



AUGUST 2006

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 11

Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan Published by SAWA-Australia Inc. A38759 ABN: 73 162 014 759
Articles have been accepted in good faith, if you have any queries please contact the editor

FROM THE CONVENER

First it was Iraq, now it is Lebanon. The tragic events in the Middle East have been pushing Afghanistan to the back pages or even off the pages of newspapers. Didn't Afghanistan have democratic elections not too long ago? Isn't the country a "good news" story? Isn't it moving forward?

Well, movement there is, but in which direction? A few weeks ago the Karzai government announced the re-introduction of the "Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice". This infamous department, a creature of the Taliban government, was used to enforce the burqa and the ban on make-up and punish women with beatings for laughing out loud on the street. The new law will again come under the authority of the minister for religious affairs, who claims that it will focus on alcohol, drugs and corruption, issues already addressed by Afghanistan's criminal law.

The women of Afghanistan have to hold fears for their future. More than 90 schools have been burnt in the last six months, 200 schools are closed. Parents are afraid to send their daughters to school, and less than 5% of girls at primary school age attend classes.

Some 367 girls look forward to a different life. They attend Naseema Shaheed High School in Khewa refugee camp in Pakistan. Thanks to SAWA's support RAWA can operate the school and give its students the opportunity to develop their potential to the fullest.

SAWA has pledged to raise enough funds to cover the school's budget, including the salaries for its 18 teachers. Regular (monthly or quarterly) donations from SAWA members and supporters amount to about 15% of the required sum. The remaining 85% are covered from our general stream of donations, which at the moment is just enough to allow us to satisfy our commitment. This is a precarious situation – donation streams can dry up quickly, as the world turns to other flashpoints. **SAWA urgently requires more regular subscription donations for the teachers of the school. \$58 per month pays one teacher's salary.**

Please follow the example of the group of RAWA supporters in Tasmania, who joined together to sponsor a teacher, and the example of three people from South Australia, Victoria and NSW who,

independently of each other, took up a 1/3 teacher sponsorship each. Go to your bank and arrange a regular fund transfer to the SAWA bank account or go to the SAWA website now and pledge your teacher sponsorship online. Without your help 367 girls may not have a school next year.

Matthias Tomczak

RAWA interview with Times of India (Calcutta)

On 24 June Journalist Amrita Mukherjee interviewed RAWA member Mehmooda about the present situation of women in Afghanistan. The following text is a short excerpt from the interview. The full text is available at the SAWA website.

Is it still mandatory for women in Afghanistan to wear the burqa?

No, it's optional but in most regions and especially in areas under the fundamentalist armed commanders, women prefer to wear it for security purpose. A lot of women don't want that but they feel much safer to wear a burqa because in many areas still, young girls and women are being abducted and raped by armed groups. Even in Kabul, where thousands of ISAF troops* are stationed, many women continue to wear the burqa. It is important to know that under Taliban it was compulsory for all women in every part of the country to use it.

* ISAF: The "International Security Assistance Force"

Can women go out alone now or do they have to be still accompanied by a male relative?

Again, that depends on the area. There are a lot of women walking alone in the big cities but in smaller towns they are always accompanied by a male relative. The security situation is critical in many parts of Afghanistan, so many families do not allow the female members of the family to go outside, fearing they will be killed or abused.

SAWA-Australia P.O. Box 90, Flinders University PO, Bedford Park SA 5042 www.sawa-australia.org info@sawa-australia.org
Bendigo Bank Account Number: 126035633 Adelaide Branch BSB: 633-000

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.

Convener: Matthias Tomczak

Secretary: Barbara Kameniar

Treasurer: Heidi Leffanue

Committee:

Ruth Redfern, Barbara James, Colin Banks

Newsletter Editor: vacant for this issue

Public Officer: Colin Banks

Auditor: Barry Hocking

When women go out on the streets does the fear of being thrashed, assaulted or raped in public still loom large?

Definitely yes. Still a large number of armed militia belonging to different fundamentalist parties (especially the Northern Alliance) are the main cause behind the plight of Afghan women. Unfortunately in most cases due to involvement of police and government officials themselves women never complain. There are many reports of abuse and rape of women especially in villages where the central government has no control and the commanders of the Northern Alliance established their local governments. Unfortunately only few of the rape and abuse cases find their way to the media because there are no reporters and journalists in remote parts of the country, because of the dangers faced from armed groups. One such case was the gang rape of 12-year old Rahima by warlords.

Before the Taliban, women used to function in important jobs as teachers, doctors and in government posts. Have they been able to go back to their earlier jobs and function normally?

Rarely. Though it is not very safe, a number of widows and needy families are back in their jobs. These are not offered by the government but mostly by international aid agencies and NGOs. Afghanistan is a country with over 40 per cent unemployment (according to the CIA world factbook). Only Kabul is an exception where a larger number of women have jobs. In other parts of Afghanistan women are afraid to get official jobs as they are being killed by Taliban and gunmen for going to NGO offices (the only jobs that are open for women these days). On 30 May 2006 six aid workers including three women were killed.

