



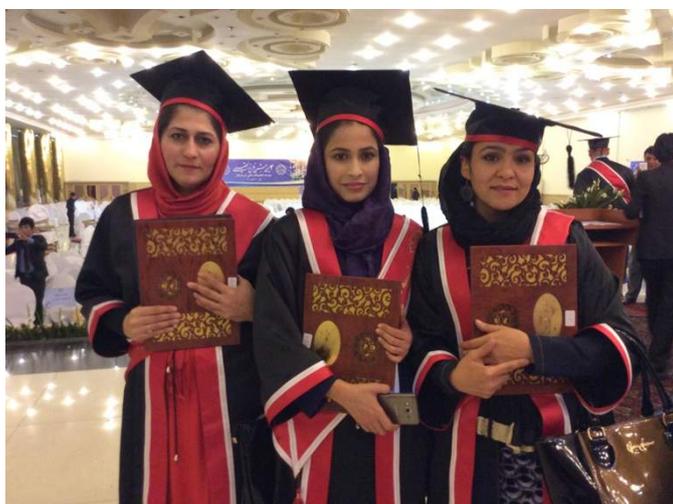
### From the Editor

*Afghanistan is being squeezed from all sides. Europe and Pakistan are forcing refugees to return, while the Taliban are again gaining ground and ISIS is trying to gain a foothold as well.*

*Should we regard our work a lost cause? The number of needy and desperate people with nothing to support themselves will increase. Those who can be reached by our support will be forever thankful for what we do for them. This alone should be enough to continue our work with even greater determination.*

Matthias Tomczak

### Sponsored students graduate



Two of the students sponsored by SAWA (SA) members graduated from university in November 2015. Zubaida (left) and Shazia (centre) completed their law degree. Zubaida worked as an unpaid intern for several months before she decided to return to her home province Nuristan, where she now works as a teacher with a good salary. Shazia had to search for a job for several months but is now working in a god job with an NGO in Jalalabad.

We only received the graduation photos last month and are proud to be able to show them here. We are very happy that both completed their studies successfully and found good employment, where they will become examples of the role of women in a new Afghanistan.

More students want to go through university and graduate in the years to come and require sponsorships to be able to do that. We introduce some of them on page 3.

### Refugees are forced back to a country at war

*The following report is from the Guardian of 6 October 2016.*

Almost 40 years ago, Allah Noor took his family to a safe haven in Pakistan, following the Soviet invasion. Last week he returned, to a country at war.

Noor's family is among more than 100,000 Afghans who have been coerced out of Pakistan since July. Pakistan's government has ordered all Afghan migrants and refugees to leave – about 3 million people. Roughly 250,000 of their number have left so far this year, according to figures from the World Food Programme, in the biggest eviction of Afghans in decades.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ocha, expects 600,000 Afghans to have returned by the end of the year. Noor's family of 18 left after months of intimidation by police, who came to their house near Peshawar almost every day to order them to leave. Noor, 62, is the family's only adult male. Two sons live in Saudi Arabia and the UK. He said that his village had been totally destroyed. "There might be peace for a month now and then," he reflected, "but there is still fighting in our village." He had to find a new plot of land, a school for the children, and then wait for remittances from his sons abroad.

Still, the Noor family is relatively lucky. Upon arrival, they received US\$3,600 from the UN's refugee agency, the UNHCR, for the nine family members who were registered as refugees in Pakistan. The remaining nine were ineligible for the \$400 cash grant because they were undocumented, as are about two-thirds of returnees.

The UNHCR receives the vast majority of funds [from international donors] but only assists people registered as refugees in Pakistan.

"The difference in survival chances is jarring, and frankly it's bizarre that an agency mandated to protect refugees appears to care for just half of them. It's callous," said Carter.

Among the undocumented returnees is Taj Bibi, a mother of six who was widowed four months ago. Her oldest son, Amanullah, is 14. Bibi had lived in Pakistan since the jihad in the 1980s but was forced out barely two months after her husband died in a motorcycle accident.

"Our life was very good there – my husband could make a salary," she said from behind a curtain in her tent in Nangarhar's Behsud district, where she relies on aid and help from neighbours. "We will live the rest of our life here," she said.

The Pakistan government has periodically threatened to send Afghans back, but it is unclear what triggered the recent crackdown.

