



From the Editor

In this edition you will find two stories that carry my signature. One is based on the Washington Post, the other on the ABC's 7.30 Report. They are much too long to be included here in full, and my heavy abbreviation is rounded up by personal impressions, so I decided to put my name to them. The facts are not changed and speak for themselves. If you want to read the full stories you can go to the original sources, given at the end of my text.

Matthias Tomczak

Big power competition returns to Afghanistan

A headline on 22 March 2014 in the Washington Post announced: "Russia returns to Afghanistan." Soviet-built factories from the time of the Soviet occupation receive new shipments of Russian-built equipment to rebuild their productivity. A spokesperson for the Russian Embassy in Kabul said: "We want to enlarge our role in the region. It's not only for Afghanistan, but for our own goals."

The new Russian initiative invites a comparison between Russia's earlier and now renewed development activities and aid projects of the USA, which many Afghans criticize as wasteful and misguided.

There can be no doubt that Afghans hated the Soviet occupation just as much as they detest the presence of US and NATO forces today. Both military operations brought much suffering and death. But in both cases, programs to assist civilian development accompanied military intervention, and here the outcomes could not be more different.

The USA gave more than \$100 billion of non-military aid. Officially given to be spent on roads, schools and hospitals, most of it disappeared into the pockets of corrupt warlords and businessmen. The major legacy of American dollars is a building boom of private palaces right next to the ramshackle dwellings of the poor and often built on land taken from which poor families were evicted.



New luxurious villas, often built on land taken from the poor, rise above homes of destitute people. (ifpo.hypotheses.org/4232)

Labib Raed is an officer in the Afghan army. His salary is paid by the USA, but he has no hesitation to criticize the U.S. development effort: "The Americans were generous to donate so much money, but they gave it to the wrong people," he said. He lives in one of the housing complexes from the Soviet era. Grey and still marked with bullet holes from the war, their four-bedroom apartments are among the country's most desirable and the only ones with central heating.

Years of US aid have turned Kabul into a free for all market economy where everything is available at a price: education, health, housing for those able to pay, poverty for those who can't. It is a far cry from the Soviet model of free education for all, including girls,

provided by government schools. Asked about the Soviet aid program, president Karzai told the Washington Post: "The Soviet money went to the right place. They were efficient in spending their money and doing it through the Afghan government."



One of many apartment blocks built during the Soviet occupation

Those times are gone. However, the Russian embassy says that its government has now compiled a list of 140 Soviet-era projects that it would like to rehabilitate. The Kabul House-Building Factory, the

country's largest manufacturing facility, was the first to benefit from the new assistance: \$25 million in new equipment.

"What the Soviets did here was really fundamental. They were thinking about the long term," said Ahmad, the head engineer of the house-building factory.

History has shown that poor and struggling countries can exploit the competition between dominating powers to their advantage. Maybe the return of Russian aid will spurn the USA to spend its money more appropriately. "We don't differentiate between the Americans and the Russians. Whoever wants to help us," said Ahmad. "We welcome the Russians back."

Matthias Tomczak

Based on information from the Washington Post:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/as-us-war-ends-russia-returns-to-afghanistan-with-series-of-investment-projects/2014/03/21/11fab228-a5fc-11e3-b865-38b254d92063_story.html

How much of your donation reaches its target?

On 21 May 2014 ABC's 7.30 Report broadcast a story that told me a fact or two I did not know about how charities operate.

I always thought that when someone knocks at my door, shows a Red Cross identification card and asks for a donation, it is a Red Cross worker or volunteer at my door. That may be the case in Adelaide; I don't know. But in a community in northern Queensland where unemployment is 80 per cent, doorknockers working on commission for **professional fundraising companies** Aida and Cornucopia signed more than 50 people on to regular payment plans for Bush Heritage Australia and for the Red Cross.

I learnt that well respected major charities subcontract their donation collection to companies with cutthroat employment practices, that cause collectors to operate unethically and exploit the vulnerable.

Yarrabah in Far North Queensland is a community of low-income families. Many agreed to give a donation thinking that this was a one-off support for a charity of good reputation. Weeks later they found out that they had signed up for automatic regular deductions from their bank accounts.

