



Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan

FROM THE EDITOR

It is said that power corrupts. It now appears that success with charitable work corrupts as well. You may have heard of "Three Cups of Tea", maybe you read the book. During a visit to the USA in 2008 I attended a talk by its author Greg Mortenson, who started the charity building "One School at a Time", first in Pakistan, then in Afghanistan and elsewhere. He moved the audience deeply, sometimes to tears. Now a civil suit charges him of fraud, deceit, breach of contract, racketeering, and "unjust enrichment" based on alleged fabrications in the books, and the Montana attorney general has deposed four staffers and board members of his Central Asia Institute, including Mortenson himself.

A much more serious development has affected Afghan Women's Mission, the charity in the USA that supports RAWA. Like many other small USA charities, Afghan Women's Mission entrusts its finances and management to the International Humanities Center (IHC), an organization that specializes in managing the operation of small charities. Last December the IHC collapsed, having spent the collected donations of nearly 200 charities on paying its staff and paying off its debt. Thousands of dollars lost by Afghan Women's Mission are now not getting to RAWA.

Hearing these disheartening news motivated me to reassure you that in the sometimes murky world of charities SAWA-Australia has an excellent record. We operate with less than 2% administration costs and send all your donations to RAWA, OPAWC and now also to AFCECO (see the article on page 2).

GiveNow.com.au, our partner through which SAWA (SA) collects donations online, is supported by Westpac and transfers incoming donations monthly, so that any build-up of donation money is held in our own bank account, over which we have full control. SAWA's committees in NSW and SA are made up of dedicated volunteers who work selflessly and tirelessly for the good of Afghanistan's women. We do need more donations and ask you to give whatever you can afford. We can assure you that not a cent of it will get into any wrong pockets.

Matthias Tomczak

RAWA remembers Meena

On 6 February the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) commemorated the 25th anniversary of the martyrdom of its leader Meena in Kabul. Due to heavy snowfall that blocked the roads the function had to be delayed. More than one hundred girls and women attended the function, which started in the morning and stretched into the afternoon. The hall was decorated with photos of Meena and banners pledging oaths of continuing on her glorious path and calling on women to continue struggling for a better Afghanistan.

Meena established RAWA in 1977 with a handful of young progressive girls in Kabul. Despite unspeakable hardships she was able to nurture RAWA by attracting hundreds of women and managed to set up social welfare projects for them. She also got the world's attention to the plight of her country in a few trips abroad.

Meena was assassinated in Quetta, Pakistan on 4 February 1987 when she was just thirty. The Afghan intelligence service KHAD and its fundamentalist partners planned the conspiracy, killing two of Meena's associates as well, because Meena had become a serious threat to them.

A short biography of Meena and brief history of RAWA's many activities were read by Asma. RAWA member Hamasa gave a speech condemning the occupation of our country, warlord rulers in the corrupt government and their sold-out treacherous writers. Describing the horrible conditions of women after the USA occupied our country she said: "We women have to snatch our rights, fight to get them. No one is ever going to liberate us or give us equality but us." She further talked about RAWA's solidarity with freedom-loving women all over the world. "We send our warmest wishes to the women of the Arab world, India, Nepal, Iran and other countries. We stand by them in their difficult struggle against tyrannical regimes. Their success is our success."

The poem *Meena* written by famous Iranian poet Riza Farmand and dedicated to Meena by him, was recited by a girl in the function. Azada declaimed the Pashto translation of the poem *I Will Never Return* written by Meena. A couple of empowering songs dedicated to Meena and to the pained Afghan women were also sung. The function ended with a slideshow depicting Meena's life, RAWA's political and social activities and images of women's struggles from all over the world.

Although we still mourn the loss of our great leader, her short life is a bubbling spring of inspiration for us and for freedom-loving women all over the world. Our enemies may have killed our great leader but her sacrifice has lit up her path for generations to come.

RAWA



Asma reads Meena's biography.

Warlords revive the Northern Alliance

A few weeks ago Mohammad Mohaqiq, a Hazara tribal leader, was prevented to attend a conference in Italy by a coalition of RAWA supporters and other groups. Soon after I received an email from one of our supporters: "As a Facebook fanatic, it has come to my

attention that some members of RAWA appear to be anti-Hazara and will go so far as to call at least one Hazara leader a terrorist and a criminal and deletes comments by Hazaras. Do you know something about this?"

I am not a Facebook fanatic, but I know how popular Facebook is, so I assume that others may have been similarly confused. I therefore give here my explanation of the situation as sent in my email reply.

