



From the Editor

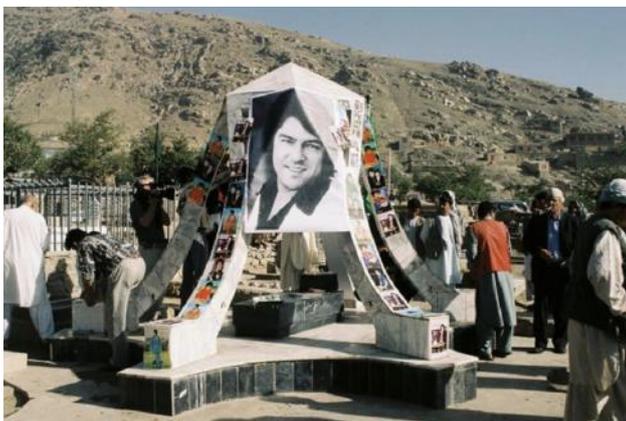
The months ahead will present challenges not only to the lives of the people of Afghanistan but to our work in their support as well. Trying to introduce democratic elections into a country entrenched in tribal politics will increase the insecurity resulting from the warring factions of the fundamentalists. Our partner organisations suffer from the dangerous situation when international sponsors withdraw from the country. Our own office-holders and supporters are not getting younger, some having to deal with exhausting health issues. The coming year will see some major changes. Hopefully they will secure SAWA's work into the future and allow our partners in Afghanistan to continue their admirable work.

Matthias Tomczak

Ahmad Zahir will be remembered

2019 will be the 40th year of the death of Ahmad Zahir, Afghanistan's first and only true mega superstar whose appeal still crosses all boundaries of age, class, language, and regions. He was a pioneer of rock and pop music in Afghanistan but also performed many other styles of music from Indian classical to Iranian music and music from different provinces.

Oscar-nominated producer Sam French, who is currently in post-production on the documentary film *In-Justice* (see SAWAN 57, February 2018) about the fate of two women accused of "moral crimes", has been asked by Ahmad's daughter to produce a retrospective of the singer's time and his place in Afghanistan of the 60s and 70s, when his voice captured the soul of an entire generation. It will be a memory to a country where girls wore mini-skirts and foreigners flocked to the country on the "hippie trail".



Ahmed Zahir's grave in the Shuhada Salehin graveyard, Kabul

Ahmed Zahir was born the son of Afghanistan's Prime Minister under King Zahir Shah. At Habibya High School he formed a band that made him known th as "Bulbul-e- Habibya" (The Nightingale of Habibya), but his family insisted that he attend teacher's college, first in Kabul and then for two years in India.

Soon after his return to Kabul he began to collaborate with various musicians, writing his own songs that combined different styles, such as Indian raga and western pop. He recorded 30 albums over a career of 10 years. Among Afghans around the world he is known as the "King of Afghan music" and the "Elvis of Afghanistan".

Although nearly all of his songs are built around classical Persian poetry, Ahmad made it accessible to all Persian and Dari speakers



Ahmed Zahir's grave during the Taliban regime

regardless of their education and knowledge of Persian poetic tradition, yet the poeticism, imagery, and emotional impact is as powerful as designed by the classical poets who wrote the texts.

Ahmad Zahir was killed on 14 Jun 1979 in a traffic accident on the Salang highway north of Kabul. There are various rumours about his death. Some say that his political views were at odds to the communist government, others blame the death on a senior politician due to an affair with his daughter.

Mushtaq Bromand, head of the Ahmad Zahir Cultural Centre, said the role poetry and literature play in his songs made his work eternal. The year 2019 will be a year to look forward to.



A new mural in Kabul in memory of Ahmed Zahir

What will the parliamentary elections bring?

Two elections were called for Saturday 20 October. The by-election in the Wentworth electorate was all over the news for weeks, the parliamentary election in Afghanistan received a few seconds coverage on the day it was held. This is perhaps understandable, considering the importance of the Sydney by-election result for the moral standing of Australia with issues such as detainees in Nauru, climate change and others.

