceston, Hobart, Castlemaine and Bendigo, that involved a packed timetable of events with a wide range of audiences – school and tertiary students, trade union and business women, politicians, academics, women's organisation such as the International Women's Development Agency and Melbourne Soroptimists, Afghan groups and a large cross section of the general community. Talking with, and listening to Mariam enabled all to gain a greater empathy for and understanding of Afghan women and RAWA members, like herself, whose lives are so alien to our own but who strive with extraordinary commitment and passion for a better future for all in Afghanistan. The tour generated considerable funds for RAWA and the awareness of RAWA has increased enormously. An enthusiastic number of supporters have sprung up around the country, many joining the SAWA network. As a result over \$34,000 was sent to RAWA for their projects.

Mariam sends a message of many thanks from Pakistan, to all supporters who contributed such a great deal of time and energy in organising and attending the many events on the tour

The amount of support demonstrated for RAWA in Australia has given members a large emotional boost, an extra bonus above money raised.

Onnie Wilson

AFGHAN WOMEN ATHLETES TO ATHENS

By Liz Robbins

Robina Muqimyar is as extroverted and flighty as her teammate, Friba Razayee is shy and shrewd, but together they will likely make the boldest statement of the Athens Olympic Games when they become the first women from Afghanistan to compete in the Olympics.

Friba said "We came from not a good situation, we have not a stadium, we have a gym, Robina, she is running, she had no blocks, she is running on the street".

"Under the Taliban, the stadium in Kabul was a place for executions. Now, women can train there, although at a different time than men. The scene there is chaotic, usually with dozens of athletes wandering about, in addition to armed soldiers and spectators".

CONGRATULATIONS RO BANCROFT

"To SAWA-Australia and Bancroft Art - CONGRATULATIONS!!

You have won the Site of the Day Award on 26 June 2004. Your entry has been chosen from 100's of other great sites.

These sites are selected for the following reasons -

GRAPHICS; ARTWORK; LAYOUT

NAVIGABILITY; FUNCTIONALITY

ORIGINALITY.

All web designed and site owners receive an award certificate.

<http://www.webdesigners.net.au>

RECENT AWARDS & RECOGNITION FOR RAWA

Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition

Presented to RAWA in recognition of outstanding and invaluable service to the community
Signed - Member of US Congress

California Legislature Assembly, Certificate of Recognition

Presented to RAWA
Special Recognition, heartiest congratulations & Commendations are conveyed upon being recognised for Outstanding contribution to Education as an

Advancing the Status of Women Award

Soroptimist International of Santa Barbara

2/5/04 - California

Signed - Member California State Legislature

Soroptimist International of Santa Barbara

"Advancing the Status of Women" Award

RAWA is the oldest political/social organization of Afghan women struggling for peace, freedom, democracy and women's rights in fundamentalism-blighted Afghanistan

POLICIES TAUGHT IN RAWA SCHOOLS

Students are taught:

Recognition of these basic principles and values:

- ✍ Everyone must respect all human beings regardless of language, religion, race, colour, etc;
- ✍ There is no difference between people; no human being is superior to any other because of class, colour, language, race or religion;
- ✍ All human beings do not have to think alike or live the same way;
- ✍ It's to the benefit of society that all human beings live in peace, understanding and harmony:

Religious Tolerance:

- ✍ Respect all religions and their followers;
- ✍ Understand that followers of all religions can live in harmony and peace;
- ✍ Do not discriminate against the followers of religious sects different from your own;
- ✍ Understand that religion is a private matter than cannot be forced on anyone else and nobody should be allowed to misuse it for any end, it must be kept separated from politics;
- ✍ Do not allow criminals in the future to dare to commit crimes in the name of religion, as did the Jihadis and Taliban;

Ethnic Tolerance:

- ✍ Respect all ethnic groups in Afghanistan;
- ✍ No ethnic group is superior to any other and no-one should be allowed to look down on others;
- ✍ All members of all ethnic groups have the right to speak their own languages;
- ✍ Respect for each language means respect for the culture of those people who live in different regions and cities;
- ✍ Prevent ethnic divisions and the kind of conflicts that, unfortunately, today have reached their peak because it is practiced by the criminal fundamentalists;
- ✍ To know the history of their own and other countries and about those who sacrificed their lives for freedom; set them as an example for themselves.

----- oOo -----

Kylea Hartley held a "belly dancing" fundraiser for RAWA in Adelaide last December and raised \$876.10. Well done Kylea—Kylea, or anyone who knows Kylea, please contact SAWA.

Flora Noyce gave a talk about Afghanistan to Carinya CWA in Mildura recently and collected \$40 for SAWA. Flora took a balloon flight to celebrate 60 years with Neill

Sue and Peter Guntrip of Green Gully, Victoria raised over \$300 at a Xmas in July for 28 friends at their home. The food was fabulous and Russell James of Newstead provided great jazz and singing. Congratulations to all concerned.

