



From the Editor

*As this edition of the SAWAN goes to press I am preparing my fourth visit to Kabul. I am in fact already on my way, having left Australia to visit my relations in Germany, so I sit in my sister's home in Hamburg while I write these lines. But the work of SAWA continues of course, as the reports on pages 3 and 4 show. The inspiring women's art book **Two Trees** arrived in Adelaide just in time before my departure, so I could participate in the organization of its distribution to all the wonderful supporters who made it possible for us to get it printed by donating to our crowd funding drive. SAWA groups are now preparing book launches around the country. I'll report on my trip to Afghanistan in the next edition of the SAWAN.*

Matthias Tomczak

Proposed new law makes successful prosecution of domestic violence unlikely

Last month the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women received an Afghan delegation for the first review of Afghanistan's compliance with the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*. The delegation assured the Committee that the Afghan government is fully committed to implementing CEDAW and to promoting women's rights.

The reality is very different. A new draft of the criminal procedure code is currently being considered by Afghanistan's parliament. The proposed language would prohibit relatives of a criminal defendant from being questioned as a witness against the accused. Should this provision become law, victims and other family members who have been witnesses to abuse will be silenced in domestic violence cases, making successful prosecutions unlikely.

Human Rights Watch Asia director Brad Adams said that "Afghanistan's lower house is proposing to protect the batterers of women and girls from criminal punishment. Legislative approval of this criminal law revision would effectively stop prosecutions of people who beat, forcibly marry, and even sell their female relatives."

The amended procedure code would pose a serious threat to critical protections for women and girls embodied in Afghanistan's Law on *Elimination of Violence Against Women* (the EAW Law), passed by presidential decree in 2009. The EAW law provides criminal penalties for various abuses including rape, child marriage, forced marriage, domestic violence, sale of women and girls, and *baad*, the giving of girls to resolve disputes between families.

The proposed ban on testifying against relatives follows several other efforts by the Wolesi Jirga to weaken the already inadequate legal protections for women's rights. Members of parliament opposed to women's rights have increasingly sought to repeal or weaken the EAW Law. A Wolesi Jirga debate over the EAW Law in May 2013 was halted after 15 minutes when parliamentarians called for revisions that would have eliminated the minimum marriage age for girls, abolished shelters, and ended criminal penalties for rape and domestic violence.

In May, the Wolesi Jirga passed a revision of Afghanistan's Electoral Law that deleted an existing guarantee reserving at least 25 percent of seats in each of Afghanistan's 34 provincial councils for female

candidates. The new version of the law provided no set-aside provincial council seats for women. The upper house of parliament, the Meshrano Jirga, subsequently reinstated the set-aside for women on provincial councils, but on 15 July Afghanistan's Tolo News reported that the two houses had agreed upon a version of the law that reduces the set-aside to 20 percent.

[Human Rights Watch 16 July 2013](#)

A Taliban appointed to protect Human Rights

The legislative threat against the EAW law emerging from the Wolesi Jirga is not the only recent development that indicates a broad-based attack on women's rights at all levels of government. Abdul Rahman Hotak, a new appointee to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), is a former Taliban government official who publicly denounced the EAW Law. Hotak was quoted in the *New York Times* on 1 July as saying "The people who have written that law do not know Afghanistan and Afghan society very well – perhaps they think Kabul is Afghanistan." The same week he told Reuters that in his view the EAW Law is "violating Islam" and there should be a law that people are "comfortable" with. He was appointed by President Hamid Karzai.

[Human Rights Watch 16 July 2013](#)

Zubaida, a student profile

SAWA (SA)'s sponsorship program for students from AFCECO orphanages is developing slowly. So far four SAWA members are sponsoring medical student Shazia, law student Zubaida, management student Pashtana and accounting student Farzana by paying their university fees. This profile of Zubaida is extracted from letters she wrote to her sponsor.