But elections in Afghanistan are arguably of worldwide importance, impacting as they do on the social structure and cohesion of a nation. The media reported on symptoms like bomb threats and murder – the police chief of Kandahar province was killed two days before the polling stations opened, and the elections in Kandahar were postponed by a month – but the wider ramifications were not of interest. Before the question what the elections can bring can be answered it is necessary to look at the history of Afghanistan's US-imported democracy.

The 2014 Presidential election was marred by vote buying and selling and led to a protracted dispute between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. It was finally resolved through a power-

sharing deal that made Ghani president and Abdullah Chief Executive. A major issue was voter registration. Afghan voters are not limited to voting in particular areas and can use their 2001-issued voting cards in any polling station. In fact, a total of 20 million voting cards were in circulation among a voting population of 12 million.

Disagreement about voter registration reform led to postponement of the elections, due in 2015, for three years. When the Electoral Reform Commission submitted its proposals in August it called for allotting 1/3 of the Afghan parliament's 250 seats to political parties, in accordance with the parties' national results. This would help the development of national political parties as backbone of a proper democracy, instead of the current system of independent candidates tied to tribal loyalties.

However, the Commission also suggested to divide the provinces into smaller voting districts, ostensibly so that districts can be quarantined in case of fraud, a measure that was preferred by those interested in controlling the votes of their tribe.

The seriousness of the issue came to the fore in Ghazni province, where in 2010 all parliamentary seats had been won by Hazaras. On 26 April, 13 days before voter registration was to begin, Pashtuns, Tajiks and Sayyeds started a sit-in at the provincial office of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and demanded that the province be divided into smaller electoral constituencies in order to ensure balanced ethnic representation. In May the IEC decided to continue using the country's 34 provinces as unitary constituencies but was forced to make an "exception" for Ghazni and split the province into three new constituencies.

On 27 June, after 63 days, the protestors removed their tents and allowed the IEC office to reopen. Two days later a group of Hazaras started a new sit-in and demanded that the exception be revoked. As a result elections in Ghazni province are postponed indefinitely, and no election took place in the province on 20 October.^A



An Afghan election commission worker checks the identity of a man at a voter registration centre in Kabul

A major issue was the creation of a clear voter identification system ahead of polling. To exclude voter card fraud, a biometric ID card that stores the facial and eye characteristics as well as a fingerprint of the bearer was introduced in May. It identifies every bearer as "Afghan", a decision clearly superior to using tribal affiliation as identity. But "Afghan" is traditionally seen as synonymous with Pashtun, so the new ID card produced immediate protests.

Nevertheless, in the end the IEC agreed to demands to use biometric verification machines at all polling booths and ordered

^A <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistan-election-conundrum-14district-council-and-ghazni-parliamentary-elections-quietly-dropped/>

24,000 machines into the country. Two weeks before the poll only 4,400 had been delivered,^B and the task to train poll workers in their use at election booths in remote country locations was still ongoing when the polling stations opened. The IWC announcement that "Both online and offline systems will be used" does not augur well for a smooth process.



Voter registration in the provinces

Less than 9 million out of a total of 12 million eligible voters registered for the poll, including only 3 million women.^C Of the 7,355 polling centres originally planned only 4,530 were open due to security concerns.^D



A biometric scanner in use at a polling station in Herat

There are thus many grounds to be sceptical about the value of the elections and how Afghanistan will ever overcome tribal thinking. In many ways, the elections are a test run for the presidential elections planned for April 2019.

There will be three rounds of announcements: initial, preliminary and final results. Preliminary results are expected 20 days after the election, on 10 November. Final results are due by 20 December.



Women queue at an election booth in Bamyan province

^B <https://thediomat.com/2018/10/parliamentary-elections-loom-in-afghanistan/>

^C http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-10/13/c_137529723.htm

^D <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/afghanistan-extends-election-to-oct-21-due-to-chaos-at-polling-stations>



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

Fundraising efforts bear fruit

Hobart and Adelaide were the centres of fundraising efforts during the past few months, with very good results.

