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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 14

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Articles have been accepted in good faith, if you have any queries please contact the editor

## FROM THE CONVENER

*Will Afghanistan turn into a "failed state"? Our government assures us that the role of Australia's troops in Afghanistan is to assist the country's reconstruction effort and its fledgling democracy. The reality is that the country is controlled by war criminals, drug lords and fundamentalists. The Taliban, whose growing military strength is reported almost daily in the international press, are only part of the equation. Peter Scholl-Latour, the German TV reporter who has been travelling in the Middle East for decades and returned from a long trip through Afghanistan's provinces only recently, reports that President Karzai has taken many Taliban leaders "who have either been bought, or changed over to the American side for other reasons" into his government. They now sit side by side with members of parties who supported the presence of the Soviet troops during the 70s. Together with the fundamentalists of the "Northern Alliance" they form an unholy alliance, whose only common interest is the oppression and exploitation of the people.*

*The economy of the country is in ruins. Afghanistan has become the largest producer of opium and heroin; poppy growing goes on in the face of the foreign troops. 80% of the country's foreign income comes from drugs. Farmers are forced to grow the crop to support the military build-up of those Taliban who have not yet joined the Karzai government. According to Scholl-Latour President Karzai is in negotiations with them, but the foreign "stabilization force" still considers Karzai's government "Afghanistan's best option".*

*RAWA predicted this development from the very moment when the Northern Alliance came to power through the support of the USA (with Australian participation). For years commentators in the west considered RAWA's analysis as out of touch with reality, bordering on the ridiculous. Today even the western press raises the question: "Will Afghanistan become a failed state?" and notes that the main progress in Kabul are the many*

*palaces of the war criminals and fundamentalists who make up 80% of the country's parliament.*

*In February this parliament passed a bill that not only grants amnesty to all war crimes committed since the Soviet occupation but also threatens everyone with severe punishment who accuses the perpetrators of their actions!*

*The future of Afghanistan will not be decided by foreign troops or Afghan politicians with a criminal record. A safe and bright future can only be secured through the action of the Afghan people and the country's democratic-minded individuals and groups. RAWA has been a beacon in the dark for 30 years. Its schools have now produced more than one generation of strong and determined women who will not be oppressed any longer and struggle tirelessly to provide a better future for the Afghan people. We can contribute to their struggle by maintaining and increasing our support for RAWA's schools, orphanages, clinics and widows' workshops.*

*SAWA's financial report for 2006 is included in this issue. It shows that our fundraising efforts were good enough to cover the salaries of all staff but not sufficient to supply Naseema Shaheed High School with all its needs. It is important not to relax in our support effort and make the Australian public aware of the situation in Afghanistan.*

*Matthias Tomczak*

## Afghan MP Malalai Joya visits Australia

On the evening of 13 March Malalai Joya, elected member of Afghanistan's parliament and according to the BBC the "most famous woman in Afghanistan", spoke to a full house of 380 at the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre in Adelaide on *Justice for Women in Afghanistan*. The event was jointly presented by the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre of the University of South Australia, SAWA-Australia and UNIFEM Australia.

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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.

**Convener:** Matthias Tomczak

**Secretary:** Barbara James

**Treasurer:** Heidi Lefanue

**Committee:** Ruth Redfern, Dawn Atkinson, Grace McCaughey

**Newsletter Editor:** Matthias Tomczak

**Public Officer:** Ruth Redfern

**Auditor:** Bob Shahinger

Ms Joya made an impassioned plea to Australians not to be complacent towards the continuing suffering of Afghans, particularly women, at the hands of powerful warlords. She pointed out that there has been no fundamental change in the plight of the Afghan people since the U.S. removed the Taliban five years ago.

Education, she believes, is the key to human rights in her country.

Ms Joya urged Australians to help bring about change by assessing the needs of the Afghan people rather than blindly following the policies of the U.S. government. She received a standing ovation.

Malalai Joya was in Australia courtesy of UNIFEM Australia. She gave a successful series of lectures in Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne before coming to Adelaide.