Bush Heritage Australia and Red Cross have since cancelled their contracts with the subcontractors mentioned in the 7.30 Report. Presumably they now use other subcontractors, whose donation practices may or may not be better. But what really shocked me was the statement by a former Aida employee who said: "You will see on

the sign-up form that **95 per cent of the initial year of payment goes towards admin' costs.** In other words, only 5 per cent of the donations given over a year are actually used for the charitable purpose claimed by the collectors.

I am of course ignorant how many charities operate in that way. I assume also that the story presented in the 7.30 Report is not typical for all charities. But what I know is that SAWA-Australia works entirely through volunteers and does not employ paid staff. We operate out of our own homes, use our own phones and do not have to pay for an office. This allows us to keep our administration costs at less than 2 per cent, covered by membership fees, so that **donations to us always reach our projects in Afghanistan to 100 per cent.** This is our guarantee to all our supporters: The money you give us will not be syphoned off to pay for office staff, doorknockers and advertising, it will reach the destination for which you gave us your donation.

Matthias Tomczak

<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2014/s4009413.htm>

150 women graduate at the Vocational Training Centre

The Vocational Training Centre held a function to graduate 150 women of the literacy course on 7 May 2014 attended by more than 350 women, girls and guests from related ministries. This year the women arranged the function themselves. This shows how much they have grown in their ability, awareness and self-confidence. There were several speeches, a women's song, a poetry reading, and a theatre performance after which all participants including the high-ranking members of the ministries were in tears.

The theatre performance showed the real condition of an Afghan girl: A young girl wants to go to school and become a doctor or teacher, but her illiterate father and brother do not allow her to go; only her mother supports her. Eventually she joins a literacy course with the support of her mother but without her father's knowledge.



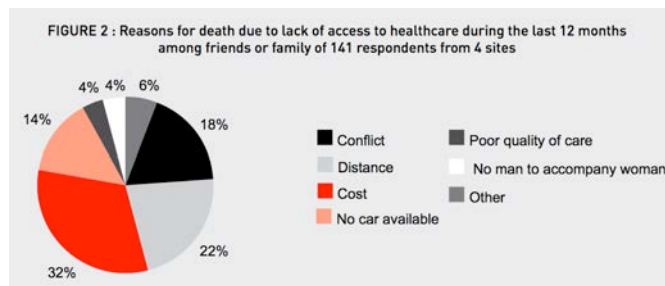
However, soon after when her father wants to marry her to a drug addict she tries to hang herself, but her teacher arrives in time to stop her from suicide by providing good suggestions and advice to her father. The drama ends with the message to women that rights are not given but have to be taken and that women should gain their rights through their own efforts and struggles.

OPAWC director Latifa Ahmady talked about women's empowerment through education and encouraged women to struggle for their rights. She added that when women are given the opportunity they are capable of performing work better than men and can play an effective role in the social, economic and political sphere.

The Deputy General Head of Programs in Literacy Alabas Jam praised OPAWC for its humanitarian activities and commitment to hard work. He said that OPAWC got the highest scores among NGOs working in the area of women's support.

Who can afford health care in Afghanistan?

Médicins sans Frontières operates four medical facilities in four Afghan provinces. Last year it undertook a survey of 700 people 150 from each facility, to assess the accessibility of health care for Afghans in rural areas. The results are depressing. In Kunduz, one in four people (27%) had travelled for more than two hours with a seriously injured person to reach the surgery center. Two in three people (66%) in all four provinces described their household as poor to extremely poor, living on around US\$1 a day. Yet people had paid an average of \$40, seven weeks' income, for healthcare during a recent illness in their household, with one in four spending more than US\$114. Nearly half the people (44%) had been forced to borrow money or sell goods to obtain healthcare during a recent illness.



This figure from the MSF report illustrates the importance of a reliable ambulance service and free treatment: 141 of the people interviewed reported a death that could have been prevented; 73% of these quoted distance, lack of transport or cost of treatment as the reason. There can be no doubt that OPAWC's new ambulance donated by SAWA in combination with free treatment at Hamoon Health Centre is saving lives.

