



Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan

FROM THE EDITOR

The last three months saw some important developments in SAWA's work. Hewad High School is now exclusively supported by SAWA (NSW), who already sent three quarterly instalments for the school's budget and is confident to be able to raise the funds needed to support the school. SAWA (SA) made new contacts with major donors, who supported two new initiatives at the Vocational Training Centre.

More exciting events are on their way for the months ahead. Afghan ex-parliamentarian and human rights activist Malalai Joya will tour Australia and speak at SAWA functions. We can all look forward to her visit and her support for our work.

The deterioration of the situation of Afghanistan's women has been apparent for quite some time. Now that the United States have given up on their support for women's rights in Afghanistan (see the news item below) our work has become more important than ever. Without the support from people like you Afghanistan's women would face a bleak future, so please continue to send us your donations.

Matthias Tomczak

Malalai Joya comes to Australia



Malalai Joya will tour Australia in August and September as guest of the Melbourne Writer's Festival. She has agreed to use the occasion to support SAWA's work by speaking at events in Melbourne, Adelaide, Hobart, Sydney and Perth.

Malalai Joya was a Parliamentarian in the National Assembly of Afghanistan from 2005 until early 2007, when she was dismissed for publicly denouncing the presence of warlords and war criminals in the Afghan parliament.

When President Obama was awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize, Noam Chomsky wrote in the New York Times: "The Nobel Peace Prize committee might well have made truly worthy choices, prominent among them the remarkable Afghan activist Malalai Joya." Her autobiography "Raising my Voice" appeared in Australia in 2009, has been translated into German, Norwegian and French and will be available in translation in another six languages languages.

Malalai Joya has received numerous awards from organizations around the world. She has survived four assassination attempts and travels in Afghanistan under a burqa and with armed guards. An outspoken critic of the first ever "democratically elected" Karzai administration and its western supporters, she is convinced that the tormented people of Afghanistan can take their fate into their own hands if they are released from the grip of foreign powers and the warlords they support.

The following venues and dates have already been decided. For updates see www.sawa-australia.org/events.html.

Melbourne: see www.sawa-australia.org/events.html

Adelaide: "Why is Afghanistan going backwards?" 30 August 7 pm, AEU Hall, 163 Greenhill Road

"What future for Afghanistan?" 31 August 6 pm, UniSA Hawke Centre, North Terrace; see http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkecentre/events/2011events/SAWA_MalalaiJoya.asp

Hobart: see www.sawa-australia.org/events.html

Sydney: see page 4 for dates and locations

Perth: at the conference "Rebuilding Harmony 2011" of the Centre for Muslim States and Societies of the University of Western Australia; see <http://www.cmss.uwa.edu.au/rebuildingharmony2011>

USA abandon support for Afghanistan's women; USAID classifies women's rights a "pet project"

When the U.S. Agency for International Development sought bids last March for a \$140 million land reform program in Afghanistan, it insisted that the winning contractor meet specific goals to promote women's rights. Before the contract was awarded, USAID overhauled the initiative, stripping out those concrete targets. The removal of specific women's rights requirements, which also took place in a \$600 million municipal government program awarded last

SAWA OBJECTIVES

- Raise funds to assist in development and relief projects for Afghan women and children,
- Increase community awareness of the needs of Afghan women and children;
- Encourage women, men and young people to join SAWA-Australia state associations;
- Set up SAWA/RAWA support groups; and
- Encourage cooperation among SAWA-Australia state associations through participation in national SAWA network forums.

year, reflects a shift in USAID's approach in Afghanistan. Instead of setting ambitious goals to improve the status of Afghan women, the agency is tilting toward more attainable measures.

"If you're targeting an issue, you need to target it in a way you can achieve those objectives," said J. Alexander Thier, director of USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs. "The women's issue is one where we need hardheaded realism. There are things we can do, and do well. But if we become unrealistic and overfocused . . . we get ourselves in trouble."

"Gender issues are going to have to take a back seat to other priorities," said a senior official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal policy deliberations. "There's no way we can be successful if we maintain every special interest and pet project. All those pet rocks in our rucksack were taking us down."

This text is an excerpt from an article that appeared in the Washington Post on 14 March 2011.

Women imprisoned for "crimes of morality"

Prison is prison, but in Badam Bagh inmates say they live in "bearable conditions inside a clean building," and, most importantly, no longer live in fear.

Activists, including Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission (IHRC), have welcomed the efforts to finally build separate prisons. "However," IHRC adviser Ghulam Nabi Hakak notes, "with the exception of a few big cities and provinces, there are no separate prison buildings for female inmates in other places."