Ms Joya attracted a considerable amount of media interest while in the country and also met with a number of Afghan groups. She was relentless in her passion to get her message across to as many people as possible.

Malalai Joya, 28 years old, has been named one of 250 Young Global Leaders. She is a truly outstanding, inspirational woman.

A collection at the Adelaide event raised \$1,665. The amount and other donations raised during the speaking tour were given to Malalai Joya to assist her in her work in Afghanistan.

Malalai Joya urged the audience to raise the awareness of Australians about Afghanistan's situation with the words: "Unfortunately the U.S. government always relies on the most dirty and brutal bands in Afghanistan. But all other peace-loving countries must prove to our people that they are relying on poor Afghan people and its democratic-minded individuals and groups. This is the only correct policy that can help Afghan people and guarantee a bright future for Afghan people. True friends of Afghan people must care for the voice of our men and women for justice; they should realize that existence of the fundamentalist groups of any brand as political and military forces is the core and main cause of all the problems in Afghanistan. They should know that bringing the Northern Alliance to power was the key to all the disasters that we are experiencing today."

The full text of Malalai Joya's speech at the Hawke Centre can be found at the NEWS page of the SAWA website.

## A student profile

*In the last two newsletters we presented two teacher profiles from Naseema Shaheed High School, SAWA's major support project. In this issue we introduce Shogofa, a student of the year 12 class.*

My name is Shogofa ("Blossom"). I am 18 years old and I study at Naseema Shaheed High School in twelfth grade, which is my final year in the school. I live in Khewa refugee camp with my grandmother, my mother and my two smaller brothers. My mother is teaching the literacy course of RAWA and is engaged in other social activities here.

My family's story is like the story of tens of thousands of families who suffered the most inhumane conditions during the past three decades of war and destruction in Afghanistan.

I was born in Farah province of Afghanistan, and soon, due to war, our family like the majority of other families in Western Afghanistan, emigrated to Iran and was settled in refugee camps there under deplorable conditions, but my father was still inside Afghanistan.

I was four years old when I lost my father in the war. My father was against the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, so he joined the resistance movement. He was an intellectual and held progressive thoughts, and with like-minded friends he had established a resistance group to oppose the Russian aggressors and their puppet government. The group was also against the fundamentalist bands and of the opinion that when the puppet regimes falls, these extremists will bring a catastrophe to our land; therefore they did not allow our village to be ruled by them.

The dark-minded fundamentalist gangs, who were so powerful and supported by foreign countries, were against intellectuals, and apart from killing Russians they were not wasting time to eliminate those who were against their fascism, and the group of my father was always attacked by them. In late 1991 a group of armed fundamentalist warlords attacked my father and his friends when they were on their way. As a result my father was killed, and several of his friends were wounded.

This was a hard time for my family. My grandfather, who was taking care of us, died only after few months, due to the grief of my father's martyrdom. In April 1992, after the fall of the puppet regime, we went back to Afghanistan with my uncles and wished to start a new life, but due to the grave situation of Afghanistan and inter-fundamentalist infighting during the civil war of 1992 – 1996, especially in Farah under Mujahadeen rule, we were forced to become refugees for the second time, this time to Pakistan, as our family was not ready to experience another life under the fascist Iranian Islamic regime, which was terribly abusing Afghan refugees.

My mother knew about RAWA because she was reading its publications in Iran. In Quetta she contacted RAWA to seek help. RAWA took me in to one of the orphanages and my mother went to the Khewa refugee camp with my grandmother and my siblings to join other RAWA members and tens of widows, who were being helped and sheltered by RAWA. My brothers now also study in the RAWA school for boys in the camp. I spent three years in the orphanage and then joined my family in the Khewa camp to continue high school in the Naseema Shaheed High School.

Right now I am in the last class of my high school. I attended the English and computer courses here and I have learnt a great deal. I regard myself as one of the lucky Afghan girls who get an opportunity for education and a better life. I am very much satisfied with the environment of the camp, where we have a life that is completely different from that of other camps, which are administrated by some dark-minded groups.