Zubaida

"I have a big family like you. My three sisters and my brother are all married and they all live in Nuristan. It would be very difficult for them to live in Kabul because the house rents are so high and they don't have a proper job and don't get salaries but they work on their own fields. They usually grow corn, wheat, tomatoes, potatoes and

other kinds of vegetable. Only my two nephews and I stay here in Kabul. One of my nephews, Shafia, is with me here at New Hope

Orphanage* but the smaller one, Kafia, stays at a government's orphanage. They are daughters of my eldest brother who has died. Shafia is in ninth grade and Kafia is in sixth grade. I am the smallest daughter of my family. My English is not good but my friend Mahbooba** helps me to correct grammar and spelling of my letter. I studied English only at school with a very poor quality."

"I can tell you how life is in Nuristan. Geographically it is located near to the Himalayan Mountains and it is very green with lots of trees and other kinds of plants. According to some historical resources, Nuristan people are descendants of the ancient Greek from the times of Alexander the Great. I think that this is the reason why Nuristan remained without the influence of the religion Islam while the citizens of all other provinces were Muslim since many centuries. My mother says that her parents' grandparents were called Kafir which means infidels or non-believers in God according to Muslims. My ancestors would follow a polytheistic type of religion. Nuristan people were converted to Islam by violent attacks from the Muslim soldiers of King Abdul Rahman Khan. He is known as one of the most violent and oppressive kings in Afghan history. By the way King Abdul Rahman is the grandfather of King Amanullah Khan who actually fought against English colonialism and gained the independence of Afghanistan in 1919. King Amanullah Khan is still admired by the Afghans today."

"Yes, becoming a lawyer is my biggest desire. It is very difficult here for women to work as a lawyer. My major requires lots of reading."

"Well, I think it is enough for now and I hope that we will write more to each other soon."

* Zubaida is the manager of New Hope Orphanage

** Mahbooba runs SAWA (SA)'s sponsorship program in Kabul

Personal profiles of students waiting to be sponsored can be seen at www.sawa-australia.org/sponsorships. Supporters wanting to sponsor a student should email sponsor@sawa-australia.org or write to the SAWA (SA) address on page 3.

The "war on terror" claims its casualties

On 24 October the Daily Mail of the UK reported that more U.S. troops are committing suicide than are being killed fighting in Afghanistan. According to the report a total of 247 U.S. army personnel are suspected to have taken their own lives between January and September 2012. This compares to 222 deaths from 'hostile causes' in Afghanistan to October. By the end of the year the number of suicides had risen to 350, as reported by the New York Times of 15 May 2013.

What kind of mission are the USA promoting that makes its soldiers kill themselves rather than "the enemy"? That, as reported by *Democracy Now* on 13 June 2012, makes the Marine Corps transform its boot camp training, telling the young recruits in the first two weeks that suicide is a potential possibility in their lives?

Ever since its formation the USA have maintained that they are the guardians of democracy and human rights. This is often true if we look at some of the country's great institutions, such as its universities and publishing houses. But it is far from the truth when it comes to the actions of its government, which topples cruel regimes in the name of democracy and human rights one day and ignores the same ideals the next day when it props up warlords as allies in its quest for global domination.

A government that claims to be the defender of the free world but acts in disregard of its claimed ideals has to work hard to keep its own people on its side. The Cold War provided a well-defined enemy that allowed the government to unite its citizens in the fight against

communism. But the Cold War ended more than 20 years ago, and a new generation has grown up for which communism is not an issue any more, a generation that was raised in the belief that the good side has won and that the USA are the beacon of freedom in the world.

Proud of their country's alleged ideals, the new generation of Americans became patriots prepared to uphold their ideals and serve their community. Many who volunteered to serve their country in the armed forces soon realized that the ideals they were prepared to fight for are in direct conflict with the actions they are expected to take. Some, like Phil Manning and Edward Snowden, experience this far from the battlefield, sitting behind computer screens watching civilians being slaughtered in countries far away, and decide to tell the world the truth. Others go through the same experience as pawns in the military operation of their government, obeying orders they do not believe in, and return home broken and suicidal. It is the price a country pays for the occupation of a foreign land: While its government plans world domination, its people are led to despair.