I assume you refer to Mohammad Mohaqiq, the Hazara tribal leader and founder and chairman of the People's Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan. It is a complicated story, like everything else in Afghanistan. Mohaqiq fought against the Soviet occupation. During the Civil War of 1992 - 1996 his party was one of several that tried to gain control over Kabul and was involved in heavy shelling and destruction there. He is generally on good terms with Iran (the Shia connection), which makes some Afghans wary because Iran treats Afghans badly generally and considers them inferior to Iranians but at the same time wants to control Afghanistan. So one should be careful supporting him unreservedly.

At the moment Mohaqiq propagates a decentralized federal system for Afghanistan in which every nationality (Hazara, Uzbek, Tajik, Pashtun ...) controls its own territory in a federation of tribal regions. He is strongly against a return of the Taliban under any form and rejects Karzai's and the USA's attempt at dialogue and negotiation with them. In November 2011 he went into a coalition with two other warlords, Ahmad Zia Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum, in what is essentially a revival of the "Northern Alliance" that assisted the USA against the Taliban in 2001. Before that time Dostum fought on the side of the Soviets and also tried to get control over Kabul through shelling and destruction during the Civil War. As you can see the alliances between warlords are fluid, and you cannot condemn or support the politics of any individual without reservation.



Mohammad Mohaqiq, Abdul Rashid Dostum and Ahmad Zia Massoud, former Vice President under Karzai

While it can be argued that Mohaqiq's rejection of negotiations with the Taliban and opposition to Karzai's policy may be worthy of our support, he presents himself in a very different light for any Afghan women's organization. He is as much a Muslim fundamentalist as the other warlords. I attended a meeting in Adelaide when he came through here on one of his trips to promote his federal system. When it came to question time and a woman wanted to ask him a question he just said: "I do not speak to women; speak to your husband." It is quite clear that should he come to power Afghanistan's women will be subjected to the same restrictions that are promoted by all the other warlords-turned-parliamentarians; see "Hamid Karzai backs restrictive code for women" at www.sawa-australia.org/news.html.

So in summary I do not think myself that agitating against Mohaqiq as a war criminal serves any useful purpose (it would be more productive to meet him face to face and argue with him about his political maneuvers, background and attitude to women) but I can understand that RAWA focuses more on his war crime history against women and civilians and his attitude to women's rights. That does not mean that RAWA is anti-Hazara; you only have to go into

one of its orphanages to see Hazara girls side by side with Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and others.

The one thing I would guard you against is to see Mohaqiq as a representative of ordinary Hazara. He is a tribal leader of much power. The Hazara are his power base because he is Hazara himself, but he obviously does not share the traditional liberal Hazara attitude to women's rights. Women cannot expect any good from him.

Matthias Tomczak

AFCECO, a new partner for SAWA

AFCECO, the Afghan Child Education and Care Organization, has been a friend of SAWA for a long time, but we never had the means to support its fantastic work. Now that one of our members has decided to sponsor one of AFCECO's students (see page 3) we want to introduce AFCECO to our supporters.

AFCECO runs orphanages in several cities of Afghanistan. The orphanages are supported through sponsorships for their children, with sponsors mainly in the USA. The following description of AFCECO's aims in running the orphanages is from its January 2010 newsletter:

Our main objective is not merely to save an urchin from the streets but to nurture a new generation of empowered Afghans. By empowered we mean people who have been given a secure and healthy home life, education, secular and democratic in nature, a place from which they can rise above racism, fundamentalism, and escape the destructive environment of poverty and drugs. To that end, we might take a child who has access to food, shelter and even parents, but who has no future. This is especially true for the girls. Often they are kept from school, treated like slaves and are likely to be sold into bondage. What is necessary is a hint that here is a child who, given a chance, just may become a leader in her or his community. To grab orphans from any of a thousand streets and create a super citizen in a bubble is of no use, given their lack of connectedness to any particular family, village or neighborhood. That is why we maintain a level of inclusiveness. Our children have a sense of *khak*, the earth that is their homeland, and in most cases there are scores of Afghans who support their entry into the orphanage, who keep track and await their return as midwives, engineers, teachers, or even political leaders.

AFCECO tries to take children from all over Afghanistan, of all ethnic backgrounds and languages. We are in close contact with a variety of grass-roots organizations, councils and minorities. These people know about AFCECO orphanages and about our philosophy and principles and they forward to us requests from families they think are good candidates. We do have some criteria. Preference is given to orphans, child laborers, abused girls and children from remote areas where Taliban and extremists dominate society. True, the cost of raising just one of our orphans could most likely feed and clothe five from the streets of Kabul. But it is not difficult to imagine the powerful effect that our one child will some day have on the welfare of hundreds of Afghans. This is not a humanitarian mission. This is taking responsibility for the future of one's own country.