Earlier in the year, our convener gave a presentation about the work of SAWA (SA) to the Lions Club West Lakes / Seaton. The Club was impressed by the determination of the women in Kabul to improve their lives with SAWA's help and decided to make a donation of \$1,000. We appreciate the Club's generosity and thank the Club for this substantial contribution to our work.

Several screenings of the documentary *The Judge* raised significant amounts for our work. Shortly after we had received permission from the distributor to use the documentary for fundraising in March the first screening was held on 20 April at the Unitarian Meeting House in Norwood. It raised \$560. This was followed on 28 July by a screening at St. Oswalds Anglican Church Parkside that raised \$520.

A screening in Hobart on 12 September was supported by a community grant and sponsored by the Hobart City Council. The Lord Mayor of Hobart, an Alderman of the Council and a member of Tasmania's Parliament attended the screening, and a total of \$1,170 was raised. In the following week a screening in Kerang, Victoria, on 21 September contributed \$50 to SAWA's funds.

Another screening for Tasmania is scheduled for 6 November at the City Baptist Church in Launceston.

More funds were raised at this year's Annual General Meeting. AGMs are boring affairs, and we always had difficulty satisfying the quorum prescribed by our constitution. So we decided this year to combine the AGM with a sumptuous Afghan banquet at the Bamyán Hotel in Port Adelaide. This not only resulted in a most pleasant social event but also raised \$405.



SAWA (SA) members and supporters at this year's AGM

The Vocational Training Centre flourishes again

In our May SAWAN our convener reported on the grim financial situation at OPAWC's Vocational Training Centre, which left the Centre with SAWA (SA) as its own source of funding. We are happy to announce that the situation has changed and the Centre can move forward to even greater successes. This is due to a grant from ACTED, a French humanitarian NGO established in Kabul in 1993.

While ACTED now works in 36 countries it still places much emphasis on projects in Afghanistan.

The grant allows OPAWC to establish a small nursery for 40 children at the Centre which may encourage those students who have babies to bring their kids along to attend classes.

In addition, the grant provides training in food processing, beauty salon, business skills and women's rights, adding significantly to the possibility of earning an income from the Centre's courses.

A graduation ceremony for 450 girls and women from OPAWC's literacy and handicraft programs was held on 25 April, with more than 400 guests in attendance.

Each year, nearly 500 girls and women pass the one year literacy programme, learn skills in tailoring and embroidery and get their graduate certificate at the end of the course.

The success of OPAWC's courses can be seen when the graduates move on with their lives. Most have started working at home. Some work as employees in tailoring shops, earning money for their families.

Last year more than 20 students that graduated from the Centre, particularly younger ones, continued their education by entering into government schools. Some even continued with tertiary education, such as Khatra, who studies graphic design at Kabul University. (The August SAWAN published a profile of Khatra.)

The tailoring programme plays the most important role to allow women to earn a living for their own. The programme is equipped with sewing machines, and the women learn how to make dresses for women and children including fitting, altering and cutting. Last year Zakira, Farziya and Trina banded together to open a shop for Afghan dresses for women and children. Basmina also plans to start her own business, trying her best to open a sewing center in Kabul, while Haliya now works as a tailoring teacher for an international NGO.

The number of students interested in OPAWC's tailoring class is very high, but unfortunately OPAWC does not have capacity for more than 70 students per year. Almost 100 of the neediest women and girls are currently on a waiting list.