Let us not forget that the suffering of the Afghan people is far greater than the suffering of the families who lost their sons to suicide. But that should not keep us from understanding their grief and remembering that governments often force their people to act against their better conscience.

Matthias Tomczak

Hamoon Clinic wants to improve its services

Our support partner Planet Wheeler has again generously donated \$30,000 to keep OPAWC's Hamoon Health Centre in Farah province operational for another six months. The funds are sufficient to guarantee basic services, but the Centre is in urgent need of a qualified gynaecologist, who can only be found in larger cities like Kabul or Herat. Consultations are underway between OPAWC and Planet Wheeler to attract a qualified doctor to work in poor and remote Farah province. It appears likely that this will require a contract that includes regular travel between the doctor's family in the city and her workplace in the Centre (a concept well known to Australians of the fly-in fly-out community). We hope to be able to report on progress in the next issue of the SAWAN.



Patients outside of the Hamoon Health Centre during a visit of OPAWC director Latifa Ahmady in September 2011

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The regional groups in Melbourne, 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.

SAWA (SA) supports Amnesty International's campaign for the rights of Afghanistan's women

As the Australian government talks about withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan, there is a growing fear that the situation of Afghanistan's women will deteriorate even further. Amnesty International has taken action to put pressure on all major Australian political parties to include the support of women and girls' rights in Afghanistan in their 2013 Federal Election Policy and organized various events around the country. SAWA (SA) has supported some of these events.

In Perth a book reading and discussion under the theme *The personal narratives of women in Afghanistan* was held on 23 May in the Fremantle City Library as a joint event of Amnesty International and SAWA (SA).

In Adelaide SAWA (SA) offered to show the documentary *View from a Grain of Sand* about Afghanistan's history and the life of three women as part of Amnesty International's campaign. On 26 June the North Adelaide Community Centre was filled to capacity as more than 100 people were moved by the personal stories of Shapiray and her family, the doctor Roeeena and RAWA member Wajia as they were torn with hope and despair between their refugee camp in Pakistan and their home in Afghanistan.



SAWA convener Matthias Tomczak introduces SAWA to the audience before the movie



The helpers from Amnesty International (left) and members of the SAWA (SA) committee conclude a successful event

Several people who attended said that it gave excellent insight into the history of Afghanistan and that they gained much new information from it. Others who could not attend contacted SAWA (SA) and asked

whether the documentary would be shown again. As a result another showing is planned for later in the year.

The event raised over \$750, which Amnesty International generously allocated to the support of the Vocational Training Centre.

SAWA (SA)'s art book delivered to supporters

In the first week of July **Two Trees**, the book of Australian art and Afghan poems and stories for which 135 supporters pledged their support in a crowd fundraising drive, finally arrived in Adelaide. A dozen SAWA (SA) members came together on a pleasant Saturday afternoon, to give all crowd funding supporters their promised reward, packing and dispatching 162 books to over 80 addresses. We thank all who made the book possible by making their pledge last November and patiently waiting to receive their reward.

The book is now available online for \$38 plus postage at the publisher's web page www.vividpublishing.com.au/twotrees and will be on sale at selected bookshops. In Adelaide it is already on display in the city at Imprints Booksellers, 107 Hindley Street, and in Stirling at Matilda Bookshop, 8 Mount Barker Road. As the printing costs have already been covered, all proceeds from the sale of *Two Trees* will be used 100% to support OPAWC's Vocational Training centre.