He adds that in the provinces of Panjshir, Kapisa, Logar, Maidan-Wardak, and others, "female inmates there are kept in cells inside men's jails. It is not easy or safe for them even to go to the bathroom there."

Hakak explains that because of the lack of special prison and detention centres for women in many provinces, female suspects are usually handed over to so-called guarantors or protectors for temporary custody until their court cases can be concluded. Such guarantors -- appointed by the courts -- are usually a man, often a powerful, high-ranking official. Hakak says the practice is "completely unacceptable, as it leaves the woman vulnerable to all kinds of abuse and exploitation, and there is no one to defend her."

The IHRC says that in one case, a guarantor in the eastern Logar Province raped a young teenage suspect under his custody.

Hakak says opening separate jails for women in modern facilities only solves some of the problems facing female prisoners in Afghanistan. A major outstanding issue, he says, is the violation of women prisoners' legal rights.

Among Afghanistan's 500 or so female inmates, dozens were convicted of murder or theft. But many others were imprisoned for crimes of morality that aren't actually listed as a criminal offence in the country's Penal Code. There are numerous cases when women were sent to jail for escaping from their abusive husbands and in-laws, or for merely chatting with men who were not their relatives. "Leaving your home is not a punishable crime by the law, so such cases are referred to Shari'a laws, and women get sentenced for immoral behaviour," Hakak says. Abandoned by relatives, and with nowhere else to turn, many female suspects find themselves unable to pay for a lawyer to defend them. Many simply don't know their rights or have no idea how to seek legal advice. "There are so many women who succumb to court rules because they don't know how to defend themselves," Hakak says. "They pay a heavy price for something they might not have done."

If prison is their fate, steps are now being taken to make sure some good can come out of it. Deputy Justice Minister Mohammad Qasim Hashimzai, for example, says that several nongovernmental organizations are engaged in "helping women prisoners in learning new skills so they can more easily reintegrate into society after they're released from jail."

But many imprisoned women are sceptical about whether they will ever be able to rebuild their lives or be accepted back into Afghanistan's deeply conservative society. Even close relatives distance themselves from a woman who has "dishonoured" the family by being sentenced to prison.

Honour is a sensitive issue in Afghanistan. Maryam, a 9-year-old girl who lives in Badam Bagh along with her imprisoned mother, knows that too well. "Everything is good in prison but living here harms one's reputation," she says. "Women outside might say about my mother, 'Perhaps she wasn't a good woman that she has been imprisoned.' "

The stigma is also shared by some 50 children who live in Badam Bagh alongside their convicted mothers. Ten-year-old Qais, whose mother has been imprisoned for crimes of morality, says he, too, "must have done something very wrong." "I have learned my lesson inside the prison," Qais says. "I won't commit a crime. I would like to be free."

This is an abbreviated version of an article that appeared on 1 June at <http://www.afghanistannewscenter.com/news/2011/june/jun12011.html#16>

More news from Afghanistan

The following news items have been published on SAWA's web page www.sawa-australia.org/news.html in 2011:

- Harassment of women again on the rise
- Afghanistan is the world's most dangerous place for women
- Illiterate and under head-to-toe burqa: life of a police woman
- USA abandon support for Afghanistan's women
- Afghan television station 1TV exposes the fate of Afghan women (with video)

SAWA-Australia's support projects

If you have not followed the work of SAWA-Australia recently, here is a brief reminder of the projects we support.



Hewad High School for refugees in Rawalpindi

Support for this project is organized by SAWA-Australia (NSW).

A student speaks to the assembly at International Women's Day 2011.



Vocational Training Centre for Women in Kabul

Support for this project is organized by SAWA-Australia (SA). It offers literacy classes for women, particularly war widows,

and training to generate an income for the families of the women.



Convener: Matthias Tomczak **Secretary:** Barbara James **Treasurer:** Christine Tomczak
Committee: Carmel Chiu-Sutcliffe, Libby Drew, Kath Jones, Ruth Redfern.
Newsletter editor: Matthias Tomczak **Public Officer:** Ruth Redfern **Auditor:** Bob Shahinger

Samira talks to SAWA supporters in Perth

On 29 May the SAWA group in Perth held a fundraising event "An Afternoon with Samira Nabizadah" and issued a press statement. The Melville Times used it for the following story, which appeared on 7 June.

Fremantle is a long way from Afghanistan and Samira Nabizadah knows this better than most.