25 students benefited from the embroidery programme this year. Many students start earning money by working at home after graduation. One of them is Gul Ghutai, a mother of four girls and three small boys who lost her husband four years ago and is now the only supporter of her family. She bought an embroidery machine and started working at home a few years ago and can now safely feed her children.



the graduation ceremony



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Convenor: Shirley Allen **Assistant Convenor:** Margaret Hetherton **Secretary:** Carolyn Allen
Treasurer: Margaret Bailey **Committee:** Maryellen Galbally, June Lunsmann, Jenny Matkevich,
Joan Long, Denise Fahey, Robyn Longhurst. **Public Officer:** Deanna Fekete.
www.nsw.sawa-australia.org; Facebook *Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan SAWA -NSW.*

New Tax-Deductible Status for Donations

Up to now donations to SAWA-NSW have not been tax deductible. Now however, we can offer tax deductibility if you make a donation on line through www.givenow.com.au/rural-centre-for-women. We have this facility through the generous cooperation of our sister organisation SAWA-Australia (SA) who will provide your receipt and send your donation on to SAWA-NSW.

Of course, if you do not need the tax-deductibility, it is best to donate, as in the past, by posted cheque or by direct deposit to our bank account (both listed above).

The spectacular success of "our" rural centre for women in creating knowledge, a new awareness of issues and employment of its 50 current students is shown below. This was achieved from the budget of A\$19,600 we sent for the year – just less than A\$400 per young person. So, you can see that donations which form almost half our fundraising are very cost effective!

Success and Planned Expansion of The Rural Centre for Young Women

Recently we were delighted to receive a long report from Krishma the Project Manager of "our" OPAWC project in Khiwa district, Nangarhar Province.

After the second year of operation, Krishma reports that the program has educated 50 more of the 500 young women aged 15 to 30 who applied. They were either local rural women or refugees who were forced to return from Pakistan. Of these 30 girls have benefited from the English



program and are now able to read, write and speak English; 20 girls have been trained in computer office programs like Word, Excel, Power Point and other programs and uses of the internet.

The Centre puts a great deal of emphasis on goal setting for individual students and carefully monitoring their progress. Instructors report excellent performance, with zero failure and great marks for attentiveness and enthusiasm. Krishma tells us that the Centre is also well aware of the changes students bring to their families in term of earning and "social behaviours". She says that "most of these girls now lead a completely different life". Success in the Centre's courses has led to employment – a big change for women in this area many of whom have had no opportunity for employment and come from very poor families. Some are now teaching in the Khiwa public school; others have opened English courses in their own homes and teach other girls. Others have



managed to travel to cities and find "decent" jobs there. There have also been benefits in building what Krishma calls a "wide network of support among the community particularly the women". We assume this comes partly from the informal curriculum which provides information on women's health, reproductive health and women's rights. The Centre now plans to expand its courses to offer a new "handicrafts program" which includes tailoring and dressmaking and requires the purchase of a second hand industrial sewing machine and additional salaries. **The new budget of US\$30,000 with the reduced rate of exchanged for the A\$ means we will need to raise a little over A\$40,000, double last year's effort.** We need as much help as possible from our network.

RECENT EVENTS

The AGM was successfully held on 18 September 2018. The Committee was reelected with one new member, Robyn Longhurst, who is warmly welcomed. Margaret Hetherton, having served the allowed maximum seven years, retired as Secretary to be replaced by Carolyn Allen. The full composition of the Committee is listed above.

COMING EVENTS

- **13th ANNUAL LUNCH Friday 23 November 2018** 12 noon to 2.00 p.m. The Apprentice Restaurant, TAFE Level 7, Building E, 731-695 Harris Street, Ultimo. Cost: \$60 (2 courses with tea or coffee) Drinks available - payment by card only. The Apprentice trains students in food preparation and service excellence. We had great reports last year from the very enjoyable lunch there. Booking is essential before 9th November. Email to: bookings.nsw@sawa-australia.org or phone Shirley 98185319. After booking please pay either by posted cheque or direct deposit to Bendigo Bank referencing surname and lunch. (Details on the header above) Please notify your payment to treasurer.nsw@sawa-australia.org
- **STALL Saturday 8 December 9am - 1pm** outside Woolworths Balmain. We would welcome any donations of jam, cakes etc to sell.

Photos from Narrative Report on English and Computer Center
October 2017 - September 2018