Source: MSF, *Between rhetoric and reality, the ongoing struggle to access health care in Afghanistan*. February 2014

More AFCECO students enter university

With the end of Afghanistan's high school year more students from AFCECO's orphanages prepare to enter university and hope to find a sponsor to cover their university fee. One of them is Hajira from Kunar province, which borders with Pakistan. Kunar is currently under Taliban control and very insecure. There are fights between the bordering polices of both nations and also fights between NATO forces and Taliban. Hajira enrolled for a Major in dentistry at the Raazi Health Care Institute. She says about herself:



"I joined an AFCECO orphanage when I was eight years old. I have six sisters and one brother. My father is very old and works as peasant on the fields of a local landlord. Recently my uncle died and now my father has to take care of his brother's family as well, and two of my uncle's children are in AFCECO orphanages. I finished high school and now want to go to university. I am the

only educated girl in the family and the only one to be consulted on important issues of my family."

AFCECO is proud to see girls like Hajira and especially her family, including her father, seeking advice from her in a country where women are intended to be half of men. This shows how education brings power and awareness to one's life.

If you want to sponsor a student for university visit the sponsorship web page at <http://www.sawa-australia.org> or contact SAWA-Australia (SA) at the address on page 3.



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Regional groups in Melbourne, WA, Tasmania, 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.

Bowling for Afghanistan in Perth

The third Perth SAWA Bowling for Afghanistan Cup was held on Sunday 18 May. The numbers were down on previous years. Nevertheless we fielded 8 teams and the participants were generous with their donations and *Two Trees* book purchases. We raised \$617 on the day, including the sale of two books. Another \$200 or so was donated by generous supporters who could not make it on the day – there were so many competing attractions: the March in May against the mean budget cuts, including a huge slashing of foreign aid, numerous birthday parties and other social events. Kerry Coyle kindly mustered two teams from relatives, friends and Zonta contacts. It was fitting that one of her teams took out the SAWA Cup.



Kerry Coyle and some of the two teams she mustered

After a few showers in the morning, the weather held on the whole. The bowlers were so resilient – and engaged – that they bowled on through the one shower that came over, donning parkas and rain coats to do so.

The afternoon tea was praised and enjoyed by all. While we were drinking and eating, Alannah MacTiernan, Member for Perth, made a short speech. She reminded us of the courage of girls and their teachers and parents in countries where regressive forces attempt to deny females an education. She spoke of the abducted Nigerian girls, but our sister-NGO OPAWC teachers in Kabul receive threats from the Taliban. They remain fiercely determined in their vision to raise women's status and empowerment in Afghanistan.

We wish the women and girls of Afghanistan well and are pleased to make a small contribution to pave their upward path.

Thanks to our sponsors: The East Fremantle Bowling Club who provide the very convenient venue and a bowling lesson for the cost of green fees only and Luna Cinemas who donate a double pass as the Lucky Door Prize.

As ever, my thanks to the facilitators: Elio Novello who co-ordinated the bowling competition; Sarah Leighton who managed the door; Priscilla Shorne who provided the raffle and sold the tickets with the assistance of her friend Christine; Azmah Anuarul who set up the afternoon tea and managed the kitchen; Carrie Abbs and all who provided the refreshments.

Chilla Bulbeck

A student profile from the literacy class

Marzia is 35 years old and lost her husband during the civil war of 1992 – 1996. She talked at the graduation function of the Vocational Training Centre, and everyone was sad to hear her story. After the death of her husband she was under much pressure that caused her to become disabled; her hands and feet became frozen. Marzia has no children and lives at her brother's home. The brother is unemployed; he sells vegetables occasionally at shops. Marzia told the function that after losing her husband and the use of her hands and feet she thought that her life had come to an end.

When OPAWC staff surveyed the suburb to recruit students for the literacy course they met Marzia in her bad condition. When they started talking to her she just cried, nothing else. The staff encouraged her and promised to take her away from all her miseries. But Marzia refused to come to classes, being disabled. However, later she changed her mind and agreed.

Since she joined the class Marzia has changed completely. She is unable to stand in front of the white board and write on it, so OPAWC provided her with a small board to practice sitting in her own chair.

Now Marzia is not alone any more, she is educated and a teacher at home. She teaches her nephews, she is happy now. She expressed her happiness and deepest thanks to her staff, to OPAWC and to the foreign supporters. She said: "You saved me and my life, may God save you all. We poor widow women need your support, your light to throw on our ways and carry us out of darkness."