Two Trees on the shelf at Imprints Booksellers

Book launches are under preparation in major cities:

Adelaide: Tuesday 10 September 6 pm in the Kerry Packer Gallery of the Hawke Centre, 55 North Terrace. Guest speaker Prof. Pal Ahluwalia, Pro Vice Chancellor of the University of South Australia. This event is kindly supported by the Hawke Centre, UniSA



Perth: Saturday 5 October 5 pm in North Perth Town Hall. Guest speaker Hon. Alannah MacTiernan, Mayor, City of Vincent



Sydney: A date in October, in a venue to be decided. Guest speaker Emma Ayres, presenter of Classic Breakfast on ABC Classic FM

Melbourne: A date to be announced, in a bookshop to be decided, with the presence of Gali Weiss, lead artist of the *Two Trees* project.

Final details for Sydney and Melbourne will be announced on the SAWA events page www.sawa-australia.org/events.



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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

UPDATE ON CAMPAIGN TO PRESERVE WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

With the deadline for the withdrawal of foreign troops looming, a new initiative is emerging in Afghanistan to gain the support of the men, traditionally opposed to women's rights. It is led by educated, vocal Afghan women against significant opposition. In April, for example, conservative lawmakers managed to indefinitely delay debate in turning a decree banning violence against women into law, citing it as un-Islamic.

Currently women leaders are trying to involve Mullahs in government-supported mosques. Member of Parliament Fawzia Koof, an outspoken campaigner, argues: "The role of the Mullahs is crucial because we're an Islamic nation and the mosques are being used against women. Why not use them for women?" Fawzia has been in talks for the last nine months with Abdul Haq Abid, Deputy Minister for Hajj and Religious Affairs, who is supportive: "Women have sacred rights granted to them in Islam, so Imams need to preach this to people in underdeveloped provinces, so they become aware," Abid told Reuters.

Wazhma Frogh, director and founder of Afghanistan's Women Peace and Security Research Institute, who visited Australia earlier this year seeking Australian support for defending women's rights and who met with some of the SAWA-NSW Committee, agrees: "This is the only solution" she said.

The campaign will target Mullahs in 3,500 government-funded mosques (about 2 percent of the 160,000 total). It will start in Kabul and then be implemented in the provinces. Also under consideration is a plan for textbooks for clerics that teach them women's rights within the context of Islam.

FUNDRAISING FUNCTIONS

Lunch at Bamiyan Restaurant

In May, Haseeb and Maliha continued their wonderful support for SAWA (NSW) hosting a buffet lunch for about 40 members and supporters at their Five Dock restaurant. The food was delicious as always, featuring filled breads, Haseeb's special pilau and our favourite spiced eggplant with yoghurt. Guest speaker was Carol Angir, Kenyan born feminist activist who has recently joined ActionAid Australia to continue her work addressing violence against women in areas of disaster and conflict. Carol spoke about the need to discover and respect the real needs and desires of Afghan women and how difficult it can be, even for another woman, to access women's networks which are of necessity hidden from public access.

Dinner at Finola's

In mid July, another strong supporter of SAWA (NSW) cooked a very tasty 5 course degustation dinner for 60 at the Balmain Bowling Club. This event raised nearly \$9,000, with generous purchases of raffle tickets for one dozen wine and many silent auction items: holiday house stays, paintings, photographs, textiles and vouchers from local businesses. A 'real' auctioneer managed to raise \$550 for a lucky four to have Finola cook them a meal in their home.

Our guest speaker was Jeremy Simpson from the University of Sydney, who had spent time in Afghanistan advising the Ministry of Education. He emphasised that change in Afghanistan must come from Afghans and cannot be imposed from outside. Development funding had been spent mainly on the interests of outsiders, and had not taken account of Afghan expectations and priorities. He said the best things outsiders could do would be to support locally owned education and employment opportunities as poverty and dependency were adding to the violence.

COMING EVENTS

Details to be announced.

September: Film premier Paddington.

October: SAWA-NSW AGM Balmain.

November: 8th Annual SAWA Lunch Balmain.

March 2014: Birthing Kit Assembly Day Leichhardt.

Carol Angir speaking at the Bamiyan Restaurant

