



From the Editor

A month has passed since my return from Kabul, where I met the brave teachers of OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre again. I also wanted to visit the Hamoon Health Centre in Farah, but security in the province was not guaranteed, and I could only have an extensive long distance phone conversation with the director of the Centre. Registration for the presidential elections in April closed last month, and the process of vote-buying is already in full swing, with unexpected consequences for the Vocational Training Centre. You can read more about it on page 3.

Matthias Tomczak

Warlords jostle to enter the presidential race

Registration of candidates for the presidential elections scheduled for 5 April 2014 closed on 6 October. Months before, warlords and leaders of old military alliances had begun to position themselves in the race. A "grand coalition" of a dozen warlords and military leaders from the old "Northern Alliance" that had assisted the USA to occupy the country announced on 29 August that they had decided to jointly field a single candidate:



The "grand coalition" at the announcement of 29 August

It did not take long before old war rivalries got in the way of the grand plan. Long motorcades of armoured cars, bodyguards and personal entourages rolling up at the Independent Election Commission office soon became a frequent sight, and in the end, in a last minute scramble, more than two dozen candidates put their names down before registrations closed.

The most ominous candidature came from Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, the infamous warlord who in the 1990s welcomed Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda fighters to his training camps and was a mentor to the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. Sayaf is a well-known misogynist who refuses to be interviewed by women journalists.



Abdul Rasul Sayaf

The USA do not seem to be overly concerned about his candidacy. Robert Neuman, former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, says that Sayyaf is "a man who knows which side his interests lie on. They lie very much with the United States, with the coalition. I would not, I'm not really worried about his moving toward Al Qaeda or his being a terrorist." (FoxNews.com, 4 October 2013)

As the withdrawal of Australia's troops approaches it is of vital importance to prevent the return of misogynist politicians to power. We must impress on our government that it has a responsibility to support women's organizations and secure women's rights now and into the future and protect them from fundamentalist politicians.

A new documentary on Malalai Joya

The Brazilian non-profit association Instituto Prónesis de Audiovisual e Mudança Social (Pronesis Institute of Audiovisual and Social Change) produces films that seek to promote social change both by raising awareness as well as by raising funds for the causes it portrays in its films. Earlier this year its documentary filmmaker Rodrigo Guim began a film project to promote unity between Afghans and the world at large for social change towards democracy, social justice and human rights. With this intent his film centres on Afghan human rights activist Malalai Joya. It is co-produced with V-Day, a global activist movement to end violence against women and girls.

Scenes and interviews were shot in Afghanistan for 2 months in 2013. To finish editing and postproduction the filmmaker now seeks your support through crowd funding. V-Day will match all donations made to this campaign. So if you give a dollar, V-Day will give another dollar.

You can watch the trailer for the planned documentary on Youtube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=RysfzM0A4po and donate to the project at www.indiegogo.com/projects/malalai-joya. The crowd funding campaign runs until the end of November.



Malalai Joya with her son in a scene from the planned documentary

A crowd funding drive for an ambulance

Hamoon Clinic is the only free health service available in Farah province. Patients travel for days to the provincial capital to receive treatment. The clinic is operated by OPAWC, the Organization for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities, and supported financially by Planet Wheeler, a fund established in 2008 by Maureen and Tony Wheeler, founders of Lonely Planet Publications.

During my stay in Kabul I received much information on the Clinic, its operation and its needs through a long phone conversation with Abdul Rashid, its administrator. He told me that the Clinic has 12 personnel, of whom 5 are volunteers including Abdul himself, who was a teacher before. Most salaries of paid employees are paid 50% from OPAWC and 50% from contributions of volunteers. To raise some funds for the salaries of general staff (cleaner, guard etc.) the

Clinic recently introduced a general treatment charge of 10 Afghani (20 cents). All medicine is still given out free of charge.

The Clinic operates from 1 – 5 pm and handles around 35 – 40 patients per day. (There is much more demand, but to guarantee quality service only up to 40 patients are accepted.) About a year ago the government handed it a list of demands that have to be satisfied to avoid closure. OPAWC negotiated a timeline, on which a blood testing laboratory was the first item. The laboratory was set up with financial support from Planet Wheeler. It has greatly increased the Clinics' reputation, as the government clinic in Farah does not have one (even though it is supported by a foreign NGO). The laboratory is supported by solar electricity during the day and 2 – 3 hours of main grid electricity and 2 hours generator electricity at night, so the fridge temperature is guaranteed 24 hours every day and all medicine, reagents and blood samples are kept in proper condition.

