



Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan

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

FROM THE CONVENER

"Villains and clowns dominate Afghan electoral theatre" wrote Farooq Sulehria from exile in Sweden. It could indeed be regarded as a Punch and Judy show, would the consequences for Afghanistan's people not be so devastating, particularly for the women, whose situation has gone from bad to worse during the eight years of foreign occupation.

We at SAWA try to oppose that trend with determination. In August our established groups in Adelaide, Sydney and Castlemaine were joined by new local groups in Brisbane, Perth, Melbourne, Hobart and Lismore. All groups are preparing own fundraising activities. Some have already started and sent us their first reports for you to read.

*Christmas is still many weeks away, but I already received my first unsolicited charity mail with offers of cards and calendars. Let me remind all SAWA members and supporters that SAWA has **beautiful cards** on offer, based on colourful drawings of orphans in RAWA's orphanages. They make ideal "Season's Greetings" cards. For the first time SAWA also offers a calendar, with photos of women and girls in Kabul. You can help the women of Afghanistan by buying your cards for the festive season and your **calendar** for 2010 from SAWA. To order online go to our web page www.sawa-australia.org/products.htm, or contact your local group secretary for orders.*

Matthias Tomczak

Women journalists threatened

Shapoor Saber, a journalist trained by Women Reporters Under Threat – a leading media watchdog in Herat – reported in June on harassment and oppression of women journalists. Vincent Brossel of *Reporters Sans Frontières* (Reporters Without Borders) said the item was especially useful because it was written by someone from the area.

The report focused on journalist Khadija Ahadi, who said she had carried on working after she was first threatened. "Then one day they threw two grenades in my house. I have not gone to

work since," she said. Another, Nilofar Habibi, a newsreader on Herat's state-run radio and television station, was stabbed in the stomach and later fled the country.

"It gives a clear picture of the situation with the necessary background ... that is what we want from investigative journalists," said Brossel. He added that it went further than typical reporting of journalists' issue by other journalists, "This is more than that: the fate of women and the challenges of press freedom in Afghanistan."

Computers in Hewad High School

16 months ago, in May 2008, we sent out a call for donations to introduce computer courses at Hewad High School. Our supporters donated generously, but threats from the Taliban forced the school to relocate (see SAWAN 22 of May 2009), and the planned purchase of computers had to be postponed. We can now report that the first computer course could finally be held during the summer vacation (July/August) of this year.



Boys and girls enjoy their brand new computers and furniture provided through SAWA's support

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 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

Secretary: Barbara James

Treasurer: Olga Eningk

Membership Officer: Helen Fletcher

Committee: Dawn Atkinson, Grace McCaughey, Ruth Redfern

Newsletter Editor: Matthias Tomczak

Public Officer: Ruth Redfern

Auditor: Bob Shahinger

What does the average Afghan think of the foreign presence in their country?

The author of this article is a foreigner who has lived in Kabul for 2 years, after visiting the country for a month or two each year for 5 years before that.

Over the past two years, I have been teaching amongst almost 300 Afghans. I have also worked as a journalist. I have been privileged to meet a variety of Afghan people, who have strong commitment to, and high hopes for, their country. (...)

When teaching, I use a brainstorming process to teach "pre-writing" skills. I have asked my classes to brainstorm the question: "What are the things that Afghanistan needs to develop well in the future?" The initial brainstorm always brings in hundreds of responses. Predictably, further discussion reduces the ideas to the most important issues: peace and stability, good governance, education, economic development and health issues.

These discussions have given me a unique insight into the attitudes and views of ordinary Afghans. Almost always they involve comments about the foreign presence in this country.

In 2001 most of the people of Afghanistan welcomed the foreign intervention. The continued foreign presence is no longer, it seems, a matter for rejoicing. In almost every one of my classes and discussions people spoke of the removal of foreign forces as one of the requirements for Afghanistan's development.

The way for foreign policy makers to understand this attitude is to place themselves in the shoes of the ordinary people of this country. How do ordinary Afghans see the foreign presence here, how do they experience it?

