



From the Editor

Most of the foreign troops have left Afghanistan, and we hear people ask: Was it too early to leave the country, and what will come next? In Britain the first books about the war have appeared; they offer a bleak résumé. Barak Obama has made sure that the occupation will continue, so nothing much will change; fighting will continue.

*Surrounded by competing warlords, suppressed by misogynist tribal chiefs and threatened by foreign bombs, the women of Afghanistan show admirable strength and determination to obtain their human rights. Why should we abandon them now, because politicians tell us that the war is over, but the occupation continues? **Their resilience should be our inspiration.***

Matthias Tomczak

Britain comes home from a war without gain

When US, European and Australian troops invaded Afghanistan in 2001 we were told that the operation was necessary to protect us from al-Qaida attacks against us. As one of the first of the invading countries Britain now experiences published reviews of its involvement and comes to the conclusion, in the words of London Review of Books, that it is "worse than a defeat": "Of all the thousands of civilians and combatants not a single al-Qaida operative or 'international terrorist' who could conceivably have threatened the United Kingdom is recorded as having been killed by NATO forces in Helmand" (the operational province of the British forces). Yet, as British journalist James Meek reports in his review of four new books about the war in Afghanistan, one of them "puts the cost at £40 billion, or £2000 for each taxpaying household."

In reality Britain conceived its invasion as a way to extract itself from the quagmire of Iraq without a loss of face. As the Chief of General Staff put it in 2009: "There is recognition that our national and military reputation and credibility, unfairly or not, have been called into question at several levels in the eyes of our most important ally as a result of some aspects of the Iraq campaign. Taking steps to restore this credibility will be pivotal – and Afghanistan provides an opportunity." It appears that the people of Helmand province simply had to serve in an attempt to uphold the fiction of the British Empire.

Another fiction was the fight against al-Qaida and the Taliban. According to a book written by Mike Martin, a Pashto speaking British officer, and reviewed by James Meek, "the British were never fighting waves of Taliban coming over the border from Pakistan: they were overwhelmingly fighting local men led by local barons who felt shut out by the British and their friends in 'government' and sought an alternative patron in Quetta. The Taliban provided money, via their sponsors in the Gulf, and a ready-made, Pashtun-friendly ideological framework the barons could franchise."

So all the military action in the province during 40 years of war can be reduced to competition between local warlords: "Martin describes the mujahedin groups set up in Helmand in the late 1970s to fight communism as entrepreneurs who saw an opportunity to get access to the stream of money, weapons and propaganda emanating from Muslim idealists in Pakistan and, later, from the CIA and the Gulf states. ... When the communists fell, these mujahedin franchisees – besides fighting socialism, they had become the kingpins of the new opium economy – rebranded themselves as 'government', and set about plundering, racketeering and squabbling. With the coming of

the Taliban, the 'government' fled and the Helmandis were largely left to their own devices. When the Taliban was pushed away in 2001 the 'government' franchisees soon re-established themselves. These were the hated mayors, policemen and secret policemen – who set up countless illegal checkpoints to extract tolls from travellers, stole their rivals' opium and tricked Western troops into sending their personal enemies to Guantánamo – that British forces spent eight years fighting."

Britain's grim balance sheet can help us to answer the question what will happen now that the troops are gone: Nothing much will change, business will continue as usual. The various warlords will simply regroup and try to make the best of a new situation. (According to some press reports some have already taken up the ISIS franchise.) Corruption and extortion will remain the order of the day, but a new and bigger civil war is unlikely – the civil war has been ongoing for more than 40 years and can hardly get much bigger.

[London Review of Books 36 \(24\) 18 December 2014, pages 3 – 10](#)

New student sponsorships for the new year

Since early 2012 SAWA (SA) members have been sponsoring students from foster havens of AFCECO, the Afghan Child Education and Care Organisation. After three years of studies Shazia and Zubaida finished their degrees in law and are looking forward to serving the women of Afghanistan in their struggle for rights. Medical student Sosan finished a two year diploma and returned to her family's village in Bamyan. We wish them well with their plans for the future.

Having successfully guided some students through university allows our members to now also sponsor Rima and Hajira, who are enrolled in dentistry, and Zarmina, who studies sculpture at Kabul University to become an artist. Hajira's story appeared in the August 2014 edition of the SAWAN. Today we introduce Rima and Zarmina:

"My name is Rima. I was born in a refugee camp of Peshawar in



Pakistan. My father sold vegetables in a wheelbarrow in Peshawar, where I went to an Afghan school for refugees. In 2008 my family moved back to Afghanistan. The place where my family comes from is a remote area of Jalalabad called Dara-e-Nur. There is no school in Dara-e-Nur that I and my siblings could attend, but my family could not afford to live

in Jalalabad. My parents work on their small land to grow crops and feed the family; this is the only source of income for them."