Angela Dickie from "Ignite the Flame" in Sydney arranged a fundraising event for 3 organisations: SAWA, Medecins sans Frontieres and Australian Tibetan Society. Details are not yet to hand.

Two SAWA members have remembered SAWA - Australia in their wills. We hope we don't receive these bequests for a very long time to come, but this has given SAWA a real fillip. Thank you.

THE VOICE OF AFGHAN WOMEN REACH FIJI!!!

“The voice of Afghanistan’s women was brought to Fiji in late May, as part of a celebration for the International Women’s Day for Peace and Disarmament.

As SAWA-Australia’s contact person in Fiji, I joined a radio panel of local women activists to talk about women and peace-building. Other participants included reps from UNIFEM, the National Council of Women and the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre. This was global networking at its best, allowing this Australian living in Fiji, who had spent much of the previous week communicating with Afghan friends in immigration detention on Nauru, to talk about RAWA’s activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan!

Whilst most of the discussion revolved around national issues and policies, it was good to recognise the common threads that bind women together internationally. For example, education and training that allows girl-children and women to make informed decisions and build independent lives are seen as a priority for Fiji’s women, as they are for RAWA. The different issues faced by women working for peace within functioning democratic systems as opposed to under dysfunctional regimes were also highlights, and one of the lessons from RAWA’s nearly 30 years’ existence is that working towards peace never stops. Peace is not simply the absence of war, but the building of systems that allow social justice to flourish.

It was a great conversation. I mentioned both SAWA, and the RAWA website, and I’m hoping that a Fiji-based support group might emerge from this publicity. Fingers crossed!

Best wishes to all, Virginia Jealous, Suva, Fiji.”

Vj@altnews.com.au

Ph. +679 330 7398

Virginia is a Foundation Member of SAWA and works with the Regional Programme Development Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPi).

“THE AFGHAN WOMAN”

William Mastrosimone is the Peabody and Emmy Award-winning playwright and screenwriter of such noted works as *Extremities* and *Bang Bang You’re Dead*. His newest play, *The Afghan Women*, has been performed in New Jersey, in New York and in Afghanistan in the local language. .

The Afghan Women is the remarkable story of an Afghan-American woman physician who returns to her homeland after the 2001 invasion to volunteer at an orphanage, which then comes under attack from a rogue warlord. To save her country and her young charges, the doctor takes part in a battle she never expected.

The play was inspired by Euripides’ *The Trojan Women*, which focuses on the widows of the Trojan warriors who await their fate as the spoils of war. “I felt that in a play about Afghanistan, that would not work,” he said. “I wanted to write about the women of Afghanistan ... I wanted to show the people who were most affected by war – women and children – what their reaction would be.”

William Mastrosimone was smuggled into Afghanistan in 1981, a year after the Soviet invasion. *The Afghan Women* is

inspired by his experiences there. Unlike other new plays, *The Afghan Women* is offered by Mr. Mastrosimone to any theatre interested in performing it, as long as all performances are done as fundraisers for International Orphan Care, an organization for which he is an advisor. In his words, “Giving 100 percent of the play and movie proceeds of *The Afghan Women* to the IOC... is my call to arms to the artistic community.”

William has been in contact with SAWA and we are now calling for expressions of interest in producing this play.

Contact Grace McCaughey
03 5476 2457. info@sawa-australia.org

MILDURA HAPPENINGS

Mildura (regional centre of North West Victoria) recently held a great fundraiser, following on from local woman Robyn Smythe’s 6 month mission to work as a midwife with the humanitarian aid organisation *Medicins Sans Frontieres* in a small village (Kooklam) in the north east province of Afghanistan known as Kushk-e-Khona. Local volunteer organisation “Wings for Kids” asked Robyn to relate her experiences in Afghanistan, which she did with much empathy and good humour, as well as some fascinating slides!

Grace McCaughey also addressed the evening which was a great financial success and extremely rewarding for all those in attendance to learn from both Robyn and Grace of the plight of the Afghani women and children and how in many ways we can help in some small way from this side of the world. The evening also raised the magnificent sum of \$1250. In total Robyn has raised \$3000 from her various speaking engagements. Great work Robyn and many thanks.

LATEST NEWS FROM AFGHANISTAN...