Six months ago the low professional standard of the doctors had caused concern, and OPAWC had looked into the possibility to get a gynecologist from Herat or even Kabul to work at the Clinic. But security in Farah province deteriorated, and no doctor is prepared to travel between Herat and Farah city any more. The Clinic resolved to training one its nurses sufficiently so that she, although not qualified, could move into the position of gynaecologist. Where the capability of the Clinic staff or its equipment is exceeded the Clinic now sends patients to Herat (for ultrasound, X-ray etc.). This costs between 3,000 and 5,000 Afghani (\$60 – \$100) but does not happen very often and therefore is still cheaper than employing a gynecologist, who in the present security situation would demand at least \$3,000 Afghani per month.

Patients are transported in an old car that is not quite up to the task of negotiating Farah's tracks and has breakdowns, sometimes even with patients on the road. The old ambulance used for patient transport, a second hand vehicle donated from Germany in 2001, has, after frequent repairs, finally ended its life. A new ambulance fitted with life support equipment etc. is urgently needed.



The old ambulance that has to be replaced

SAWA does not have the funds to support Hamoon Clinic and has to rely on the generous support of Planet Wheeler to cover the cost of its day-to-day operation. But finding the funds to replace the defunct ambulance is a once-off effort that should be tackled. The SAWA (SA) committee decided at its meeting of 21 October to start a crowd funding drive. The last crowd funding drive to cover the printing of *Two Trees* was very successful; it raised over \$12,000. This is about the amount needed to buy a second hand ambulance in Afghanistan and a realistic crowd funding target.

The crowd funding drive is being prepared, and a notice will go out to all members, supporters and contacts when it begins. In the meantime you can make a start by donating online at www.givenow.com.au/sawadoctorsforhamoonclinic.

Matthias Tomczak

The difficulty to gain a full education

AFCECO, the Afghan Child Education and Care Organization, has a vision of a democratic Afghanistan in which all Afghans regardless of ethnicity, religion or gender live together as equals. In its "foster havens" it gives children from poor families an education that will enable them to become the country's future professionals: doctors, lawyers, business managers and other occupations a democratic and independent Afghanistan needs.

Several of AFCECO's girl students have grown up to enter tertiary education institutions. SAWA (SA) operates a sponsorship program to pay the university fees for these young women. Currently four SAWA (SA) members sponsor law students Shazia and Zubaida, business management student Pashtana and accounting student Farzana.

The time when a girl of a "foster haven" finishes high school is the most critical moment in her life. The government then approaches AFCECO with the demand to return her to her family. For a girl from a rural family this usually means the end of education and return to a life in traditional setting, i.e. staying at home, prevented from going out unless accompanied by a male relative, getting into pre-arranged marriage etc. It is therefore a real struggle to keep a girl in the city so that she can continue her education by going to university or college, and this struggle can only be won against the government if her family supports her with the utmost determination. Not every family is willing to do that, many only sent their daughter to foster havens because they were unable to feed all their children, and when their daughter is grown up and become a valuable worker they want her back.

Shazia, Zubaida and Pashtana won the struggle and now study at their tertiary institutions. Farzana's family initially agreed to let her study but then changed its mind. AFCECO is still arguing with her family, but all indications are that the family does not want to release her again. It is a really sad situation, but this is what life is like for girls in Afghanistan, not even the best intentions always produce a good result.

AFCECO still needs more sponsors for its brave young women who are determined to make their mark and contribute to Afghanistan's future. Please go to www.sawa-australia.org/sponsorships to read their biographies and contact sponsor@sawa-australia.org if you want to become a sponsor.



Shazia, Zubaida and Pashtana

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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.

Two Trees launched around Australia

The sale of *Two Trees*, the book of dialogue between 14 Australian women artists and 30 women from the Literacy Centre in Kabul, is progressing. 160 copies were given as rewards to supporters of the crowd funding drive to cover the printing costs. Since then over 150 additional copies were sold, raising well over \$5,000 for the Vocational Training Centre, and the sale continues. The book was launched successfully around the country, with more launches to come.

The first launch took place in **Hobart** on 5 September, with 20 books sold through the Hobart Bookshop. It was followed by **Adelaide**, where the launch on 11 September was supported by the Hawke Centre of the University of South Australia. Dr. Nahid Kabir of the University's International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding spoke about the book and expressed her admiration:

I was particularly moved by the ways that it so clearly demonstrated how art and writing have the capacity to develop shared meaning between multiple people on far sides of the world who have never before had any communication with each other, and have only limited knowledge about how the others live their lives.

