



From the Interim Editor

As most readers of SAWAN will know, the author of the larger part of all past issues was Matthias Tomczak who died in May shortly after completing the last issue of SAWAN. Matthias was greatly admired and now is sadly missed by all in SAWA who knew him. He was a founder of SAWA-Australia and Convener of SAWA - SA providing invaluable leadership. His numerous visits to Afghanistan to the projects SAWA supports enabled a personal connection to develop with those who manage the projects. His visits were invaluable in providing us with a better understanding of the challenges women face at all levels of Afghan life and of the value of the work for which we are raising funds. As Convenor of SAWA-NSW, I have taken responsibility for this issue of SAWAN. We dedicate it to celebrating Matthias' enormous contribution. In so doing, we also assure all members and supporters of SAWA-Australia that our efforts to support the women of Afghanistan will continue in his absence. Their needs are as great as ever.

During the 6 years I have been Convenor in NSW, Matthias helped the NSW Association in many ways including setting up a sub-domain of the SAWA-Australia website, connecting us to the broker he had organised to send money to OPAWC in Afghanistan (which cannot be done through an Australian bank) and sharing the tax deductibility status he had obtained, through adding our project to the Give Now website. Matthias' practical expertise will be missed together with his leadership. A comprehensive appreciation from SAWA -SA of Matthias and his work for SAWA has already been sent to South Australian members and can be found on the website. Below are tributes to him from friends in Afghanistan, Malalai Joya, former member of the Afghan Parliament, who visited Australia on several occasions and greatly inspired our continued work for women in Afghanistan and also from OPAWC, Organisation Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities, who run the Vocational Training Centres we fund as well as Hamoon Clinic and many other schools and orphanages around the country.

Shirley Allen, Convenor NSW

From Malalai Joya's Facebook page

I deeply grieve the passing of Professor Matthias Tomczak who was an honest and kind friend to Afghan people. I am honored to have met this noble anti-war and anti-oppression activist who was a strong supporter and cooperater of oppressed Afghan women. I consider his loss a huge toll for the people of Afghanistan.

German-Australian Matthias Tomczak had donated much of his personal income and time since 2004 to suffering women and children in Afghanistan. He also tirelessly collected funds for educational and health centers of Afghan girls and women. Matthias gathered his companions in Australia and created a group called "Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan" (SAWA). Through this, he raised funds by selling products made by Afghan women and organising different campaigns. This was one of his several initiatives to empower Afghan women and to raise awareness on the plight of Afghan women. Although

Matthias had cancer for several years, he enthusiastically continued his services and wrote to his Afghan friends even days before passing away.

He used to publish a publication called SAWAN, via which he aimed to raise awareness in Australia about the catastrophic situation and current realities in Afghanistan. In May 2019 issue of SAWAN, he shared the sad news about his critical situation and not being able to continue his work. My deepest condolences to his wife, son and colleagues. I hope we can keep his memory forever alive by continuing in his footsteps and following his shining example as a progressive humanitarian.

From OPAWC

(Organisation of Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities)



We were very saddened to hear of the death of Professor Matthias Tomczak and will always remember him for his tireless works for Afghan women. As the Convenor of SAWA-Australia (SA), Professor Tomczak directed a sponsorship campaign in Australia for Afghan women that helped OPAWC to lay the foundation stone of OPAWC's Vocation Training Center in Kabul in 2008. Through his efforts, this women center expanded over time to become an educational hub for hundreds of women and girls offering quality education in literacy and handicraft.

Despite battling with the evil cancer, Professor Tomczak untiringly dedicated his time to Afghan women and children. He built up a wide network of support in Australia resulted to various humanitarian projects for Afghanistan including a community health center in Farah and scholarship fund for orphanage' graduates.

We all Afghans will remember him loving memory and extraordinary character forever.

News from Afghanistan

From time to time on our TV screens or in other media, reports appear of another violent event in Afghanistan, sometimes in the capital, more often in one of the provinces where Taliban are in power or where ISIS has become active. These days, most of those targeted are Afghan police or military but often civilians are casualties as well. In Australia, these incidents of violence are almost all we ever see reported, but we know that in the midst of all this conflict, Afghan people, especially women and children, are trying to lead a 'normal' life and are longing for peace.

A subscription to Google news of Afghanistan reveals a much wider range of stories with some emphasis in recent months on attempts to reach some kind of peace with the Taliban. Each week also sees a report on Afghan cricket; this year saw their inclusion in the World Cup One Day series for the first time and although they did not win a match, they came very close, including an 11 run loss to India. Surely a boost to morale for some Afghans.