It is my wish to serve the oppressed and ill-fated people of my unfortunate country by moving to Kabul, as the only choice we have is to enter Kabul university because the education costs in Pakistan are sky high. RAWA will help me and other girls like me to continue our higher education in Kabul, and we will be sheltered there.

Besides studying in Naseema Shaheed High School I also take part in some volunteer work for RAWA projects in the camp and sometimes act as translator when needed. I also have a plan to voluntarily teach literacy and English classes in the camp for one year after graduation from the school, and then I will go to university.

I am really thankful to RAWA for helping my family in our worst and painful times and provide me and my family with everything. We are now part of the larger RAWA family and we all share our joys and grief in the camp.

I wish our Australian friends one day visit the school; they must be proud to help a large number of needy girls to get quite a different education from that of other Afghan schools. Your contribution has made a difference, and on the behalf of my class I send lots of thanks and gratitude to you.

According to my mother, it was my father's wish to see his children being educated to better help Afghanistan. Today he is not alive to see that Naseema Shaheed has become a tool to realize his dream.



Shogofa in her computer course.

### Kabul, a city of widows

*The following report was written by journalist Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy who visited Kabul recently. It was published in the Independent (UK) of 17 May.*

Glass lifts carry people up to the second floor of the shopping mall where gold jewellery and Levi's jeans are being sold in bright new stores. A large poster of a woman in a miniskirt hugging a man is plastered outside a shoe store while music blares from the mall's speakers. But outside, just around the corner, women are begging on the streets. They are the hidden face of modern Kabul.

Walking the streets of Kabul under a full burqa, the traditional garment that the Taliban insisted that women wear and which many still do, it is possible to gain access to Afghanistan's forgotten women.

There are two million war widows in Afghanistan, and their plight is easy to forget in Hamid Karzai's capital, where Western-style shopping malls, bars and French restaurants are opening up for wealthy foreign aid workers and Afghan expatriates.

Every morning Gul, who was widowed when an American bomb hit her house in 2001, leaves her two daughters to go begging on the streets of Kabul. "If I'm lucky, I'll make about 50 afghanis (80p), enough to buy two pieces of bread," she says.

Kabul, it is said, is the widows' capital of the world. As many as 50,000 women like Gul live in the city, and many make their home in the abandoned buildings that dot the suburbs, often living in horrific conditions. In a nation with a fractured infrastructure and, at £125 a year, one of the lowest per-capita incomes in the world, many widows are left without relatives able to take them in or offer even modest financial support.

Gul's blue burqa at least affords her some dignity. "The men hurl abuse at me, they make indecent gestures and I'm always being harassed, but at least they cannot see me," she says.

There is no social security system in Afghanistan. Widows are not provided pensions or housing so there is no safety net for them to fall back on. In other Muslim countries, getting remarried can resolve the economic problems of widows. But in Afghanistan's that is not so. Most Afghan men do not want to bring up children from a previous marriage. "They are fiercely protective of their wives, and the mere thought of them being married before is an insult to their honour," says Maria Akrami, a social worker who runs a small NGO in Kabul.

On the southern edge of Kabul, among the rubble and bombed-out buildings, Gul and her two daughters, Zeba and Seema, live in a simple one-room flat with no heating or water in a city where winter temperatures can plummet as low as minus 17°C.

Inside, Gul's daughters prepare tea for their tired mother. They would like to attend school but do not have money to buy school supplies. "I want to become a teacher," says 14-year-old Zeba, "I wish I could go to school, I am happiest when I am learning," she says.

Sixteen-year-old Seema, meanwhile, is angry at the Afghan government's empty promises. "I don't think our lives will improve," she says. "My mother is a beggar, the government doesn't care about us. They do not offer to help us, nothing has changed for us in this new Afghanistan."

War widows often stand outside government buildings holding frayed photographs of their late husbands, hoping to be noticed. "They should be the government's top priority," says Ms Akrami. "These women are uneducated; they lack basic job skills and cannot fend for themselves. If America invaded us to liberate our women, this is a clear sign that they are failing miserably."