This book will stand the ages, and will serve as a landmark publication for all of those who come across it. This is also a noble book: from it you will be able to develop and re-imagine your own story.



Dr. Kabir addresses the Adelaide launch

In **Perth** *Two Trees* was launched in Lesser Hall, North Perth, on 5 October by Alannah MacTiernan, until recently the mayor of Vincent and now the Federal Member for Perth. Alannah applauded the goal and success of the Vocational Training Centre in helping women take charge of their lives economically and emotionally. Men's and women's lives and ideas are slowly undergoing transformation – against the backdrop of a war-torn nation. This grey blighted landscape was once green and fruitful, as Alannah read out from a story one of the VTC graduates contributed to *Two Trees*.

Latifa, the director of the Vocational Training Centre, explained in the introduction how important this experience was for her students:

In a country where every two hours a woman is dying during pregnancy and child birth, in a country where women are considered a second person and change hands even against animals, in a country where women are locked in their houses and not allowed to travel without a male member of her family, if a flower or a picture or a gift is dedicated to one of these suffering women, it is the greatest gift for her, who will never have dreamed about it.

On this basis, Alannah suggested several ways in which we might continue this personal gift-giving by forging ongoing personal connections with the women at the VTC. The West Australian SAWA group is delighted to have Alannah's interest and support and looks forward to some exciting new directions in our work.

As Alannah kindly provided the delightful venue for the book launch, all the money raised will support the work of the Vocational Training Centre. Perth raised almost \$1,200 from book sales (selling 37 books), \$110 from donations and \$182 from the raffle, a

grand total of: \$1,476.70. Our thanks to the hard-working SAWA facilitators: Sarah Leighton, Elio Novello, Priscilla Shorne, Azmah Anuarul, Janelle Macgregor and Pauline Masters.

More book launches are planned for Ipswich (27/11 4 pm, Ipswich Library 40 South Street), Melbourne (27/11 7 pm, AEU House 112 Trenerry Crescent Abbotsford), Brisbane (ca. 3 – 7/12) and Sydney. The book (an excellent Christmas present!) is also available online from www.vividpublishing.com.au/twotrees.

Challenging times at the VTC

There have been several important developments at the Vocational Training Centre. The Centre enjoys a very high reputation with the Education Ministry, and a few weeks ago the Ministry asked OPAWC to take on more women by opening a new class. So OPAWC started a fourth class and now operates literacy classes in two locations.

A serious problem occurred in August, when an unknown organization opened a literacy centre two blocks away and offers women 1,800 Afghani (\$36) and food when they join. Many women, maybe about half of all students, left the OPAWC Centre to obtain access to the free money. It appears that the main purpose of the rival centre is to buy people's votes for the presidential election. Evidence for this is that all women younger than 18 or not in possession of an ID card and voter registration card were not accepted by the centre and had no option but to come back to OPAWC's centre.

Who is behind the new centre is still unclear. To find out more, OPAWC director Latifa Ahmady sent two women to the centre to ask for employment as teachers. They were told that the organization sets up literacy centres only for a few months and then moves to another suburb. When they asked to see the classes they were shown the two existing classes; both were full of OPAWC students. They took the students to task, saying that OPAWC clearly offers better classes.

After that a few women returned to OPAWC, but most women said that they want to continue attending the new classes to receive the money but would come to the OPAWC Centre in the afternoon.

Latifa wrote to the Ministry and was told that the new centre is not registered and that the Ministry will visit it and make an evaluation. The outcome was not known at the time of writing; but the Ministry said that no matter how few or how many students OPAWC's Centre has it will always have the Ministry's support.

Teachers' day at the VTC



The 5th of October is Teachers' Day in Afghanistan. Students of the Vocational Training Centre celebrated the day through speeches and poems praising their teachers.

Director Latifa Ahmady talked about the importance of teachers and of educated people, in particular women, and the risks they bear. Many are killed just for performing their job, but still they continue to serve the new generations.