What is the condition of education in your country now?

In the large cities such as Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad there are a few universities and girls' schools but in small towns and villages there are no schools or educational projects. In most parts families do not want to send their kids to school as it is dangerous.

RAWA used to run underground schools and even beauty parlours at the time of the Taliban regime. Are you now open about it?

All our social and humanitarian projects continue in the same way. We are still not a registered or legal organization so we cannot run our projects under RAWA's logo. We still face many problems that we used to face under the Taliban. Being strongly against the criminal fundamentalist leaders who are seizing the government, and criticizing their supporters and the negative role played by other governments, makes it hard for RAWA to operate openly. Considering RAWA's boldness and uncompromising struggle, some people believe that it's suicidal to take on such powerful enemies in such a way, and are afraid to get in touch with us. Although many of them praise the courage of RAWA members.

More importantly, unfortunately some Afghan writers and poets have changed into mouthpieces of the fundamentalist bands who use their art and talent to misguide people and present a whitewashed picture of fundamentalists. These people are against RAWA and oppose RAWA's objectives. And today most of them have top positions in the

government. On 8 March 2006, when we held a big event on International Women's Day in Kabul, many people were amazed to hear about such a big risk being taken by RAWA, and the media in Kabul were afraid of the fundamentalists to report it.

We can't put our magazine for sale in any bookshops in Kabul and other cities of Afghanistan because in a number of places booksellers have been abused and warned by gunmen not to sell RAWA publications. The gunmen of warlords have many times collected and burnt our magazines from shops and even put pressure on shopkeepers to show them the RAWA members who bring the magazines to their shops for sale. In a similar incident, they tortured and imprisoned a RAWA supporter who was caught when copying a RAWA statement in a Kabul market to distribute it to others. He was released after 24 hours in custody by paying a bribe to the gunmen.

Activity Report for Nasima Shaheed High School

In June SAWA received a report from RAWA to inform SAWA members and donors about the progress made at Nasima Shaheed High School. SAWA has pledged to support the school. The following is an extract from the report. The full report is available at the Naseema Shaheed High School page of the SAWA website.



Ms. Shaima Saeed, the Project Coordinator, has conducted interviews with the school Principal, the Head Mistress and one of the teachers.

The school principal is Mr. Arif, an engineer with 20 years of teaching experience, interested in philosophy and politics. He is also the Physics teacher at Naseema Shaheed School.

Shaima: As you know SAWA, an Australian group of RAWA supporters, made a big financial contribution to your school. How did that help to make a difference in the overall school situation?

Arif: We had big financial problems in the past three years, which badly affected our plans and standards. In order to effectively utilize the little budget we were receiving, we reduced our staff members and some experienced teacher left the school. Our Physics and Chemistry labs were in a very bad condition because we didn't buy any equipment or medical for the labs in the past few years. Teachers were complaining that they couldn't perform the practicals. There were similar difficulties that we were facing because of

financial problems. Now we have got hold of the many issues. With the donation from SAWA and extra money from RAWA, we could manage to minimize our problems to a very low level. We have now a full strength of staff members and reshape our laboratories to a good standard.

Shaima: It has been reported that the majority of the Afghan refugee population is returning to their homeland and on the other hand the Pakistani government may order the closure of the refugee camps. What do you think how that will effect Naseema Shaheed School?

Arif: Despite massive deportation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan, this country still hosts around 2 millions Afghan refugees. Khewa is still fully packed, therefore, we don't see any significant change in the near future for Naseema Shaheed School. RAWA established this school to serve Afghan girls, who otherwise would be left without education in this camp.

Headmistress Mrs. Waheeda is a RAWA member and social activist. She has lived in Khewa camp for 15 years and has been the clinic administrator and the project manager and trainer of RAWA literacy courses in Pakistan.

Shaima: What is the total number of students currently studying in Naseema Shaheed School?

Wahida: 367 girls, most are young girls of ages 10 to 14. This number is low as compared to the previous years because most families went back to Afghanistan. We had a big number of students from the adjacent refugee camps that are mostly empty now.

Shaima: Would you like to give us a brief description about your school, such as the number of classrooms you have, the timing and the overall programs.?

Wahida: We have 9 class rooms and because of this limited space, we divide the classes into two shifts, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. We have two batches of classes One, Two and Three that are in the afternoon shift while classes 4 till 12 are in the morning shift that runs from 8:00 am till 12:15.



Each period of study is of 45 minutes and each class has five periods in a day with 15 minutes for the assembly time and 15 minutes break after the third period. All the students are to be present sharply at 8:00 am at the school

ground, when the teachers will take their attendance there, which means anybody who comes after 8:15 will be marked absent. The students are allowed to go outside the school building at the break time, if they want to drink tea or take refreshment at their houses, which are close to the school. Teachers will be served tea at the staff room.

We follow the text books and the curriculum that is given to us by the Afghan Consulate in Pakistan, because our school is registered with Afghan government. We must follow this regulation otherwise our documents will be invalid and this will badly affect the students' future.