After fleeing her homeland with her family at the age of 11, Ms Nabizadah spent three weeks hiding in a hotel in Pakistan before boarding a crowded boat bound for Indonesia. With no documents, passports or other belongings, Ms Nabizadah and her family arrived at Christmas Island and were transferred to the Port Hedland detention centre, where they spent the next year. When they were finally released, they settled in Perth.

Now 21, Ms Nabizadah is aware of just how different her life could have been. "If I was to still live in Afghanistan, I can see myself married with three to four kids, with no education and no rights as a woman," she said. "Whereas here I am a 21-year-old, working hard and wishing to pursue my education in the police force next year.

"When the time is right for me, I might get married. I know I can do this at any point in my life living here but back home I wouldn't have had that choice."

Ms Nabizadah shared her story at the Fremantle Arts Centre on May 29, in an event organised by the Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan. SAWA-Australia raises funds for human rights, education, nutrition, health, safety, and improving the self-esteem of Afghanistan's women and children. For more information, visit www.sawa-australia.org.



Samira

SAWA Adelaide participated in Refugee Week

SAWA (SA) screened the moving documentary *Sweetest Embrace* as part of SA Refugee Week. The film was especially relevant as it tells of the displacement of individuals and their families because of the refugee experience. We also see portrayed the resilience of the human spirit in the stories of Soorgul and Amir who return to Afghanistan in search of their families. Lovely Afghan sweets were made by Parwana Afghan restaurant (124B Henley Beach Rd Torrensville, phone 84439001) and kindly donated to us to sell on the night. We thank Fatema and everyone at Parwana for their support of SAWA (SA)'s work. If you haven't yet been to the restaurant for a meal, it is definitely worth a visit, the food is delicious!

English classes at the Vocational Training Centre

During the less than 4 years of its existence the Vocational Training Centre has taught over 300 women to read and write. Many of them hope to use their new skills to support their families through paid work, but the two questions every jobseeker in Kabul is asked are: "Can you speak English?" and "Can you use a computer?" The Centre's Annual Report for 2010 clearly stated the need for English and computer classes, but SAWA (SA) had been unable so far to raise the necessary funds.

Three months ago our secretary Barbara James had the opportunity to describe SAWA's work to the **DAK Foundation**, a private charity. As a result SAWA (SA) received \$7882 to enable the Vocational Training Centre to run a first English class for 70 students. Latifa, the Centre's director, reported that the women were overjoyed and that she received 158 applications for the course. She has selected 70 participants based on the marks received for the literacy course.

The course is scheduled to begin in August. We thank the DAK Foundation for its generous support that will change the lives of 70 women who were illiterate and helpless just a year ago. We hope to be able to give the remaining 88 women the same opportunity in the near future.

Computer course at the Vocational Training Centre

The second need of the Vocational Training Centre, establishing a computer course, will become a reality through the initiative of the secretary of the Perth SAWA group Chilla Bulbeck. Chilla approached **GlobalQuest** and submitted a proposal for funding a computer lab and teacher. GlobalQuest is a charity initiated and managed voluntarily by staff of Coffey International Ltd, in a spirit very similar to SAWA as it is run entirely by volunteers, but with the additional advantage that Coffey International matches money raised by GlobalQuest with its own dollars. GlobalQuest donated \$9,950 for the computer lab and teacher salary.

At the time of writing all classes are on vacation and the Centre is being painted and reorganized to accommodate the new English and computer courses. We thank GlobalQuest for its generous support and look forward to photos of a sparkling new laboratory full of happy women in front of computers.

Adelaide Quiz night

The Adelaide group will hold its first quiz night on Friday 21 October at the Box Factory, 59 Regent St South. Details of the event are still evolving. Please think of putting together a table of six and contact 0423 900 889 closer to the date or check the SAWA web page.

Keep the donation spirit up!

While the generous assistance of GlobalQuest and the DAK Foundation has allowed us to start new activities at the Vocational Training Centre, our regular donation stream that pays for the financial base load of the Centre has been falling off recently. Please do not forget the needs of Afghanistan's women; they rely on your support. Our bank details are at the top of the page.



Convener: Dawn Atkinson **Assistant Convener:** Shirley Allen

Treasurer: Carolyn Allen

Committee: Maryellen Galbally, Margaret Hetherton, June Lunsmann, Herma Sieper, Helen Toner.

Malalai Joya visit to NSW

SAWA (NSW) is delighted that Ms. Joya will be speaking at a number of events in NSW from 5 – 10 September. Malalai Joya is an active campaigner for human rights and the rights of Afghan women and children in particular. The opportunity to have this first hand and authoritative account is very welcome.