“Five aid workers shot to death in ambush”

“KABUL, Afghanistan, June 2 – Five aid workers from the Dutch branch of “Doctors Without Borders” were shot dead on Wednesday in an ambush in northwest Afghanistan as they were returning to their regional office, officials said.” (As an addendum to the above – this is an email sent to Robyn Smythe’s friends and supporters on 3/6/04)

“Dear friends, I have some really tragic news. Today MSF Sydney notified me that 5 MSF workers from Baghis Afghanistan were ambushed and murdered on Wednesday afternoon. They had just been to one of their clinics and were on their way back to their compound when they were attacked. In the car was the project co-ordinator, a Belgian woman, a Norwegian doctor, 2 afghans (translator & driver) and PIM my friend – a Dutch logistician. I spent Christmas Day with PIM and he was such a dear friend. Sadly, he was to finish his years mission to Afghanistan next week. When they failed to make their radio check, the other members of the team went to check on them. Another good friend, Jo, an English nurse, found them. How I wish I could be with Jo to just simply hug her. The Taliban have claimed responsibility and have equated humanitarian aid workers with the US military. This couldn’t be further from the truth. *Medecins Sans Frontieres* have always practiced impartiality and neutrality from any political affiliation. Sadly of late these boundaries have been blurred by the Coalition forces to the detriment of aid workers.

Many of us who were in Afghanistan knew PIM and can’t believe he died so tragically. PIM got an extra mouthful of champagne Christmas Day because he was the one male to help me prepare Christmas Dinner. Sadly PIM will not get to see his unborn twins, due later this year.

I don’t know why I have sent this email to you all, but I just needed to make some sense of these senseless murders with my friends. All of MSF

(expatriate staff) have now been evacuated from Afghanistan for an indefinite period. This will not worry the Taliban but it will affect all those women in Kooklam who now have no one to offer antenatal and postnatal care. Their lives go back to how it was prior to MSF being there. They will accept this, just as they have accepted all the "shitty" things that have happened to them in the past. (The organisation's activities continue to be run by remote control from Kabul, and through the brave assistance of our national staff, although this will continue to be monitored and assessed and re-evaluated in July 2004) There's nothing we can do or say, but even though you didn't know PIM, perhaps you would like to say 'good on you PIM, you did make a difference to the people of Baghis, and you were a great friend and mate to Robyn, albeit for too short a time'.

Thanks for listening, Robyn." **GOOD ON YOU PIM**

Web sites

http://www.internews.org/regions/afghanistan/media_directory.pdf

This 139 page report lists hundreds of Afghan journalists, including some English speaking.

"During the Taliban regime, which took control of most of the country including Kabul by 1996, there was no independent media in the country and government-run media was exclusively used as a propaganda tool by the ultra-conservative Taliban. The Taliban banned all forms of entertainment including "TV, videos, satellite dishes, music, chess, football and kite flying. Radio Kabul was renamed as Radio Shariat and all music was taken off the air", writes Ahmed Rashid, in his book *Taliban*. In the 90 percent of the country under Taliban control, printing presses were destroyed, and a total ban on TV, Internet, photographs, video screenings, and listening to music was imposed.

During the US-led War on Terror, the state broadcaster faced heavy aerial bombing. Much of the infrastructure is also antiquated. According to Abdul Hamid Mubarez, Deputy Minister for Information and Culture, "During the American bombardment two 500 KW [AM] transmitters were destroyed and the equipment in many stations in the provinces is outdated."

COMING EVENTS

OSAMA Castlemaine Theatre Royal 1.30 pm Sunday 25th July. \$15/\$10 All proceeds to SAWA.

Won Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film in Boston. International Critics Prize Cannes 2003; Special mention Camera d'Or Cannes 2003

Southerland Trophy London Film Festival 2003.

"Chillingly and with unsettling precision, Siddiq Barmak, the film's Moscow-trained director, details the daily indignities and strictures women endured under the now-deposed fundamentalist Taliban."

Tickets: \$15 and \$10 conc. From the Theatre Royal or Deborah 03 54720 5423

MAJOR RAFFLE

First prize painting donated by Jan Lancaster, Castlemaine. Value \$1,100. Many other prizes. Books of tickets available September 2004. info@sawa-australia.org

GRAND CHARITY CONCERT March 2005 Melbourne with Judi Connelli and company. Watch for details.

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HOW TO HELP

You can contribute enormously to promoting SAWA:

--Pass this newsletter to a friend/neighbour/relative
--Print and/or copy the SAWA leaflet and this newsletter and give to friends, work colleagues, relatives and organisations. Forward it to your address list or through your organisation.

--Encourage others to add their names to our email list and to check out the award-winning web page:

www.sawa-australia.org

--Invite a few friends and neighbours or members of a group you belong to, over for morning tea.

-Ask your organisations/employers to make a donation, run a fundraiser or join SAWA as an organisation member

-- Make a bequest in your will to Sawa-Australia

Contact Helen: 03 5476 2235

JOIN HERE:

Name:.....

Organisation:

Address:.....

Post Code..... Phone:().....

Email:

I support the objectives of SAWA

Signed:.....Date:.....

(circle as appropriate):

Organisations: \$100.00

Foundation Subscription \$50.00

Individual \$20.00

Concession \$10.00

Student \$5.00

School \$10.00

Donation \$.....

TOTAL \$.....

(Pay by cheque, via Internet or direct deposit through your bank)