Shaima: What do the students do after being graduated from your school, do you have any special plan for them?

Wahida: After being graduated from the 12th class, our students are eligible to appear for the board exams in Afghanistan that will decide their faculties at the university. Afghanistan has limited resources and there are few universities there that accept a limited number of students per year. Every year over 50,000 students appear before the board exams and only 18,000 are passed to go to university and the rest are to stay at home. In addition to powers of authority, money and force, tough competition exerts too much pressure on students to get into university. For this reason, we usually have provided extra classes for the graduated students that will help them how to appear in the exam. We have provided them with every study materials to make sure they would get good marks in exams. Luckily, our students have achieved good results in the past and all of them are now in the university.

RAWA receives more medicines from OPAL

As reported in the last SAWAN, a consignment of medicines worth \$6000 donated by OPAL was sent to RAWA's Malalai Clinic in April. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Soroptimist International of Torrens, who covered the packing and shipping costs of \$250.

Since this first consignment SAWA's relations with OPAL (Overseas Pharmaceutical Aid for Life) have developed further. OPAL is currently packing cartons of medicine for a male RAWA supporter who suffers from Parkinson's disease but has always given his time and strength for RAWA and continues to support RAWA, and for a 31 year old mother of three girls who had fractured her back falling from a three story building. OPAL is also preparing another major shipment for RAWA's medical services in Afghanistan.

The donated medicines will again attract packing and shipping costs of a few hundred dollars. SAWA is again looking for donors willing to cover these costs. If you know an organisation that can help please ask them to contact SAWA.

A call for contributions

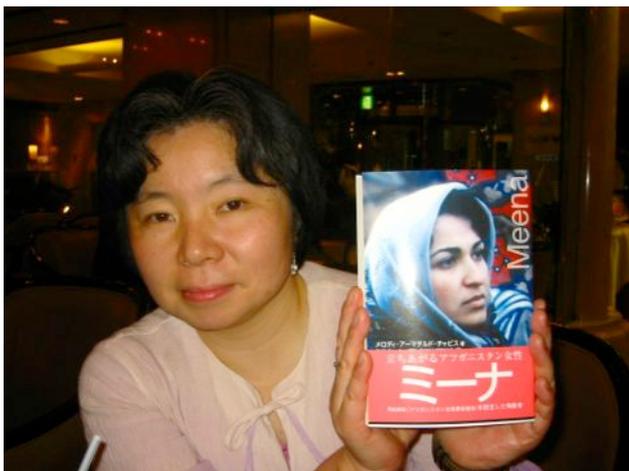
SAWA works through the support of its members. Without their active support SAWA would not achieve anything. The same is true for the SAWAN. Contributions from members make it more informative and useful. So if you have any news from your region or hear about developments in Afghanistan that you want others to know as well, send your contribution to the SAWA mail address or email it to news@sawa-australia.org. The newsletter editor will be pleased to post it on the SAWA website and include it in the next issue of the SAWAN.

RAWA has support around the world

In June SAWA secretary Barbara Kameniar visited Japan on work-related business. She took the opportunity to meet RAWA supporters in Japan and exchange experiences of fundraising and awareness-building. While the cultures are very different, the dedication of RAWA supporters is the same, and it is instructive to see how others work for the same goal.



Barbara Kameniar with three RAWA supporters in Japan



RAWA supporter Kamakura shows *Meena – Heroine of Afghanistan* in Japanese translation

In July a RAWA supporter from Italy on a visit to relatives in Melbourne contacted SAWA for a discussion of experiences. This led to an exchange of email addresses to maintain the contact and exchange information.

Support RAWA while searching the web !

If you are a regular internet user you can now raise funds for RAWA while browsing the web. GoodSearch is a not-for-profit search engine that directs one cent to the charity of your choice every time you search the internet. All you have to do is go to www.goodsearch.com and enter RAWA as the charity of your choice.

GoodSearch is powered by Yahoo, so its search results are as good as going to Yahoo directly. Make yourself a bookmark for GoodSearch, add it to your favourites, make it the search engine of your choice and tell your friends and colleagues to use it as well!

At the moment GoodSearch supports only charities registered in the USA, so your web searches will raise funds for RAWA through the US-based Afghan Women's Mission. Support for Naseema Shaheed High School still requires your direct support. Still, every penny counts!

HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can contribute enormously to promoting SAWA:

- Pass this newsletter to a friend/ neighbour/ relative.
- Print and/or copy this newsletter and give to friends, work colleagues, relatives and organisations. Forward it to your address list or through your organisations.
- Ask your medical centre for permission to have this newsletter placed in its waiting room.
- Encourage others to join SAWA and to check out the SAWA web page:
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 or join SAWA as an organisation member.

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	\$15.00
Student	\$5.00
School	\$10.00
Donation	\$.....
TOTAL	\$.....

(Pay by cheque, via Internet at www.sawa-australia.org or via direct deposit through your bank)

OUR SPONSORS



Michael Hourigan & Associates