Her NSW program includes a public meeting in Armidale (Monday 5 September) hosted by Armidale Writers, University of New England academics at Armidale Town Hall.

This is followed in Sydney by addressing groups at Macquarie University, speaking to the Contemporary Muslim Society at Western Sydney University, giving a Sydney Peace and Conflict Studies lecture at Sydney University as well as meeting with teachers, students and union groups.

On Friday 9 September 5.30 - 8.30 at Marrickville Town Hall Ms. Joya will be the guest speaker of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, the Sydney Peace Foundation and the Marrickville Peace Group under the banner of the "Stop the War Coalition".

While SAWA does not advocate such political objectives and is not a sponsor of this meeting, it welcomes the chance for Sydneysiders to hear an Afghan woman's account of the situation in her homeland, including the way it affects the women and children SAWA aims to support.

SAWA (NSW) and Malalai Joya

On behalf of SAWA (NSW), Holroyd High School is hosting a morning where Ms. Joya will address students from a number of state and private schools as well as community members and ex-students, the topic being *Human Rights and the Position of Women in Afghanistan Today*. The principal, Ms. Dorothy Hoddinott and the dedicated staff of Holroyd High, are well known for their achievements in meeting both educational and resettling needs of a large number of refugee students, many of whom are from Afghanistan.

SAWA (NSW) is most appreciative of the staff support, in particular that of Fiona Lamont, Head Teacher Student Engagement, and Dorothy Hoddinott, Principal. Details of this event and of a public meeting at Annandale Neighbourhood Centre hosted by SAWA (NSW) can be found in the next column.

Following the event at Holroyd High School, SAWA (NSW) is planning an afternoon tea where representatives of a number of groups involved in women's rights in Afghanistan can meet for informal discussion with Malalai Joya.

Donations

A very pleasing development for SAWA (NSW) is the increasing number of direct donations.

This year approximately half our income has come from this source with donations ranging from \$10 up to \$1000 from individuals and companies who have simply heard of our work and wish to do something to help. As our fundraising increases SAWA (NSW) would like to provide more teaching resources to enhance both staff and student development at Hewad High School.

Of special note is that since the last SAWAN Friends of RAWA in Japan have been in contact. They have now managed to raise their annual donation to Hewad High School despite the devastating tsunami and its aftermath.

SAWA Dinner 18 May

Despite competition from the Sydney Writers' Festival and winter weather, this most enjoyable dinner at Finola's Restaurant at the Balmain Bowling Club was a great success. Judge Helen Murrell was our guest speaker. Her talk included the history of struggle for basic human rights by women in Afghanistan.

Judge Murrell is one of *Women for Influence*, a group of women standing firmly with the Action Aid project for Female Paralegal Training Program in Afghanistan. (Please note the invitation to a fund raising dinner for this important project.)

The ongoing support of individuals and small businesses in the Balmain-Rozelle area has been essential to the success of this type of fundraiser. Many who were not able to attend the dinner sent donations instead.

I'm sure you will agree that it is the effort of many that makes our achievements possible and our achievements become the achievements of Afghan women and children.

Margaret Hetherton and Dawn Atkinson

An Invitation to support ActionAid

Join **ActionAid Australia's Women for Influence** for a night to Support Survivors of Gender-based Violence in Afghanistan. Thursday 1 September 2011, Parliament House Macquarie Street Sydney, 6.30pm to 9.30pm. Tickets \$150 or Tables of 10 for \$1300.

Guest speakers, entertainment and a raffle. For more information including bookings contact Clementine Johnson (02 9565 9102 or Clementine.johnson@actionaid.org)

All proceeds go directly towards the Paralegal Training Program, training women in Afghanistan on human rights and women's rights issues as well as Afghan law and working with and educating Afghan communities on the issues surrounding gender-based violence.

Malalai Joya speaks on "Human Rights and The Position of Women in Afghanistan Today"

This will be the theme of Malalai Joya's talk at two events:

Annandale Neighbourhood Centre 79 Johnstone St., Annandale, Wednesday 7 September 6.30 for 7.00p.m. bookings essential, \$15/\$10 concession. Contact Maryellen (9692 8248 or bookings@sawansw.org.au). A light supper will be served. Sponsored by SAWA-Australia (NSW). All proceeds will go towards the funding of Hewad High School.

Holroyd High School Thursday 8 September 2011 10.30 for 11am. For further information contact Fiona Lamont (9631 9410 or Fiona.Lamont1@det.nsw.edu.au)

The talk will be attended by senior secondary students from both state and private schools, ex-students and community members. We thank the school community of Holroyd High for hosting this event on behalf of SAWA (NSW).