"I joined the AFCECO orphanage in Jalalabad with my brother and sister but moved to Kabul orphanages because of changes in Jalalabad. I finished high school and now want to study stomatology to become a dentist. When I finish university I would like to go back to my village and help the people there. My biggest dream is to open a school in the village."

Rima works as assistant to the AFCECO health manager, taking children to doctors and solving health issues at the orphanage.



"My name is Zarmina; I am 18 years old. My life has changed very much since I came to the orphanage. If I would not have joined the orphanage I, like many of my Afghan female peers, would have faced many problems. Maybe I would have been married; maybe I would have stopped studying and remained illiterate for the rest

of my life. I am actually proud of myself right now. I did very well at school and learned many things that I never imagined."

"My mother's death has been very difficult for me, but now I am coping. I started to get interested in art especially in reading poems and making sculptures. I want to attend a university of fine arts with tuition in making statues. I would love to become an artist and use my art to create a better situation for the women of my country."

Zarina is the head of the Educational Team of the orphanages. She deals with the teachers and makes sure that teachers come regularly to the orphanages and teach well and that the students attend the classes. She enrolled at the Department of Sculpture of Kabul University.

USA maintain "offensive capability"

Anyone who thought that the withdrawal of most of the US forces from Afghanistan means an end to direct military action will have to think again. As the New York Times wrote in an article in November:

"President Obama decided in recent weeks to authorize a more expansive mission for the military in Afghanistan in 2015 than originally planned, a move that ensures American troops will have a direct role in fighting in the war-ravaged country for at least another year. Mr. Obama's order allows American forces to carry out missions against the Taliban and other militant groups threatening American troops or the Afghan government, a broader mission than the president described to the public earlier this year.

In an announcement in the White House Rose Garden in May, Mr. Obama said that the American military would have no combat role in Afghanistan next year, and that the missions for the 9,800 troops remaining in the country would be limited to training Afghan forces and to hunting the "remnants of Al Qaeda."

In effect, Mr. Obama's decision largely extends much of the current American military role for another year.

President Ashraf Ghani ... has been far more accepting of an expansive American military mission in his country than his predecessor, Hamid Karzai.

According to a senior Afghan official and a former Afghan official who maintains close ties to his former colleagues, in recent weeks both Mr. Ghani and his new national security adviser, Hanif Atmar, have requested that the United States continue to fight Taliban forces in 2015 — as opposed to being strictly limited to operations against Al Qaeda. Mr. Ghani also recently lifted the limits on American airstrikes and joint raids that Mr. Karzai had put in place, the Afghan officials said.

"The difference is night and day," General Campbell said in an email about the distinction between dealing with Mr. Ghani and Mr. Karzai. "President Ghani has reached out and embraced the international community. We have a strategic opportunity we haven't had previously with President Karzai."

American military officials saw the easing of the limits on airstrikes imposed by Mr. Karzai as especially significant, even if the restrictions were not always honored. During the summer, Afghan generals occasionally ignored Mr. Karzai's directive and requested American air support when their forces encountered trouble. Now it appears such requests will no longer have to be kept secret.

One senior American military officer said that in light of Mr. Obama's decision, the Air Force expects to use F-16 fighters, B-1B bombers and Predator and Reaper drones to go after the Taliban in 2015. "Our plans are to maintain an offensive capability in Afghanistan," he said.

The Pentagon plans to take the lead role in advising and training Afghan forces in southern and eastern Afghanistan, with Italy also operating in the east, Germany in the north and Turkey in Kabul.

America's NATO allies are expected to keep about 4,000 troops of their own in Afghanistan in 2015."

[The New York Times](#) 21 November 2014

10 years SAWA-Australia, a visual history

2014 was the year when SAWA-Australia celebrated its 10th birthday. SAWA (NSW) retold its story in the February 2014 issue of the SAWAN, SAWA (SA) celebrated it at its Annual General Meeting in September. A visual SAWA-Australia history produced for the occasion can now be seen on our website under the "[about](#)" menu. Even those who have been with us for all those years will be surprised how much SAWA-Australia has done since its inception in 2004. Well worth a look!

The Women's Song

A poem read at the Certificate Ceremony of the Vocational Training Centre of 7 May 2014

Listen to me for a few seconds; after centuries
I am still a slave to discrimination and abuses
Listen to me and don't force me to stop
That still I am trapped in a prison

What story have you not made to deceive me?
What pain have I not tolerated for being a woman?

You addressed me as incomplete minded
Because I am not a man, that is why all bad possibilities are for me,
being a woman?