News on the website of RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) emphasises the plight of women. Recent reports include Taliban lashing women in Nuristan Province for singing and dancing (something that is meant to belong to the past); a pregnant woman in northern Sar-i-Pul Province killed because she condemned the action of Taliban in killing military men; no girls have graduated from high school in southern Helmand Province in the last 18 years and indeed there are no schools for girls in some districts. The observation is also made that "Afghanistan is one the world's most prolific producers of orphans and widows". Most widows are illiterate, many are forced to marry close relatives of their husband and many are not allowed to marry again. Complex traditional rules give these women no freedom of choice. Some optimism in the capital with news of peace talks between the US and Taliban has been tempered by growth in crime, making attempts at running a business extremely dangerous.

Coming event in Victoria



The remarkable story of a female Sharia Law Judge and her fight for justice and equal rights for women

St Margaret's Anglican Church hall 79-81 Pitt Street, Eltham

Friday 9 August, 7pm to 9pm

\$22 full/\$15 concession includes tea and coffee

Book via FB: <https://www.facebook.com/sawaelthamfilm/>

Supported by **ELTHAMbookshop**

All proceeds go to the Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan

News from SAWA-Australia (SA)

SAWA-SA are looking for a new convenor and additional committee members to continue with Matthias' great work.

If you can help please contact Secretary SAWA SA Christine Gamble, cgamble@unitingsa.com.au.

Recent Event in SA

Great Collaboration with Local Music Students to Raise funds for SAWA

One of our committee members is a mature-age violin student with well-known teacher, Jill Folauhola. Every year, every student (ranging in ages from 5-75) performs in Jill's concert as preparation for public recitals later on.

This year, SAWA was chosen as one of the two charities to pass donations on to. Those attending not only enjoyed a delightful concert but also afternoon tea and a chance to learn more about SAWA. Our committee all pitched in to assist and together we raised \$560 from this event.

Ruth Russell





SAWA-Australia (NSW) PO Box 1741, Rozelle NSW 2039 website: nsw.sawa-australia.org
Bendigo Bank Rozelle Branch BSB 633-000 Account number 141397471 (SAWA-Australia NSW)
Convenor: Shirley Allen **Assistant Convenor:** Margaret Hetherton **Secretary:** Carolyn Allen
Treasurer: Margaret Bailey **Committee:** Maryellen Galbally, June Lunsman, 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.*

EDUCATION CENTRE AT QALATAK

Thanks to a number of very generous individual donations this year, one through Give Now, SAWA -NSW have recently forwarded US\$20,550 to OPAWC for the Education Centre in Rural Afghanistan which is in Qalatak village in Nangarhar Province. This will cover the remainder of the year and will meet the budget they have sent for October 2019 - September 2020 to continue classes in English, computer skills, tailoring and sewing. Nangarhar Province is close to Pakistan and the main trade route from Kabul runs through the capital, Jalalabad. OPAWC have chosen this area in the north-east of the province because of its poverty and the needs of women there. OPAWC's view is that people have been kept illiterate due to the dominance of clans and a misogynist ideology which also keeps women in subjection. Women are typically busy with cultivation and care of children. There is very little opportunity to get an education or to understand modern technology even though many women welcome a chance to learn as is evidenced by the large number who have applied for places in the Centre. Women are also at high risk of death in childbirth, so the Centre also gives information on health care and women's rights. Many families who were able to do so, fled to Pakistan after the American invasion. SAWA formerly funded a school for some of these refugees in Pakistan. Families who remained had a very difficult life under the Taliban. Girls were not allowed to go to school, boys had to attend religious schools and no one was allowed music or dance. In recent years with Pakistan forcing people back to Afghanistan, many families are trying to re-establish themselves in Nangarhar Province after exile and in many cases, loss of their previous homes.

EVENTS

•Biennial Dinner

Held at the Kazbah restaurant in Balmain on 8th May was supported by local businesses and SAWA supporters who donated a wide variety of items for auction which brought in around \$3,800 so with the raffle and profit on food we made a total of well over \$5,000.

•Film

Showing of the film *The Judge* on Saturday, 1st June at the Hannaford Centre in Rozelle. A last minute problem with the projector meant we had to use a large TV set in a smaller room rather than the main hall, which caused some difficulty in reading the subtitles, especially for those some distance from the TV. One of our committee read out the subtitles which was some help, but it was disappointing not to see such an excellent documentary in the best of circumstances.

The Judge tells the story of Kholoud Al-Faqih who was the first

woman appointed to a religious court in the Middle East. With the support of a progressive Sheik, Kholoud was appointed to a Palestinian Shari'a court on the West Bank. The film follows her life in and out of the court, showing her tenacious ability to maintain her position despite attempts to marginalise and demote her. She asserts her right to equality and redefines how Shari'a law perceives, treats and respects women. It is a fascinating view not only into the law, but of the domestic life of a strong woman in a modern Islamic world.

The Judge will also be shown in Melbourne on 9th August 7-9pm see previously.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- **AGM** will be 6.30pm Wednesday, 16th October at the Balmain Uniting Church, 344 Darling Street
- **Annual Lunch** will be at the new Bamiyan Restaurant, Great North Road Five Dock in late November. Details will be sent later.



Guests at the dinner above and one of the many cheerful staff who looked after us.