### Willyama High School of Broken Hill becomes sister school to Naseema Shaheed High School

When someone mentions Broken Hill, the big outback town of western New South Wales that gave its name to Australia's largest mining company, we think of red soil, slag heaps, tourists, the flying doctor service and great red kangaroos. The students of Willyama High School also think of the history of Broken Hill and their Afghan forefathers.

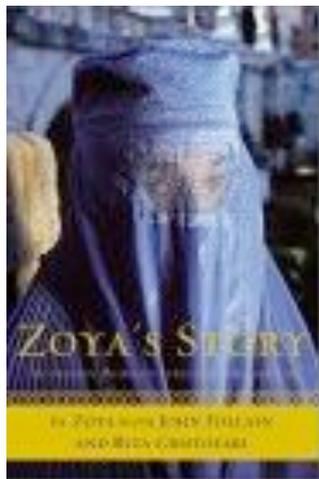
When Europeans began to establish settlements in the vast Australian interior they relied heavily on camels, the only beast of burden that could provide transport before the age of the railways. Many Afghans arrived in Australia during the 19th century and took up work as camel drivers.

In their studies of Broken Hill's history many students of Willyama High School are rediscovering their Afghan ancestry and become interested in Afghanistan. Earlier this year they

decided to seek contact with an Afghan school and establish a sister relationship. Through SAWA's website they discovered Naseema Shaheed High School.

First contact between Willyama High School and Naseema Shaheed High School was established in March. SAWA congratulates the students of Willyama High School for their initiative and will report on progress in the sister relationship between the schools in future newsletters.

**Next RAWA speaking tour planned for July**



RAWA will again send one of its members to Australia to speak at public meetings, visit schools, and attend fundraising events around the country. The speaker for this tour will be Zoya, who is well known to many of us through the book *Zoya's Story: An Afghan Woman's Battle for Freedom* that reports her life as a young girl under the Taliban and as a young woman when she found RAWA and joined the organization. This will be an excellent

opportunity particularly for schools, who can prepare the students by studying Zoya's life before they meet Zoya herself. Zoya will come to Australia in July. Details of the tour will be announced on the EVENTS page of the SAWA website as they become available. Anyone wanting to organize a fundraising event with Zoya should contact SAWA as soon as possible.

**SAWA financial statement for 2006**

SAWA's Annual General Meeting was held in Adelaide on 22 February. The convener presented his annual report, which was accepted. A copy can be obtained by contacting SAWA by mail or email. The financial statement for 2006 shows that again less than 0.5% of SAWA's income was spent on administration – no NGO can do better than that!

2006	income	expenditure
bank balance 1 January	7227.59	
revenue (1)	24,182.93	
<b>total income</b>	<b>31,410.52</b>	
transfer to RAWA		13,500.00
administration (2)		765.00
<b>total expenditure</b>		<b>14,265.00</b>
bank balance 31 December (3)		17,145.52
<b>Balance income/expenditure</b>	<b>31,410.52</b>	<b>31,410.52</b>

(1) Donations and membership. This figure does not include the value of another OPAL shipment of pharmaceuticals (\$7625). The shipment went to Malalai Clinic in 2006 but did not go through the OPAL and SAWA books until January 2007. Its value will therefore appear in the financial statement for 2007.

- (2) Postage of newsletters, website maintenance etc. This is a 25% reduction of administration costs against 2005.
- (3) The high bank balance is the result of fund transfer delays during December 2006. Regular transfers of \$4,500 in support of Naseema Shaheed High School are made in March, June, September and December. In 2006 the December transfer was delayed and will therefore occur in the financial statement for 2007. The SAWA Committee discussed the financial situation at its January meeting and decided to transmit an additional \$3,000 to the school to cover the purchase of laboratory materials. The committee also resolved to purchase Afghan arts and crafts from RAWA. The sale of these goods at fundraising events will raise additional funds to support RAWA during 2007. As a result of these decisions and of the regular March transfer to Naseema Shaheed High School, SAWA's bank balance is now reduced to an amount equivalent to about 30% of our annual commitment to the support of the school, which the committee considers appropriate to guarantee our continued support, assuming that we can maintain our donation income at the level of 2005 and 2006.

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