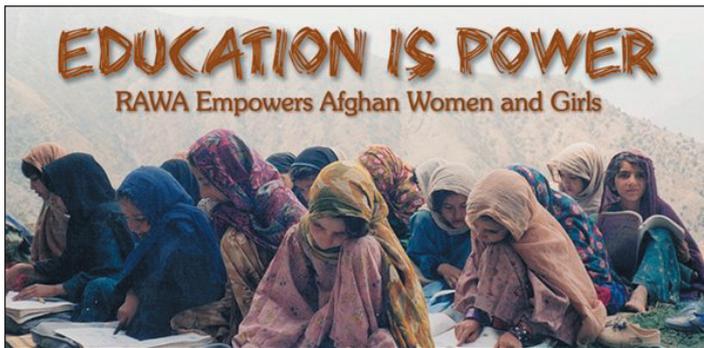


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Convenor: Dawn Atkinson **Assistant Convenor:** Shirley Allen **Secretary:** Margaret Hetherton

Treasurer: Carolyn Allen

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



Education is Power, the caption of this photograph from RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, summarises the rationale for SAWA (NSW)'s work in funding one of RAWA's schools. In 1977, RAWA was founded by students and staff of Kabul University to advance the situation of women and despite the personal dangers and the assassination of some of its leading women, it has managed to improve literacy for women in Afghanistan and set up schools in refugee settlements in neighbouring countries. The Hewad School for Afghan refugee children in Rawalpindi, which SAWA (NSW) funds, is one of those schools.

The statistics tell us that women who are educated in developing countries have greater employment opportunities, are less likely to die in childbirth, have fewer children and have families who support literacy and value education for girls as well as boys. Literacy is life changing. Truly education is power for women! Hewad's report last year pointed out that this school is the only hope for a good education for most students from very poor Afghan families in Rawalpindi, Hewad not only provides education, it also tries to support children in other ways. The school provides transport to school in situations in which girls, in particular, would not otherwise be able to come to school. Pupils as young as seventh and eighth grade work jobs like selling French fries or working as street vendors. Most students who work part-time are given free stationery at Hewad to ease the burden on their families.

In late 2012, as student intake reached near 200, it was necessary for Hewad School to move to a larger building in a poorer area of Rawalpindi where rents are cheaper. The building was an old one and not ideal for a school but the students made do. Wooden partitions divided some of the larger spaces. Students worked in poorly furnished areas. Stairways were narrow and steep; lighting poor. As there was no schoolyard, students had physical exercise and play indoors. Understandably, many students want to do sports outdoors. Nevertheless, the photographs show them working studiously and also celebrating school events and looking happy. As of September 2013, however, the school has moved to a better building in a quieter area.

Hewad School caters for infants, primary and secondary students. In August this year 18 students graduated with high marks which will allow most of them to qualify for University entrance. Some will return to Afghanistan, some will find work

with N.G.O.s and others will manage to gain scholarships to follow tertiary study elsewhere.

These outcomes are achieved for an amazingly small amount of money in terms of education costs in Australia - \$38,986 covers the total 2013–2014 budget for the school. So you can see that any donation you give makes a real difference and SAWA (NSW), being run by volunteers, takes no administration costs from donations. SAWA (NSW) has promised to raise the whole of this budget although we usually receive some help from Friends of RAWA Japan.

The two largest costs are teacher salaries (37%) and rent (20%)
Fundraising or donations of:

\$675 covers about one month's rent

\$1,400 covers half the stationery and books budgeted for the year

\$2,516 covers the expenses of the computer course - the most expensive part of the curriculum.

\$2,700 covers one quarter of 17 teachers' salaries for the year
SAWA (NSW)'s fundraising is truly fulfilling a real need in the lives of very disadvantaged children.

Dates for Diary

Tuesday 19th November 2013 SAWA (NSW) AGM, 7 for 7.20 pm. The Circle, 344 Darling Street, Balmain. We hope you can join us for a drink and to talk about our work and what we may do in the future.

Tuesday December 3 2013 SAWA (NSW) 8th Annual Lunch –12.00 for 12.30. Leichhardt Rowing Club, Glover St, Leichhardt. Rebecca Barry, the Director of I Am a Girl will speak on her experience visiting Afghanistan and interviewing an Afghan teenager about her life for this documentary.

Monday 4 March 2014 Birthing Kit Assembly Day 10am. Leichhardt Rowing Club, Glover St, Leichhardt. Please come and help to assemble 1,000 kits to save lives in rural Afghanistan. Morning tea will be provided.

For all events detailed information will be available on our webpage www.sawansw.org.au closer to the event.



*Hewad School needs some new chairs and tables for the current year. Our Japanese friends promised to provide it and hope they could raise the needed fund to fulfill their promise.
From Hewad School Annual Report 2012/2013.*