Marzia with OPAWC director Latifa Ahmady

OPAWC presented Marzia with a gift along with her Merit Certificate; she was smiling and happy to receive the result of her hard work.



JUNE FUNDRAISING DINNER

Wonderful Afghan food was celebrated on June 17 at the Bamiyan Afghan restaurant at 175 First Ave in Five Dock. The menu was introduced by Haseeb Miazad the restaurant owner who explained the way in which Afghan cuisine has been influenced by its neighbours in India, China and Asia. There was very positive feedback from guests and the generous response to the raffle particularly helped to produce a profit of \$2,735 for SAWA-NSW.

HEWAD SCHOOL

From time to time we report to you on different aspects of the school for Afghan refugee children whose budget, of approximately US \$38,000 per year, is the particular commitment of SAWA-NSW. This time we thought you may be interested in what RAWA says are the values taught to the students at HEWAD.



RAWA, The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, is a women's organization founded in 1977 by Meena Keshwar Kamal, an Afghan university student who gathered around her a well educated group of women committed in practical ways to political and social activities aimed at acquiring human rights for women. The group is opposed to political and religious fundamentalism. By the early 1980s Kabul was too unsafe for such an organisation and it moved its base to Quetta, Pakistan. Eventually Meena paid the price for her activities and was assassinated in February 1987.

In Hewad, as in all schools founded by RAWA, the following basic principles and values are explicitly taught to the pupils:

- Everyone must respect all human beings regardless of language, religion, race, sex, colour, etc.
- There is no difference between people; no human being is superior to any other because of class, colour, language, race, or religion.
- All human beings do not have to think alike or live the same way.
- It's to the benefit of society that all human beings live in peace, understanding, and harmony.

The schools aim to develop in their students the following characteristics:

Religious Tolerance which recognises respect for all religions and understanding that members of different faiths can live in harmony and peace. RAWA does not support crimes in the name of religion, as do the Jahadis and Taliban.

Ethnic Tolerance which values the equality and rights of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan and respects the right of different ethnic groups to preserve their culture and speak their own language. RAWA specifically rejects the activities of criminal fundamentalists and encourages students to know the history of their own and other countries and about those who sacrificed their lives for freedom; set them as an example for themselves.

Gender Tolerance which avoids any kind of behaviour or cultural expressions that promote gender apartheid. RAWA specifically rejects fundamentalists who treat our women as cattle and represent them as mentally deficient

RAWA's values also encourage pupils to live by the core values of human life which RAWA lists as *honesty, decency, simplicity, unity, love, patience, responsibility, happiness, respect, and help for others*. It advocated *respect people who are handicapped, conservation of the natural environment and very strongly rejects violence advocating for the promotion of peace and cooperative values*. As RAWA writes "the goal is to never let Afghanistan, which today has become a field for dogfighting and bloodbaths, be a place for the monster like fundamentalists, Parchami and Khalqi traitors".

Reference: www.rawa.org

DATES FOR DIARY

Thursday 14 August 2014: 12 for 12.30 to 1.30.

Presentation of the book *Two Trees* at Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000. Guest Speakers Emma Ayres of the ABC FM music program and Matthias Tomczak, Convenor, SAWA- Australia SA. *Two Trees* is a coffee table art book published by SAWA -SA. This beautiful book grew from the collaboration of Australian artists and Afghan women who tell their stories. These are the women who bravely attend The Vocational Training Centre in Kabul (funded by SAWA-SA) often in danger of abuse and violence from the male members of their family because of their attendance.

Thursday 23 October 2014: 7.30 pm

Circle Cafe, 344 Darling St Balmain Talk by expert on the situation of Afghan women, by Sabera Turkamani a graduate student at UTS and previously a Midwife in Afghanistan. The talk will be preceded at 7.00pm by the AGM of SAWA-NSW and followed by supper – Donation \$10.00.

November 2014: Annual SAWA-NSW Lunch date to be notified.



Photos from RAWA's Annual Report for Hewad High School, 2013.

Top left: Morning assembly to welcome new students.

Above: Students performing traditional Afghan dance, Attan.