Listen to me for a few seconds and don't force me to stop
That I am still a slave to discrimination and abuse

I work hard like you all my life
I am a mother but like a sweeper at home
Where are the justice and your everlasting feeling?
If I say a word, you call me runty
Tell me, without excuses, is this life?
I am a woman buried in all my life

My selling is lawful because you are here
You pretend that you are the powerful owner of my property and my life

I am like all others in this destroyed land
Be attentive that I stand with anger
Be attentive that I stand with anger

Listen to me for a few seconds; after centuries
I am still a slave to discrimination and abuses
Listen to me and don't force me to stop
That still I am trapped in a prison



SAWA-Australia (SA)

PO Box 90, Flinders University PO Bedford Park SA 5042
Bendigo Bank BSB 633-000 Account number 126035633 sawa.sa@sawa-australia.org



Convener: Matthias Tomczak **Secretary:** Christine Gamble **Treasurer:** Christine Tomczak
Committee: Maureen Arnott, Elaine Gouldhurst, Kath Jones, Ruth Redfern
Newsletter editor: Matthias Tomczak **Public Officer:** Ruth Redfern **Auditor:** Bob Shahinger

Regional groups in Melbourne, WA, Tasmania and Queensland are affiliated with SAWA-Australia (SA) and contribute to the support for the Vocational Training Centre and Hamoon Clinic.

Meet our patron Senator Penny Wright

For several years now SAWA-Australia (SA) has enjoyed the valuable support of political representatives at various levels of government. In Queensland Senator Claire Moore, a long-standing SAWA (SA) member, assisted us with the launch of our art book *Two Trees*. In Western Australia Alannah MacTiernan, federal member for Perth, has taken up our cause. In South Australia Legislative Council member Michelle Lensink has been a SAWA (SA) member for many years.



We are now honoured to be able to announce that Senator Penny Wright has agreed to be our new patron. As a Senator for South Australia living in Adelaide Penny can work closely with the Adelaide-based SAWA (SA) committee.

Senator Wright has had a life-long commitment to justice and social justice, both in Australia and globally.

As a lawyer, Penny often worked in the 'little end' of town, with those who live on the margins of society - people on low incomes, people with mental illnesses and

people who have been dealt a tough hand by life. She has also championed global development and human rights for many years through her involvement with Oxfam and Amnesty International.

Penny has been a Senator for South Australia since 2010. She is the Australian Greens national spokesperson for Mental Health, Legal Affairs and Schools and is passionate about Australia being a nation where every person can participate fully in their community and fulfil their unique potential. She is also a member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, a co-convener of the parliamentary Amnesty International group and the Chair of the Senate's Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee.

Penny is delighted to have the opportunity to assist SAWA (SA) with its valuable work on behalf of Afghan women and girls.

Donations to SAWA (SA) now tax-deductible

For several years now SAWA-Australia has tried, and failed, to obtain the legal status from the Department of Foreign Affairs required to issue tax-deductible receipts. The procedure was complicated, required some 50 pages of paperwork, and could realistically only be completed by a trained charity manager.

Fortunately the situation has changed. The Federal Government established the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC) through the ACNC Act 2012, to regulate all charities in a uniform manner nationwide. On 13 November 2014 SAWA-Australia (SA) registered with the ACNC and received the status of a **Public Benevolent Institution (PBI)**. Registration as a PBI entitles SAWA-Australia (SA) to apply to the Australian Tax Office (ATO) for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, which makes donations to

SAWA-Australia (SA) tax-deductible, without going through the Department of Foreign Affairs.

One requirement for DGR status is a clause in the constitution that regulates what shall happen in the case that the DGR status is revoked. The necessary change to clause 37 was approved at a Special General Meeting held on 4 February. The application for DGR status has been launched with the ATO; approval is expected any day.

For the last four years tax-deductible donations for OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre had to be channelled through Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA. Having obtained DGR status SAWA-Australia (SA) will now issue tax-deductible receipts for all donations and has cancelled its agreement with APHEDA, effective 1 March 2015.

Please do not send any more donations for OPAWC through APHEDA. Such donations will be returned to the donors.

We thank Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA for the support it has given during these four years to the suffering women of Afghanistan by accepting donations on our behalf.

An ultrasound scanner for Hamoon Clinic

The DAK Foundation, which had assisted SAWA previously by supporting the English classes at the Vocational Training Centre, works with Rotary Australia World Community Services (RAWCS) to give free medical equipment to developing countries. It supplied SAWA (SA) with a portable ultrasound scanner for Hamoon Clinic.

The scanner is suitable for essential clinical services such as emergency trauma, identifying effusion, abdominal and cardiac scans and maternal health. It weighs 7kg and was taken to Kabul by Emma Ayres as she visits the Winter Music Academy of Afghanistan's National Institute of Music.

The academy was planned for December/January. Unfortunately the director of the National Institute Dr. Ahmad Sarmast was injured in a suicide attack while watching a play at the French-sponsored Istiqlal High School in Kabul, and the Winter Academy had to be pushed back. Emma Aires flew to Kabul in late January, and the ultrasound scanner is now on its way to Farah.