Some have speculated that Pakistan is using Afghans as pawns in a dispute with the US. Noor, meanwhile, thought the harassment had more to do with the Afghan government's recent diplomatic outreach to Pakistan's rival.

"Ever since Afghanistan began improving relations with India, they called us 'sons of India'," he said.

Read the full story in the [Guardian, 6/10/16](http://www.guardian.com/afghanistan/2016/oct/06/afghan-refugees-pakistan).



*Afghan refugees preparing to return to Afghanistan*

## Europe blackmails Afghanistan into accepting refugees back against their will

*The following report is from the Guardian of 4 October 2016.*

The EU has signed an agreement with the Afghan government allowing its member states to deport an unlimited number of the country's asylum seekers and obliging the Afghan government to receive them.

The deal has been in the pipeline for months, leading up to a large EU-hosted donor conference in Brussels. According to a previously leaked memo, the EU suggested stripping Afghanistan of aid if its government did not cooperate.

The deal has not been made public but a copy seen by the Guardian states that Afghanistan commits to readmitting any Afghan citizen who has not been granted asylum in Europe, and who refuses to return to Afghanistan voluntarily.

It is the latest EU measure to alleviate the weight of the many asylum seekers who have arrived since early 2015. Afghans constituted the second-largest group of asylum seekers in Europe, with 196,170 applying last year.

While the text stipulates a maximum of 50 non-voluntary deportees per chartered flight in the first six months after the agreement, there is no limit to the number of daily deportation flights European governments can charter to Kabul.

With tens of thousands set to be deported, both sides will also consider building a terminal dedicated to deportation flights at Kabul international airport.

The EU has negotiated the agreement with the Afghan government as part of the run-up to this week's Brussels donor conference, where international donors will pledge aid for Afghanistan for the coming four years. Some Afghan officials seem to have felt strong-armed. The Afghan minister for refugees and repatriation, Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi, refused to sign the document, leaving the duty to a deputy.



*German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Ashraf Ghani shake hands after a press conference in Berlin, 2 December 2015, when the repatriation plan was first discussed.*

Still, Afghanistan, whose domestic revenue only constitutes 10.4% of GDP, is so dependent on foreign aid that the government may have had little choice.

Liza Schuster, a Kabul-based migration expert, said the deal was an example of "how developed countries are able to push through their agenda in countries where there simply isn't the capacity in the ministries to push back". She added that there had been little transparency in the negotiation process.

The large exodus of Afghans last year seemed partly triggered by Angela Merkel opening Germany's doors to almost a million migrants. To prevent a migrant flow of the size experienced last year, the deal commits the EU to help fund public awareness campaigns in Afghanistan warning against the dangers of migrating.

However, not all Afghan asylum seekers arrive to Europe from Afghanistan. An unknown number were born or grew up in Iran or Pakistan. If sent to Afghanistan, many are likely to struggle without the social networks that are often a prerequisite to getting work, even for the well-educated. According to Schuster destitute people, who do not choose to leave Afghanistan again immediately after deportation, could be ripe targets for recruitment not only by the Taliban but local strongmen commanding militias. In that sense, deportations could add to instability.

"This particular agreement allows European governments to ride straight through all the argumentation that's been made over the past 15 years that it's not safe to return people at the moment."

Read the full story in the [Guardian, 4/10/16](#).

## No security for civilians in Kabul and Farah

The deteriorating security situation has made life for our partners in Afghanistan very hard. Mahbooba, AFCECO's donor relations officer, told us on 7 September:

"It has been a difficult month for us here. We had a number of terror attacks. I lost several friends and a professor of mine during an attack at the American University. At another suicide attack at the Defense Ministry one of our cleaning women lost her son who worked in the police force. He had been cleaning up the area from body parts and blood when another explosion happened."

The situation in the provinces is even worse. OPAWC executive director Latifa Ahmady reported about Hamoon Clinic on 17 October:

"As you know Farah, like Kunduz and Helmand, is one of the most insecure provinces. Fighting has never stopped in this province, but until recently the fighting was in the districts and villages, not in the capital city.



Unfortunately since 20 days ago the fighting came to around 4 to 5 km from the city center. The people are in a very bad situation – no food, no way to move, air tickets reached \$500 per person. Some people who had the money flew urgently to Kabul and Herat, while most of the poor people moved into the mountains and to the villages where they could be safe from the bombs and rockets. There was fear that the Taliban could enter the city and arrest men and educated people.