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Committee: Libby Drew, Christine Gamble, Kath Jones, Ruth Redfern

Newsletter editor: Matthias Tomczak **Public Officer:** Ruth Redfern **Auditor:** Bob Shahinger

The regional groups in WA, Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, the Riverina and Northern Rivers are affiliated with SAWA-Australia (SA) and contribute to the support for the Vocational Training Centre and Hamoon Clinic.

Belly dancing for Afghanistan



On International Women's Day Shalimar Belly Dance in Foster, NSW, presented *Shimmy by the Sea*, a fundraising event for Forster Women's Shed and War Widows of Afghanistan. \$260 were raised and sent to SAWA. Melanie of Shalimar Belly Dance said:

"My belly dancing troupe has been discussing fundraising for the women and girls in Afghanistan for a couple of years now. The style of dance we perform is called American Tribal Style. It was devised by a dancer in San Francisco and combines elements of Flamenco, Gypsy, Egyptian and Subcontinent styles. Part of our costumes feature a lot of coins and pendants which come from Kuchi tribes throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan. I really wanted to do something to give "something back". I found out about SAWA by doing an internet search for local organisations that support women in Afghanistan and was very happy to find such a grass roots organisation! At this last International Women's Day we held our first day of workshops and a fundraising dinner and performance. We had about 60 people attend the show and enjoyed a beautiful dinner. Feedback was great so we hope to do it again next year! We raised \$260 for SAWA and hope to do it bigger and better next year!! If you'd like to see more photos our facebook page is www.facebook.com/shalimarbellydance.

A new committee member

In SAWAN 28 (November 2010) we introduced the SAWA (SA) committee members. Since then Christine Gamble was elected into the committee but has not yet been introduced to our supporters. We hasten (if that is the right word so late in the story) to make good:

"I attended the SAWA AGM and, surprisingly, found myself on the committee for SAWA. Ten years ago I had met a SAWA Committee Member in the context of teaching English as a second language to men from Afghanistan, mostly Hazaras, on Temporary Protection Visas who were working at Murray Bridge. This became an award winning support group; an alliance across organizations and individuals assisting the process of dispossessed husbands, fathers and sons to finding resolution, via language, food, art, social outings, and practical assistance as the needs arose. This continued for three years until applications were allowed through the Refugee Review Tribunal to gain a permanent place to live with family in Australia.

I had previously joined Amnesty International (AI) and was on the Refugee Team working in public education. AI did not at that time take action onshore so, with friends, I started visiting people in Immigration Detention Facilities, mainly Baxter. In 2006 I became the Coordinator of Circles of Friends at the Australian Refugee Association (ARA).

For many refugees, mental illness remained an issue. This led me to focus on this and I now work in the area of Community Mental Health."

A university scholarship for Shazia

Jane Hamilton from Bondi, NSW, has been a major supporter of SAWA for several years. Last December Jane expressed the wish to do something that will help in the development of Afghanistan. While OPAWC's work at the Vocational Training Centre changes the lives of many women, the future Afghanistan also needs women professionals and leaders in many fields. After some discussion it was decided to help Jane set up a university scholarship for a year 12 student from one of AFCECO's orphanages. Now Jane sponsors Shazia from Jalalabad, who has been living in an AFCECO orphanage for many years. Shazia lost her father during the war when she was a baby. Her mother works in one of the AFCECO orphanages in Jalalabad. She is 20 years old and she is in her first year of university, studying law.

There is indeed a great need for capable and courageous lawyers to defend the rights of women. Although Afghanistan's constitution guarantees equality of women, in practice women's rights are reduced again step by step. Of the 2,299 incidents of violence against women reported in 2010/2011 only 4% were handled by courts based on the Elimination of Violence against Women law of 2009 (see the United Nations report in SAWAN 33, February 2012), while the use of religious law is still widespread. Shazia will have her work cut out when she finishes university in a few year's time.

SAWA (SA) desperately requires more funds to support the literacy classes at the Vocational Training Centre. However, if you want to follow Jane's example and sponsor a student, send us an email at sponsor@sawa-australia.org or write to us at the above address. A full sponsorship requires \$120 per month. SAWA (SA) will be glad to connect you with a future professional or public leader in a new modern Afghanistan educated in one of AFCECO's orphanages.