The most common "meeting place" of ordinary Afghans and foreigners is on the roads with the International Security Force for Afghanistan (ISAF) around Afghanistan and in Kabul. Armed and armoured military convoys travel the roads with an attitude that says to ordinary Afghans "We are the conquering heroes, get out of our way." The soldiers point their guns directly at bystanders and those in cars. They drive up the middle of roads and force other vehicles off the road.

The same is true for the unmarked Land Cruisers used by ISAF, Blackwater Security company as well as United Nations vehicles. They drive through traffic like drunken western teenagers returning from a party, without respect for other road users or their safety. ISAF have no number plates and, therefore, reporting outrageously dangerous driving is impossible. In May, the occupants of a Blackwater vehicle fired at an Afghan car after a crash, killing one of the occupants. This story, along with others of injuries caused by the bad driving of ISAF vehicles, spread like wildfire amongst the ordinary people.

As one foreigner, who has lived here for many years, said recently: "The most dangerous thing on an average day in Kabul is being confronted by ISAF drivers." If you were an ordinary Afghan and this was the only way you had ever met foreigners (and this is the case for the vast majority of people here) - what would your image of them be?

Another issue that helps form the Afghan image of foreigners is the lifestyle of the multi-national foreign community.

They live in large mansions with every modern convenience. Their organization may be paying the landlord (who built the house on money earned as a warlord or heroin producer) up to \$20,000 per month. These houses are surrounded by fortifications, razor wire and armed guards. Often, within a stone's throw are the houses of poor people who look on with envy.

The foreigners drive in big armoured Land Cruisers, when they take their rare trips outside of their bunkers to go to "approved, secure locations." The driving style, like that of ISAF and the UN, indicates their belief that they "own" Afghanistan - to hell with any form of road civility or rules. Foreigners will say that Afghans drive badly, and they certainly do. But the way many foreign vehicles are driven puts Afghan driving in a different light.

Most foreigners never meet an ordinary Afghan and would probably be terrified if they did. Security companies, in order to sell their wares, encourage the belief that all Afghans are dangerous. A recent article by a foreign journalist spoke about how "you never know who you can trust" in Afghanistan - certainly not a true statement, but don't let the truth get in the way of a good story! What a dreadful insult to so many good people here - in a country that journalist is using to make his money. (...)

Late at night, it is common to see clearly marked United Nations and other "development" vehicles lined up outside various licensed venues frequented by foreigners. Partying seems to be a work funded operation for many of the foreign UN and development workers here. A waiter at one of these establishments told me recently that a table of 6 foreigners would spend more than \$ 1,000 per night on food and drinks. That's more than a year's income for many families in Kabul.

The foreigners definitely do earn high salaries. Many earn far more here than they would (or could) in their home countries. Salaries between 10 and 20 thousand dollars per month (plus danger money, accommodation, transport etc) are not uncommon. Afghan workers with the same international organisations may receive less than \$ 1,000 per month. This inequality is justified by saying "we cannot interfere with the economy in developing countries." The same philosophy is ignored by the development organizations who pay a warlord \$200,000 per year for a house.

Afghans know what the foreigners are earning and spending here. They assume that all foreigners are very rich and that they live fairly debauched life styles - they believe they have plenty of evidence to prove it. The Taliban are not averse to making use of these realities which demonstrate either a total lack of understanding of local culture, cultural sensitivity or, worse, a conscious decision to ignore those cultural sensitivities. (...) Imagine yourself as an ordinary Afghan who earns less than \$50 per month, lives in a small mud brick house (often no more than one room for a family of 5 or 6) with no facilities, has no car and whose life is a daily battle. As you look on from the outside at the "crumbs that fall from the rich man's table", how would you see the foreigners, how would you feel about them?

Foreigners generally do not speak much to Afghans here. Whether this is fear or a sense of superiority remains to be seen. It is, however, common. Sometimes I stop my car and talk to young policemen on duty at the various checkpoints

around Kabul. They are amazed: "You are different to other foreigners" I am often told in their broken English which they love to practice. They are not used to foreigners bothering to talk to them or, indeed, obeying their traffic directions - just drive straight through, seems to be the motto of ISAF and UN vehicles.