OPAWC urgently flew the staff of Hamoon Clinic to Herat and rented a house for them, where they were provided with food, clothes and essential items. The staff stayed in Herat for four days until the situation in the city center got better and we could fly the staff back to attend to people, who were in need more than at any other time.

Now our staff are in the city and the clinic is operating daily, and the staff are there even during the holidays because a lot of injuries come to the clinic. The roads are still blocked and the fighting is in the districts and villages now, not far from the center. This fighting seems like a game of Tom and Jerry: One day the government defeats the Taliban, the next day the Taliban seem to make progress. All this makes life very difficult for the poor people. OPAWC talked with a travel agency to be ready to move our staff again, in case it is urgently needed. But I ask you not to worry. We have to accept these risks because our aim is to support and help the people especially the women who are in need these days, but we also give priority to the lives of our staff. OPAWC has sent food and other items for the staff to Farah by air. We are in close contact with them, they inform us about the fighting every two hours. We hope that the situation will get better."



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**Patron: Penny Wright, previously SA Senator and member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights**

Partner NGOs: **OPAWC** (Organization for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities), **AFCECO** (Afghan Child Education and Care Organization)

## A donation in memory of Dianne Groom

On 8 October Melanie Ledgett of Coomba Bay in NSW sent us a donation of \$1,000 with the note "I would like to give this gift in memory of my mum, Dianne Groom". We asked Melanie for more detail and received this information:

"My mum passed away earlier this year and as a result I was left with the ability to share some of her legacy. My sister and I were mainly raised by a single, hard working mum who always encouraged further study and independence. I have three daughters myself, and having travelled twice to Nepal, among other places, I feel very privileged to be able to raise my daughters here in Australia where expectations are high and opportunities abound. I wanted to make my first use of my inheritance to donate to a worthy cause and I think SAWA do a great job for struggling women."

We thank Melanie for thinking of the women of Afghanistan and sharing her inheritance with them.

## Delays with literacy certificates

183 women completed their literacy course by mid-2016 without a graduation ceremony because the issuing of their certificates has been delayed. The new Minister of Education has put all contracts with NGOs on hold, including the contract with OPAWC. Latest information confirms that the Minister has now signed OPAWC's contract, and the women can expect to receive their graduation papers soon.

After several years of operation in Afshar, one of the poorest areas in Kabul city, the Literacy Centre has moved to Da Araban in Qargha, an outer area of Kabul some 12 km from Afshar. It is an area with much illiteracy but without schools. OPAWC staff went from street to street to survey the people's needs and received over 500 registrations for literacy courses. Not all women who registered received permission from their families to attend classes, but OPAWC hopes to gain the trust of the community once the results of the first few months of literacy courses become known.



Staff of the Centre share a cake on International Teachers' Day

Several workshops and conferences were held in the Centre, some with assistance from HAWCA, the Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan. They covered medical advice, gynaecological issues, violence against women, and children's rights.

## New students are looking for sponsors

Several students in AFCECO's foster houses completed their high school this year and are now hoping to be able to take up tertiary

studies. All are working for AFCECO while studying and determined to make a contribution to a new Afghanistan where women enjoy equal rights with men and tribal conflict is a thing of the past. SAWA (SA) hopes to find sponsors for four of them. Please contact SAWA (SA) if you want to become a sponsor.



Saeeda



Malalai

**Saeeda** was born in a refugee camp in Peshawar where she attended an Afghan school for refugees. She first joined AFCECO's foster haven in Jalalabad and later came to Kabul. She works in AFCECO's finance department as accountant. She wants to study Pashto literature.



Ahmad



Shams

**Malalai** is from Nuristan province and joined an AFCECO foster haven in 2007. She studies midwifery, a profession that is

desperately needed in her home province. She chose this major after witnessing women die while giving birth because there were no midwives or doctor.

**Ahmad** lived in Farah Province on a drug trade route. His father took to drugs and disappeared. Ahmad took to working in the streets. His mother watched other boys go off to war with the Taliban for a regular tempting salary of a hundred dollars a month. Desperate to keep her sons out of the war, she took them to the first AFCECO orphanage in Kabul, where she still works as a foster haven mother. Ahmad graduated from high school last year and is now studying law.

