

# THE SAWAN

**SAWA-Australia**  
SUPPORT ASSOCIATION FOR THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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[www.sawa-australia.org](http://www.sawa-australia.org)

[info@sawa-australia.org](mailto:info@sawa-australia.org)

P.O. Box 90, Flinders University Post Office  
BEDFORD PARK SA 5042

**Bendigo Bank Account Number: 120800610**

BSB: 633-000. SAWA Contact: Barbara Kameniar

## 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.

## SAWA-Australia Committee

Convener: Matthias Tomczak  
Secretary: Barbara Kameniar  
Treasurer: Heidi Leffanue  
Committee: Ruth Redfern, Barbara James,  
Grace McCaughey  
Web Page Admin: Ro Bancroft  
Public Officer: Colin Banks  
Newsletter Editor: Louise Pyman  
Auditor: Barry Hocking

PLEASE PASS SAWAN ON TO FRIENDS/FAMILY

## FROM THE CONVENER

*Afghanistan is again in the news. Reports from the US and British military paint a resurgence of the Taliban - for the women of Afghanistan that can only mean that another force of suppression and violence is added to the array of warlords already in control of the country outside the capital. Attacks on schools for girls appear in newspaper reports, and daily injustice and oppression continue. There is other news as well. To find them, Murdoch and Fairfax are of no help; one has to search around, look at the internet, have access to the local Pakistani press. The Khewa refugee camp on the outskirts of Peshawar recently witnessed a graduation ceremony. Young Afghan students, who had lived away from their families in Afghanistan to attend one of RAWA's schools, received their graduation documents. With more and more families returning to their ruined homes the camps have been shrinking, but the lack of schools at home convinced many to leave their daughters in Khewa camp to complete their education.*

*When the world is made to believe that life is "returning to normal in Afghanistan" SAWA's assistance to keep RAWA's schools, orphanages and hospitals in operation is needed more than ever. We have made good contributions in the past, but there is much need and always room for improvement. The SAWA committee has been looking at ways to boost our fundraising effort and to make our organisation more effective.*

*While SAWA is and will always be an organisation of dedicated volunteers and sends RAWA every dollar it can raise, we are not averse to learning from the professional world. We do not have to define "milestones", "deliverables" and other inventions of bureaucratic terminology, but it will do us good if we set ourselves clear targets and monitor our progress against them.*

*The first target for 2005 will be to achieve tax deductibility. The paperwork has been set in train; the process is slow.*

*The second target is to create a range of merchandise that can be used for fundraising. Given our financial situation we have to start small; but greeting cards, mugs and other small items will soon be available. The third target has to be to make the October visit of Amena, the RAWA member responsible for orphanages in Pakistan, an outstanding success. More about the visit can be found elsewhere in the newsletter. We have to make sure that Amena receives the widest possible exposure in the local press before her visit.*

*The committee will define more targets as time moves on. To put our work in perspective, let me report a few figures from "CW4WAfghan", the Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. CW4WAfghan began in 1999 and raised*

CN\$26,250 in its first two years. This equates to about 28,875 Australian dollars and corresponds roughly to the amount SAWA raised during its first 12 months.

In 2001/02 and 2002/03 our Canadian friends raised about CN\$250,000, and in 2003/04 over CN\$460,000. This shows us what can be achieved and what kind of targets we should set ourselves in the future. Let us all work together to make SAWA a strong support group for RAWA and the Women of Afghanistan!  
**Matthias Tomczak**

#### OLDEST RAWA MEMBER PASSES AWAY



Some of you have met Rabia in Khewa refugee camp. She was an aged woman and one of the hard working RAWA members who joined RAWA a month after Meena established it in 1977 and throughout her life accepted risks and difficulties to realize RAWA's mission.

Unfortunately she died few days ago due to heart attack in the Khewa camp. All RAWA members are in grave sorrow for the loss of our beloved Rabia. For all young RAWA members she was a kind and loving mother who was giving us courage and resoluteness in our struggle.

She was from one of the most backward areas of Afghanistan called Nooristan but with her efforts and sacrifices became the voice of deprived women of her birth place.

We will remember and honour her by following her path with steadfastness and determination.

Rabia Jan  
Our loving mother

**RAWA**

#### THANK YOU

Thank you to Nayano Taylor-Neumann from Murray Bridge for her continued support of the SAWAN.

#### RAWA TOUR OCTOBER 2005

October is shaping up to be a month to remember for Australian RAWA supporters, as Amena Shams from RAWA will be with us in Australia for most of October. Amena is in charge of RAWA's orphanages in Pakistan and we are keen to meet her, to receive an update on the current situation for women and children in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well learn more of RAWA's inspirational work. News of Amena's coming tour has travelled fast and interest in Amena's visit has been extensive. Many supporters have offered to host RAWA events and Amena will have a full timetable of information and fundraising events in Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane with Lismore and other towns also holding events: public speaking forums or dinners organised by the federal Human Rights an Equal Opportunity Commission, several universities, trade unions, schools, women's organizations and other RAWA supporters.

This is our chance to promote RAWA even further and wider. RAWA members have always had a great impact on their audiences here in Australia and we have the opportunity in October to show our support and fundraise for RAWA, whilst creating interest in ongoing funding of RAWA projects: a lifeline to so many.

#### AMENA'S TOUR DATES

October 4 – 9	MELBOURNE
October 10 – 11	SYDNEY
October 12	LISMORE
October 13 – 14	BRISBANE
October 15 – 16	MELBOURNE
October 17 – 21	ADELAIDE
October 22 – 30	MELBOURNE

Details of events are being finalised but further information can be obtained from organisers:

Melbourne/Sydney: Onnie [mok@connexus.net.au](mailto:mok@connexus.net.au)

Lismore: Ruth [ruthr@ozemail.com.au](mailto:ruthr@ozemail.com.au)

Brisbane: Annabelle [Annabelle@iwss.org.au](mailto:Annabelle@iwss.org.au)

Adelaide: Matthias [mtomczak@e-access.com.au](mailto:mtomczak@e-access.com.au)

**Onnie Wilson**

#### U.S. FUNDS AFGHAN BUSINESSWOMEN'S FEDERATION

KABUL, June 21 (**Online**): A federation of the Afghan businesswomen will be established in a month with a start-up fund from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Chairman of Afghanistan International Chamber of Commerce Hamid Qaderi said the USAID had promised to donate six million dollars for funding the project.

He hoped the creation of the businesswomen federation would boost business concerns belonging to women besides enabling them to play a more active role in the country's reconstruction and economic development.

Although women are currently engaged in such businesses as construction materials, carpets and agricultural products, their role is widely regarded as peripheral.

Chairperson of Afghanistan Businesswomen Council Mahbooba Waezi hailed the project as beneficial to the businesswomen community.

## DANGER FOR WOMEN RUNNING FOR OFFICE

### July 19, 2005 Kashar News

Soraya Parluka is one of over 500 women standing for parliament in Afghanistan. The elections, scheduled for **September 18**, promise to be more than usually contentious - and for the women, more than usually hazardous. Afghanistan's election law seems to smooth the path to parliament for women, guaranteeing them two seats from each of the country's 34 provinces. But in the struggle between legislation and tradition, the latter seems to be gaining the upper hand. The most conservative elements of society believe that women have no business seeking power, and that it is against Islamic tradition. Dr Shir Ali Zarifi of the Afghan Academy of Sciences says there are no religious bars preventing women from running for parliament. "Women can go to polls and run for the elections under the umbrella of Islam," he said. But there have been numerous reports of threats against women, and some cases of actual violence. One candidate had her house burned down. In spite of the difficulties, there are still many women who are ready to battle the odds. Safia Sediqi lives in Kabul, but has nominated herself as a parliamentary candidate for Nangarhar province where she says she has many followers. She has no illusions about the difficulties women face in Nangarhar, a rural and mountainous region in the southeast, bordering Pakistan.

"Female candidates in Nangarhar face security and economic problems. We can neither hold meetings nor go to certain areas and it will be very difficult for some women candidates to launch election campaigns," she said. "There are some women who are conducting their campaigns in burqas."

Since women in more traditional areas are unable to leave the house without their husbands' permission, Sediqi said her campaign will be a long slog of door-to-door visits, trying to reach her natural constituency. But she said that she is determined to stand for a seat so as to be able to defend women's rights as well as serve her country.

## RAWA SCHOOL AT KHEWA REFUGEE CAMP

Her eyes were sparkling as she said, "I want to develop a lot of courses to teach local girls their rights and values. I want to go back to Afghanistan and make my country a learning center for all!" The young woman was reeling with excitement, a little overwhelmed, but fully in the moment. She had just marched onstage and received her twelfth class diploma. For the 4,000 residents of the Khewa refugee camp, located on the outskirts of Peshawar, the recently held graduation ceremony of the youth offered a moment of hope. The graduating students presented an inspiring possibility- helping to change the bleak situation faced by Afghans, especially Afghan women.

For the youth, especially school-going girls, life in Afghanistan is characterised by paralysing physical danger. As a recently released report by Amnesty International explained, violence against females in the country is such that "Daily Afghan women are at risk of abduction and rape by armed individuals. The government is doing little to improve their condition." Acts of violence against women are rarely investigated or punished.

Only few schools destroyed during the Taliban-era and subsequent American invasion have been rebuilt, meaning that very few girls have educational institutions near their homes.

Rather than sacrifice the hope of obtaining an education, many girls have decided to remain alone in the refugee camps while their families travel back to Afghanistan. This sacrifice is a testament to just how grim the situation is for women inside Afghanistan. It also means that, despite the accelerating repatriation of the Afghans, there remains a strong need for educational programmes on the Pakistani side of the border. About 70 girls attending school at Khewa are like Feroza, living separately from their families in pursuit of the education and safety their homeland is yet unable to provide. Both the school and its nearby hostel are run by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), a grassroots organisation with programmes throughout Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Western media portrays the situation in Afghanistan as improved, and global attention has shifted to the crisis in Iraq. This has meant a sharp decrease in the funds available for educating Afghan refugees, and RAWA has been forced to make tough decisions.

"We have had to turn away many girls who want to stay on and study," said one RAWA organiser. "It is hard to know who to say no to. We try to keep the girls who show the most potential but are least likely to have any chance of education at home."

While Kabul has stabilised, the rural areas remain volatile. Northern Afghanistan is especially unsafe.

Khewa's current atmosphere results from years of tireless work by RAWA members and supporters. In the early days of the camp, one long-time resident recalled, "People were reluctant to even send their daughters to school." Local women painstakingly convinced people to educate their daughters, often going door to door to persuade reluctant parents.

RAWA's efforts are apparent in girls like Feroza, Meena and Freba. "My school taught me to speak freely," said Feroza, "I can face people, anywhere." Feroza shared that she hopes to use this skill to work as a lawyer and "fight against the cruel people, people like the Taliban, people who hurt women." Meena said that she wants to work as a journalist, telling the story of the Afghan people. Freba said that she wishes to be an engineer, "I love science, and I want to help rebuild my country."

### Erica Ahmed

Excerpt from **You! Magazine (The News International)**, July 5, 2005

## FUNDRAISING – ONE WOMAN'S PILGRIMAGE

'I find it hard to believe that I have just walked 800 kilometres across the top of Spain with a backpack weighing more than my weekly shopping. But I did.'

**Vickie Smiles walked the famous 800km pilgrimage from the French Pyrenees village of St Jean Pied-de-Port, finishing at the steps of the Cathedral at Santiago de Compestela, with all sponsorship funds going to RAWA. Vickie has collected \$3000 so far for RAWA from sponsors of her pilgrimage.**

## IWPR LAUNCHES NEW WOMEN'S REPORTING PROGRAMME

The Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR) supports local journalists at the frontlines of crisis and change. In launching our Women's Reporting and Dialogue Programme, IWPR looks at a different kind of frontline - the battle women in Islamic countries are waging to define new rights in changing times.

Amid war, revolution and extended political transition, this change may be the most fundamental of all. Longstanding social, political and cultural habits are being challenged. Women are seeking to redefine their roles, in the public sphere as political leaders and active citizens, and in private as equal partners in families with more control over their own lives, livelihoods and bodies. This is a true revolution. There is an enormous amount to be gained, as societies unleash the creative power of half of their populations. But there are also serious risks - resistance and even violent backlash against change, and new forms of exploitation and degradation. The greatest challenge of all may be to define new rights and responsibilities for women while respecting the cultures and the practices of Islam, with all its diversity. We are particularly proud that of some 18 high-profile current or recent projects by IWPR worldwide, 14 have been managed by women. Through this expertise, IWPR is uniquely placed to run such a programme.

IWPR is a practical organisation, and will seek to strengthen the capacity to women to make themselves heard within local media, through regional syndication and internationally via IWPR's website and electronic publications. The flagship will be a fortnightly electronic publication, Women's Perspectives.

The activities will focus on women journalists in Afghanistan, Central Asia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus - with launch support from the US Department of State. Relevant issues arising in other IWPR country programmes will be brought into the mix, and we hope to be able to continue to expand the remit of the programme, in order to extend and enrich this vital debate.

But it is essential to stress that IWPR brings no preconceived solutions. The answers for each society must be worked out within those communities. IWPR's goal in this project is to help ensure that, in those debates, half of the populations have their say.

**Anthony Borden**, London (WP No. 1, 19-May-05).  
Anthony Borden is executive director of IWPR.

## PARWAZ EMPOWERING AFGHAN WOMEN

### Mission

The Mission of PARWAZ is to empower the women of Afghanistan economically, socially, and personally to rise from poverty by enabling them to build micro businesses, increase their income and reduce their vulnerability.

### Vision

The vision of PARWAZ is to create self employment for vulnerable Afghans women cross Afghanistan so they can become economic agents of change in their families, communities and country.

<http://www.parwaz.org/home.html>

## HOW YOU CAN 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 organisations.
- Encourage others to join SAWA and to check out the award-winning web page:

[www.sawa-australia.org](http://www.sawa-australia.org)

- Invite a few friends and neighbours or members of a group you belong to, over for morning tea/supper.
- Ask your organisations/employers to make a donation
- Run a fundraiser (some ideas on previous page) or join SAWA as an organisation member
- Make a bequest in your will to Sawa-Australia

## SAWA CONTACTS

**Melbourne:** Onnie Wilson 03 9822 8858 [mok@connexus.com.au](mailto:mok@connexus.com.au)

**Adelaide:** Matthias Tomczak [mtomczak@e-access.com.au](mailto:mtomczak@e-access.com.au)

**Sydney:** Jane Chesher 0415 713 567

**Perth:** Nadia R. [xpressit@inet.net.au](mailto:xpressit@inet.net.au)

**Lismore:** Ruth Rosenhek [ruthr@ozemail.com.au](mailto:ruthr@ozemail.com.au)

**Castlemaine:** Kirsten Beggs 03 5472 5669

**Mildura:** Sandra Girvan 03 5023 6631  
[bschulte@inet.net.au](mailto:bschulte@inet.net.au)

**Bendigo:** Katherine Legge 03 54416680  
[cannonlegge@impulse.net.au](mailto:cannonlegge@impulse.net.au)

**Moorooduc:** Sue Christopherson 03 5979 4590  
[christop@hotkey.net.au](mailto:christop@hotkey.net.au)

**Ouyen:** Lynne Healy 03 5092 1686 [lmwh@inet.net.au](mailto:lmwh@inet.net.au)

**Robinvale:** Kristine Hogg 03 5051 8160 or 03 5026 4570 H  
[khogg@rdhs.com.au](mailto:khogg@rdhs.com.au)

**Canberra:** Fiona McIlroy [fionam@goldweb.com.au](mailto:fionam@goldweb.com.au)

**Hobart:** Yabbo Thompson [talvin@bigpond.net.au](mailto:talvin@bigpond.net.au)

**Norfolk Island:** Leone Hogan PO Box 999 Norfolk Island 2899.  
[rhogan@norfolk.net.nf](mailto:rhogan@norfolk.net.nf)

**Brisbane:** Sarah Grealy [travelling-grealy@yahoo.com](mailto:travelling-grealy@yahoo.com)

## JOIN SAWA HERE:

Name:.....

Organisation: .....

Address:.....

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

Email: .....

I support the objectives of SAWA

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

(circle as appropriate):

Organisations: \$100.00

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)