Many foreigners complain bitterly about the beggars calling for baksheesh on the streets, whilst they openly display the life styles of the "rich and famous" – who could blame a poor Afghan child for trying to get "one dollar" from the rich foreigners?

At a barbecue at the US embassy last year, a woman in a significant position was heard to comment: "I would love to know more about the culture here and meet some ordinary people, but we do not get the opportunity." She may well be helping to determine US policy for the country. ...

If you were an ordinary Afghan, how would you react to this? What would you think of the "conquering heroes" who have come to save you and your country?

Read the full story at

<http://www.afghanistanalive.com/afghanimage.htm>

Birthing kit assembly in Castlemaine



Women in in Dikundi, a backward and poor province in central Afghanistan, receive Zonta birthing kits.

SAWA has sent several thousands of birthing kits to RAWA. The birthing kit project was described in detail in SAWAN no. 21. The following is a report on the assembly of another 1000 kits.

The task seemed easy enough. Simply, it was to roll up a sterile scalpel blade, a tiny square of soap, three pieces of string and five pieces of gauze in a set of latex gloves, shove them between the folds of a carefully folded square meter of black plastic, and pack them tight in a tiny sealable plastic bag.

Ronda Walker, of Kyneton, explains why they're needed. "For those of us who've given birth in a hospital, it's a bit mind-boggling to think of having a baby in Third World conditions," she says. "Often it's on a dirt floor of a hut that's been made out of dung and mud and the umbilical cord is cut with a knife that might have slaughtered the pig for the family meal the day before."

So there we were, 20 or so of us, rolling, shoving and flattening all the bits, to make kits for the women of Afghanistan. Grace McCaughey, secretary of the local SAWA group, had corralled

23 people for the day. Yet the benefits seemed all ours. There in our makeshift assembly line was Tania, in the first year of her three-year midwifery course, who talked about the constant changing of "blueys", or under sheets, during birthing in Australia's hospitals.

There was Janey, a 60-year-old Murray Grey cattle breeder, who reckoned she had more gear in her shed for calving cows than was included in the birthing kits.

There was 83-year-old June, who'd worked with pioneering safe-abortion advocate and GP Bertram Wainer in the 1960s.

There was Wendy, the midwife and grandmother, who recalled the gangrene ward of the Melbourne Hospital of the 1960s and '70s, filled with patients suffering after backyard abortions, and the rules that forbade nurses talking to women hospitalised by rape, because such patients were regarded as scarlet women.

From a report of Genevieve Barlow in the Weekly Times, 5 August 2009



Ronda Walker of Kyneton and Grace McCaughey and Jill Leisegang of Castlemaine with the birthing kits.

Fundraising ideas

Here are a few fundraising ideas from Grace McCaughey:

Ask SAWA members and friends to give money, not presents. If you are one of the many people who already have most things, why not ask your friends not to give you a Christmas present this year but to donate the money to SAWA instead. It will be a more meaningful Christmas than another pair of novelty socks!

Join up new SAWA members for Christmas. Instead of giving out Christmas presents, consider making a donation on your friends' behalf to SAWA. Buy your Christmas cards and the 2010 calendar from SAWA.

Sponsor a local community event. If your business is in a position to do so, why not sponsor a SAWA event in your local area? It doesn't have to be a major event but it will help build a relationship with your local community (and local customers).

Put the bite on your boss. Ask your employer to provide a matching gift for whatever your workplace can raise in a special Christmas fundraising effort for SAWA.

Hold Christmas drinks/nibbles for your local group members to say thanks and perhaps plan for 2010.

And here is an idea from Chilla in Perth:

Get people to bring something to sell and then undertake to buy something that is brought - with at least half the funds going to SAWA. I saw a bring your dresses fundraiser along these lines on TV once, but people could bring jam, books, clothes.