**Shams** helped his father on his farm in Nuristan province, taking care of the animals, until his older brother decided that Shams should study and sent him to an AFCECO foster haven in Kabul. Although Shams started school very late he was able to finish it on time. He graduated last year and is now the head of the AFCECO logistic team. He wants to study dental technology. He has not started yet but will enrol at the Zavul Institute of Higher Education in early 2017.

## Double your donations

One of our supporters has made a very generous offer: **For two months, during November and December**, he will match every donation sent through our online portal dollar for dollar. This is your opportunity to increase your support for the women of Afghanistan and double your end-of-year donations.

To take advantage of this magnanimous offer go to our website <http://www.sawa-australia.org>, click on DONATE and select the "Special November and December" option.



## PROGRESS ON NEW PROJECT

Classes in English and computer skills have begun for 60 women and girls, chosen from the 500 who applied earlier this year. Latifa Ahmady, Executive Director of OPAWC (Organisation Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities) has recently sent a progress report with photos of the women in class. Those attending have been chosen because they have suffered the most and have lost their husbands or are homeless, displaced through decades of war. In addition to the classes we are funding, OPAWC teaches the women about their rights and once a week they have special training in health and hygiene. Because so many women and girls wanted to join the classes, they will only attend until they reach a functional level, then others will be given a turn. Funds we sent in May this year have bought computers, furniture and solar panels for electricity. The budget for operating the centre for a year is US\$ 11,160 which includes rent of two rooms, teachers, security guard and books and stationery. In accordance with our agreement with OPAWC, we expect to send half of this amount before the end of this year.

The Centre is in a village called QalaTak in Khewa district of Nangarhar province of Afghanistan, some way north-east of the capital, Jalalabad. Although Khewa is not a district badly affected by Taliban and Dayesh conflicts, violence against women is still common and already the local Mullah has warned women not to go to this Centre, but to go to an Islamic academy. Many of those in Nangarhar province have returned from neighbouring Pakistan where they had sought refuge. So this project is an appropriate one to follow our funding of Hewad School for refugees in Rawalpindi.



*Women at OPAWC centre*

## RECENT ACTIVITIES OF SAWA-NSW

In September, a long-time supporter, **Jennifer Gowen**, gave a most interesting and enjoyable presentation about her month in Kabul in 2011 when she went to host a showing of some Australian art works. Jennifer stayed with a family there and took a wonderful collection of photos with which to illustrate her talk.

**The AGM of SAWA-Australia (NSW) Inc** was held on 20th October at the Uniting Church, Balmain. The Convenor reported



*Jennifer with one of her paintings*

on the past year's activities but unfortunately the report on the new project was not received in time for inclusion. The current committee all stood for re-election and one of the vacancies on the committee created by increasing the size through constitutional amendments last year, was also filled. We expect to soon fill one more of the vacancies and are pleased to see continued strong support for our work. At the conclusion of the AGM, there was a most interesting talk, accompanied by some fascinating images, by **Jan Forrester**, a media trainer and consultant who made several trips to Afghanistan between 2009 and 2013 to train media and media trainers in a very active, volatile environment. We are most grateful to these speakers who gave their time and effort to help us better understand the people we are raising funds to support.



*Jan Forrester*

## SALE OF BRIC-A-BRAC, CLOTHES AND COLLECTABLES

Over the weekend of 22nd-23rd October, a sale was held of a large quantity of donations from SAWA supporters at the Balmain Watch House, a wonderful venue donated by the Balmain Association for this event. As many of the items were sold at bargain prices, not a huge amount of money was raised, but with the help of donations, we made over \$1,200.

## COMING EVENTS

The next event, one of the most important of the year, is the **Annual Lunch**.

**Date:** Thursday, 17th November, 2016

**Venue:** Leichhardt Rowing Club, Glover Street, Leichhardt

**Time:** 12 noon for 12.30 p.m.

**Cost:** \$60 ( including one complimentary drink)

**Guest Speaker:** Phil Glendenning, Director of the Edmund Rice Centre and President of the Refugee Council of Australia. Mr Glendenning has made many visits to Afghanistan, particularly to follow up the fate of those returned home by Australia.

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