



THE SAWAN

SAWA-Australia

SUPPORT ASSOCIATION FOR THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN

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

FROM THE CONVENER

SAWA is now in its fifth year of support for the suffering women of Afghanistan. The opening of the Vocational Training Center in Kabul is the most recent achievement of our support. The growth of SAWA's donation income is encouraging, but support of the centre requires ongoing commitment and work if its long-term future is to be secured.

I recently had an opportunity to meet with several RAWA supporters in the USA. Donating to charities has always been an important part of the social fabric in the USA, where large sums can be raised through contacts with the corporate world. I was impressed by the achievements of Afghan Women's Mission, RAWA-Santa Barbara and Ipswich Rotary, organizations that rely on the unwavering work of a few dedicated individuals.

SAWA's strength is its broad membership base, which enables it to draw on the support of many. This was demonstrated at the Annual General Meeting through the election of new office bearers. With a new team of officers SAWA will continue to function well. Our main task for SAWA's fifth year will be to establish contacts with other charities and corporate donors.

Matthias Tomczak

RAWA celebrates International Women's Day

More than 1,500 guests attended RAWA's celebration of International Women's Day in Kabul on 8 March 2008. Only the capacity of the hall available for hire limited the number of people who came to express their support for RAWA; many had to be turned away.

The event was a powerful demonstration of the desire of all Afghan people to end the rule of war criminals and religious fundamentalists and establish a society that guarantees human rights for all and equal rights for women.



A number of Afghan journalists were present. Most do not dare to report anything related to RAWA, but the Afghan TV Channel Ariana had a short report about the event that could be seen in all provinces of Afghanistan by ordinary antenna and all over the world via satellite.

SAWA sent a message of support that was read out at the meeting: "On this day, International Women's Day 2008, SAWA-

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SAWA OBJECTIVES

- Raise funds to assist in development and relief projects 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

Auditor:

Secretary:

Barbara James

Bob Shahinger

Treasurer:

Olga Enigk

Membership Officer:

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Committee:

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Newsletter Editor:

Matthias Tomczak

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Ruth Redfern

Australia sends you its heartfelt message of solidarity and support. For over thirty years RAWA has been a beacon of hope and help for the suffering women of Afghanistan. RAWA continues to be a bastion of strength against the fundamentalists. Its struggle for a secular state, a state that guarantees human rights for all and equal rights for women, gives the women of Afghanistan and the people of the world the determination to continue the fight for justice and for a better future.

SAWA-Australia deplores the way in which Australia and other Western governments prop up a government of proven criminals and religious extremists and supports RAWA in its struggle to bring these elements to justice. May this International Women's Day bring RAWA strength and growth and a better future for Afghanistan's women."

Harsh winter and rising food prices mean despair for many widows

Knocking on the windows of cars stuck in traffic on Shar-e-Naw Street in Kabul, Zulaikha and her children beg for money to keep warm and feed themselves. Their daily routine starts at 7 am and ends at 6 pm every day. "Often we collect 100-150 Afghanis (\$ 2-3) a day," she said, barely enough for bread and tea.

The last winter had been extremely harsh, causing many deaths in rural areas. A severe food shortage has forced the United Nation's World Food Program (WFP) to start with the distribution of emergency food aid. In Kabul the prices of staple foods have doubled during the last year. "The price of wheat last year per kilogram was 15 afghanis," Ebadullah Ebad, spokesman for the WFP, says. "This year, one kilogram of wheat is about 27 to 28 afghanis." The price of rice has also gone up by over 100%.

Zulaikha lost her husband Jamaluddin in factional fighting between former Taliban and Northern Alliance forces in the northern outskirts of Kabul in 1999. She has three children - an 11-year-old son and two daughters aged eight and nine. Over the past three years she has been living in a shack outside Kabul, for which she pays a monthly rent of \$15. "We have nobody to help us," Zulaikha said.

Afghanistan has one of the highest numbers of widows in the world (in proportion to its total population), owing to the armed conflicts that have bedevilled the country for over two decades.

According to Beyond 9/11, a US-based nonprofit group, there are over 1.5 million widows out of an estimated 26.6 million people in Afghanistan. Some 50,000-70,000 widows live in Kabul alone, the group says.

"The average age of an Afghan widow is just 35 years, and 94 percent of them are unable to read and write," Deborah Zalesne, a board member of the Beyond 9/11 and a law professor at the City University of New York, told IRIN. "About 90 percent of Afghan widows have children, and the average widow has more than four."

A survey by UNIFEM Survey states: "65 per cent of the 50,000 widows in Kabul see suicide as the only option to get rid of their miseries and desolation." During winter, when fuel and food costs increase, female-headed households become the most vulnerable.

Source: IRIN News, January 30 and March 10, 2008

The Vocational Training Center opens its doors



As reported in the last SAWAN, the Vocational Training Center for Afghan Women was initially planned to have adult literacy and handicraft training classes and employ three literary teachers and one handicraft trainer for that purpose. Because SAWA could only guarantee to fund 70% of its operational costs, the handicraft training component had to be postponed for the time being.

It may be recalled that SAWA had worked towards a support project for war widows already in 2007 and had made funds available to run a three-month training course for ten widows in November 2007. When more funds became available SAWA and RAWA looked into the possibility of establishing a permanent Vocational Training Center in Kabul, and the funds for the handicraft training were incorporated into the support for the new Vocational Training Center.



The purpose of the new Center is to give war widows the means to support their families. Literacy is the first important step, but the purpose of the Center is not achieved without training in a suitable home industry that brings income stability to the family. Raising the \$11,000 required to cover the remaining 30% of the Center's budget is therefore SAWA's highest priority.

According to the work plan, the Center was to open its doors in the first week of February. Heavy snowfall in February, with temperatures reaching -24°C, blocked all roads in Kabul city;

there was almost no chance for women to come to the Center. This caused a delay of almost one month.

The Center opened in the first week of March. The number of students gradually increased, and by 1 April, 67 women attended classes. More women were expected to join in April as the weather gets warmer in Kabul, and the final intake of 90 students should have been reached when this SAWAN is distributed. Some remaining maintenance, such as painting the house and planting flowers, should also be completed by now.



The Center is open from 9 am to 4:30 pm. Each of the three teachers works in two shifts. The first shift starts at 9:00 and ends at 11:30, the second shift starts at 2:00 and ends at 4:30. Most of the students are housewives, and this schedule allows them to come to classes.

The subjects taught in the Center are: Dari (Farsi), Mathematics, Basic Information on Child Care, and General Knowledge. The literacy program is of two years, comprised of four semesters of six months each. An exam is conducted at the end of each semester which students have to pass to proceed to the next semester. After finishing the 4th semester the students appear for the final examination, and if they pass that exam they get the Merit Certificate of Literacy.

The Center has rooms to set up handicraft training. This component of the Center will be implemented as soon as SAWA can raise the additional funds required.

Help us to give computers to Hewad High School!

Hewad High School in Rawalpindi is one of SAWA's major support projects. Following on from the report on Hewad High School in the last SAWAN, we were able to see some video footage of interviews with students. The video demonstrates their excellent English skills. It also makes clear the disadvantage the students face compared with modern educational standards: Several students mentioned that their school does not have computers.

Computer literacy is essential in the modern world, and an education that does not provide computer skills is no longer adequate. SAWA sees the provision of computers to Hewad High School as a priority in its fundraising efforts. PC clones built in Pakistan are relatively inexpensive, so about \$3,500 - \$4,000 are needed to set up a small computer laboratory with five or six computers.

Please assist SAWA in raising the required funds! You can take this SAWAN to your local school and suggest that the school follows the example of Sandy Strait State School (described below). You can borrow the video of *View from a Grain of Sand* from SAWA and organize a home video evening with friends. You can ask your local Soroptimist, Zonta or other community group for help. Every dollar counts!



*International Women's Day in Hewad High School.
The banner reads: "The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) celebrates the International Women's Day."*

Fundraising in NSW, Queensland and South Australia

The months of March and April saw much fundraising activity around the country. A fundraising dinner at Finola's Restaurant in Balmain, Sydney, was supported by special guest speaker Michael Raper, Australian Representative and Deputy Global President of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), who spoke on *"International social justice issues and particularly in relation to the people of Afghanistan."* Renowned mime artist Jean-Paul Bell, a known supporter of Afghani children's health and education projects, took on the role of auctioneer. Close to 9,000 dollars were raised at the event. SAWA thanks Annie Bell, Pamela Klingman and several local businesses for donating items to the silent auction.

Also in March, the Unitarians for Refugees Group of the Unitarian Church of South Australia showed the documentary *"View from a Grain of Sand"* and raised several hundred dollars at the event. The group also decided to adopt SAWA for future

fundraising events. SAWA thanks the Unitarians for Refugees Group for this decision and for the support already received from the film viewing event. This support will give more widows of Kabul an opportunity to escape from misery and despair by enrolling at the Vocational Training Center.

In April Sandy Strait State School in Hervey Bay, Queensland, held a free dress day in order to raise money for International Women's Day. Each year the Student Representative Council decides upon an organization that supports women, to donate this money to. This year the Student Representative Council recognized the work of SAWA at Hewad High School in Rawalpindi. The students raised more than \$1,000 on the day. SAWA acknowledges this outstanding effort and expresses the sincere thanks on behalf of the students of Hewad High School. The money will go toward the purchase of much needed computers.

Four Soroptimist International clubs of the Adelaide Hills region have pledged to raise \$4,000 during 2008 to run a handicraft training course. This will go a long way towards implementing the second stage of the Vocational Training Center. On behalf of the widows of Kabul SAWA expresses its heartfelt thanks to the clubs and is confident that with their help, handicraft training will soon be operational at the Center.

SAWA's tax deductibility status and related changes to its constitution

There are hundreds of charitable organizations with tax deductibility status. The fact that everyone can receive tax receipts for donations of \$2 or more has given rise to the belief that it should be easy for a charity such as SAWA to gain tax deductibility status. Unfortunately this is not the case.

There are two kinds of charitable organizations. A charity set up to support a local football club, hospital or leisure club can get tax deductibility very easily. All that is required is registration as an incorporated association in the state where it operates. A charity set up for overseas aid purposes can only get tax deductibility through a process called the Overseas Aid Gift Deductibility Scheme (OAGDS). This process takes a minimum of two years and has many more requirements, which are described below. SAWA is an overseas aid organization and can thus gain tax deductibility only through the OAGDS process.

To be acceptable for tax deductibility as an overseas aid organization SAWA has to 1) concentrate on *development and relief*. Support for schools, orphanages and hospitals is regarded *welfare* and does not qualify for tax deductibility. 2) raise at least \$40,000 per year. SAWA is close to achieving this but spends half of the funds on what the Australian legislation considers welfare; so we have not yet reached the required level of fundraising as far as tax legislation is concerned. 3) inspect its aid projects and verify the correct use of funds. This means that a SAWA member will have to travel to Pakistan and visit Hewad High School and travel to Kabul and visit the Vocational Training Center every year. We have not yet had enough funds to do that and rely on our close contacts with RAWA and reports provided by RAWA supporters in other countries.

In conclusion, donations to SAWA are not tax deductible and will not be tax deductible for quite some time (at least another 2-3

years). Companies and other commercial bodies can make donations to SAWA and offset them against their tax liability under the heading "good corporate citizen". Unfortunately this option is not available for individuals. The SAWA committee is looking into options to establish links with other registered charities that would allow donations to become tax-deductible. To make SAWA conform fully with government regulations the Annual General Meeting held on 5 March 2008 amended the constitution as follows (additions underlined):

In Section 1 (2) to the first purpose of the Association was amended to read to "Raise funds to assist in development and relief projects for Afghan women and children."

A new section 5 (6) was added:

5 (6) Officers and members of the Association (a) offer their services on a voluntary basis and shall not receive remuneration for services to the Association; and (b) do not obtain advantages or profit from the assets of the Association.

A copy of the full Annual Report can be obtained by contacting SAWA by mail or email.

SAWA financial statement for 2007

The financial statement for 2007 presented to the AGM shows that again less than 2.8% of SAWA's income was spent on administration. The increase over the administration cost over previous years is due to a one-off cost item to improve SAWA's understanding of the Australian legislation for charities.

	2006	income	expenditure
bank balance 1 January		17,145.52	
revenue (1)		50,717.54	
total income		67,863.06	
transfer to RAWA			42,279.92
administration (2)			1437.20
total expenditure			43,717.12
bank balance 31 December (3)			24,145.94
Balance income/expenditure		67,863.06	67,863.06

- (1) Donations and membership.
- (2) Postage of newsletters, website maintenance etc. Also included is the participation cost for a training weekend in charity legislation for the Convener.
- (3) This includes the funds for the Vocational Training Center, which were not transmitted until 2008.



To become a member of SAWA go to <http://sawa-australia.org/joinus.htm> or write to SAWA's PO Box. Send a message to membership@sawa-australia.org if you wish to receive the SAWAN by email rather than ordinary mail.