The fundraiser (organized by RAWA)

I read a poem
my world
being one quarter
of the whole –
I went to the
fundraiser
the young Afghani
woman
spoke
of matters that
travel
through the
graveyards
of women
harnessed
to a conflict
not of their making
for a time
a glimmer of hope
flickered
in the night sky

but alas too soon
shadows
swallowed the stars
darkness
returned –
this was her story –
slowly
I drank red wine
as women's voices
raised
in song
songs
written by other
women
mindful
of winter nights
where
three-quarters
of the whole
roam

Judy Morrison of Cowes Phillip Island

Reports from local groups

As already announced in the last SAWAN, Shazia's speaking tour and Malalai Joya's book launch in July led to the formation of local groups in several cities. Their addresses are:

Adelaide: P.O. Box 90 Flinders University Post Office Bedford Park SA 5042
Brisbane: c/- Glenys Baldwin 184 Nyleta Street Coopers Plains Qld 4108
Castlemaine: c/- Grace McCaughey 13A Yeats Street Castlemaine Vic 3450
Hobart: c/- Yabbo Thompson 11 Union Street West Hobart Tas 7000
Lismore: c/- Bob Oort Mountain Top Rd Georgica NSW 2480
Melbourne: c/- Barbara Kameniar 9 Cullens Street North Melbourne Vic 3051
Perth: PO Box 4163 Mosman Park South WA 6012
Sydney: c/- Dawn Atkinson 8/6 Eventon Street Balmain NSW 2041
Wagga Wagga contact: Leonie Francis TAFE NSW Riverina Institute, Wagga Wagga Campus, PO Box 2231 Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650

Adelaide

SAWA thanks WILPF (Women's International League of Peace and Freedom) yet again for its consistent and valued support. On Saturday 12 September WILPF organized a fundraising screening at Hutt St Community Library of the short film made by SAWA's convenor, Matthias Tomczak, while in Kabul last year. The film looks at everyday life in Kabul today, focussing on one of SAWA's key projects, the Vocational Training Centre. Operated by OPAWC (Organization for Promoting Women's Capabilities) the Centre supports war widows and illiterate women of Afghanistan by offering free adult literacy classes and handicraft training. It is SAWA's belief that education is the key to positive change. With education comes power, enabling Afghan women to take their rightful place in the struggle for a free, democratic Afghanistan. There was valuable opportunity for the audience of approximately forty people to debrief, reflect and discuss.

In 1981, International Day of Peace was declared by the United Nations to coincide with the opening of the United Nations General Assembly each year. SAWA was invited to help celebrate the day with the Combined Peace Groups of Adelaide on 20th September. On display were writings and artwork by students from a number of schools who had been making a study of "Peace in my Life". SAWA ran a brisk trade in handcrafts, shopping bags etc and raised \$170.

On Sunday 27 September the Adelaide group organized a picnic for members in the parklands. Unfortunately it turned out to be the coldest day of the year. Still, the small group that had gathered spent a lovely afternoon at the pub and enthusiastically made plans for next events.

Barbara James and Olga Enigk

Brisbane

Brisbane's Peace Fair in Mt. Cooththa Botanic Garden was attended by the usual crowd of people, who are all helping various causes. SAWA had a stall at the Fair where we introduced our new local group and sold some handcrafts and shopping bags. \$198 were raised during a busy day.

Glenys Baldwin

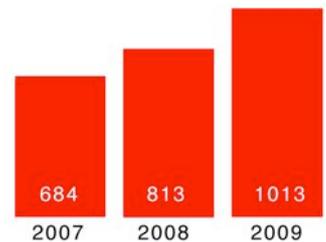


A thank you to our supporters

Many readers supported us again in our fundraising activities. It is impossible to mention all by name, but some generous donations should not go unrecorded. Sandra Marsh in Neutral Bay, NSW, raised \$1032 as part of a birthday party, and the Victorian Branch of the Australian Education Union sent us a cheque over \$500. We thank these generous donors and all other members and supporters who make our work possible.

The bottom line

Civilians killed during **January – July** each year (does not include incidents that involved civilians but may also have involved combatants)



400 more killed in August/September 2009

Source: UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

To become a member of SAWA subscribe to the SAWAN at <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.