Forthcoming events in Perth and Adelaide

Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan
WA BRANCH

Invites you to 'Bowling for
Afghanistan'

Enjoy an afternoon of fun for young and old, even if
you've never lawn bowled

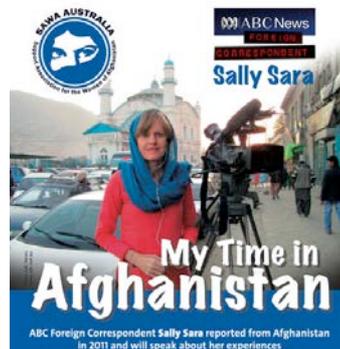
SUNDAY APRIL 22ND, 2PM - 4PM

East Fremantle Bowling Club, Fletcher Street (cnr Hamilton), East Fremantle.



Booking

essential, see www.sawa-australia.org/groups/Perth.html for details.



Date: 26 April 2012

Time: 6.30 for 7 pm

Venue: St Ignatius Church Hall,
137 William Street, Norwood

Tickets \$25, includes wine or soft
drink and canapés.

Bookings through www.sawa-australia.org/groups/Adelaide.html



Convenor: Dawn Atkinson **Assistant Convenor:** Shirley Allen **Secretary:** Margaret Hetherton

Treasurer: Carolyn Allen

Committee: Maryellen Galbally, June Lunsmann, Susan Martin, Helen Toner. **Public Officer:** Deanna Fekete

Birthing Kits for Rural Afghanistan

"It was really great to be there. When you think about it, it's heart-warming to be part of a group of women carefully putting those kits together and knowing that in the back blocks of distant Afghanistan a woman in labour might then have a safe birth for herself and her baby. It was a real pleasure to be asked to help."

These are the words of Sara, words typical of the many comments heard at the SAWA-NSW event to acknowledge IWD 2012.

There are many to thank including the Birthing Kit Foundation (Aust.), the committee of the Leichhardt Rowing Club for making their premises available for the event, Deborah Fitzgerald and Phil Rogers of the Inner West Courier for their keen interest and all groups and individuals from both NSW and inter-state whose financial contributions made the event possible.

Last but not least our thanks go to the 43 volunteers who finalised the project by assembling 1,000 Birthing Kits for rural Afghanistan.

Sally Sara Speaks at IWD Breakfast

A number of SAWA-NSW members attended the UN Women Australia IWD Sydney Breakfast and we also staffed an information table in the foyer.

Sally Sara the multi-award winning journalist and foreign correspondent with the ABC was the inspiring guest speaker.

Having just returned from a year stationed in Afghanistan she spoke briefly of the basic practicalities of being a woman journalist in war-torn countries emphasising that women could fulfil the role of a journalist in such difficult situations.

Sally spoke of the Afghan woman's need for education and safer birthing conditions. (See her article Birth a Deadly Challenge in Afghanistan at www.sawansw.org.au)

Speaking of the privilege of meeting many outstanding Afghan women she mentioned the death of Hamida Barmaki, renowned Afghan Professor of Law and Human Rights Activist killed along with her husband and four children in the bombing of a Kabul supermarket in January 2011 and spoke of the outstanding achievement of two sisters in becoming licensed helicopter pilots. One sister took her 4 year old daughter on daily missions and had done so since she had been born.

Why?---because there was no child care.

The other sister who flew almost daily missions died in childbirth.

Sally Sara stressed that Afghan women see the education of their



Birthing Kit Assembly. Photo: courtesy Innerwest Courier, March 20 2012, Newspix/Phil Rogers

daughters and granddaughters as a path to a better life.

The conclusion of this outstanding address to the audience of 1,700 was a message Sally Sara was asked to carry back to Australia.

A simple plea – Please do not forget the women of Afghanistan.

Film Night

A very successful film night was held at the Palace Cinema, Norton Street, Leichhardt on 19 March, resulting in a profit of \$1,680.

The film shown was "A Separation" which had just won an Oscar for the Best Foreign Film filling the 130 seat cinema and attracting a large network of people new to SAWA.

Our thanks to all who attended, Palace Cinema, and the Manager and Staff at Norton Street for their support.

IWD in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan IWD 2012 was acknowledged in a variety of ways.

Some school children taking part in drawing competitions honouring Afghan women, some young women participating in Take Back the Tech! with workshops on digital story telling along with varied activities aimed at raising awareness of women's rights, women's empowerment and promoting gender equality.

In three villages in three different rural provinces activities were run by Afghan women's organisations to raise awareness of women's rights.

A number of Afghan women's organisations worked to create billboards that were displayed in each of Kabul's districts. The billboards focussed on the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law that was passed in 2009 and drew attention to the level of violence against women that still exists in their country. While domestic violence and under age marriage are criminal offences little is done by authorities to implement these laws.

Go to www.sawansw.org.au for link to "I had to Run Away" The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for 'Moral Crimes' in Afghanistan. Human Rights Watch Report 28 March 2012.