We thank the DAK Foundation for its support and Emma for making the delivery for us.



Help us to keep our costs down. If you have email and still receive the SAWAN by mail let us know your email address.



SAWA-Australia (NSW) PO Box 1741, Rozelle NSW 2039 www.sawansw.org.au
Bendigo Bank Rozelle Branch BSB 633-000 Account number 141397471 (SAWA-Australia NSW)

Convenor: Shirley Allen **Secretary:** Margaret Hetherton **Treasurer:** Carolyn Allen
Committee: Dawn Atkinson, Maryellen Galbally, June Lunsmann, Susan Martin, Jenny Matkevich,
Margaret Bailey. **Public Officer:** Deanna Fekete.

AFGHAN WOMEN

"I want to let them know that they [Afghan women] are very courageous women. Often during the war, men are absent. It's the woman who carries the family... The media, especially the international media, have presented an image of Afghan women as weak, as women that are really leading horrible lives. I don't want to in any way diminish the problems that women are facing...but women here in Afghanistan have played a very important role. And maybe it's time that we should recognise them and celebrate them for that." [See The Guardian 7 November 2014]

These are the words of Rula Ghani, the wife of the new president of Afghanistan. She is passionate about the courage of Afghan women and in this she is not alone. SAWA has heard similar views from RAWA leaders - the group who founded the Hewad school SAWA-NSW supports. It is important to keep the courage and resilience of Afghan women in focus while still recognising the enormous obstacles they face.

The *Trust in Education* NFP organisation from the USA which has established schools, services for street children and various other helpful projects in Afghanistan lists these difficulties and some of the advances in the last 10 years on their website:

- **Child marriage** - as many as 50% of Afghan girls are married by the age of 16. This is often associated with domestic abuse, continuing illiteracy and health problems as a result of pregnancies and childbirth at a young age. Here there has been some improvement as a result of a law making 17 the earliest age for a registered marriage.
- **Lack of education**-three times more boys than girls attend school. Improvement is seen in the 30 percent increase in girls at school since 2002 although still 1.5 million are not enrolled.
- **Being hidden and isolated** as a result of extremist Islamic views that girls may only leave home if they are fully covered and accompanied by a male relative.

- **Lack of economic opportunities** arising from the above difficulties. This is particularly hard on 1.5 million widows, (average age 35) one of the highest proportions in the world. Education is the best way in which women can be liberated from these limitations. There is slow progress here mainly associated with education and skills programs like that sponsored by SAWA-SA.

- **Precarious legal rights** – Sharia law is very discriminatory and there is much anxiety that the advances in women's rights since the Taliban may be threatened now. Some optimism arises from the fact that the recently adopted Afghan constitution states that men and women have equal rights before the law.

Education of women is clearly one of the most effective ways of bolstering the resilience and courage of Afghan women. Though SAWA can only be a small player in this effort, we can feel that we are, as encouraged by Rula Ghani, doing something useful to bolster the future of women in Afghanistan.

ANNUAL NSW SAWA LUNCH

This lunch was held on 27th November at Alegrias Spanish Tapas Restaurant in Balmain. We received many compliments on the event which returned a net \$3,720. We thank all who attended.

DATES FOR DIARY (See also at www.sawansw.org.au)

BIRTHING KIT ASSEMBLY MORNING: 2 March 2015 at Leichhardt Rowing Club Glover St, Leichhardt

From 9.30 am with birthing kit instructions at 10am sharp. Morning tea provided. Please let Maryellen Galbally know if you can come: <mailto:bookings@sawansw.org.au> or phone: 0425 718 996.

Any help you can give in paying for the kit components (\$3.00 per kit) will be gratefully received on the day.

ART SALE: 27, 28, 29 March

Friday 27: Evening Opening with drinks \$10.000 then Sat. 28 (NSW State Election) and Sun. 29 - 10am to 5pm
Balmain Watch House, 179 Darling Street, Balmain.

A wide range of paintings, ceramics and sculptures will be for sale.

CALLING ALL COLLECTORS / HOARDERS

Declutter and contribute to a sale of works to raise much needed funds to support SAWA particularly the Hewad School for Afghan refugee children.

We are looking for paintings, ceramics, sculptures

The Balmain Association has generously offered the use of the Watch House
on the weekend 28, 29 March, 2015

All profit will go directly to SAWA

if you have something to donate, ideas for the exhibition or can help in any way
express your intent as early as possible to June Lunsmann
speal@zip.com.au, 9810 6885 or Shirley Allen info@sawansw.org.au

www.sawansw.org.au

SAWA Australia NSW Inc.

SUPPORT ASSOCIATION FOR THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN