

# Karen Culture Presentation

- Introduction



# Karen Culture Presentation

- Brief history of Burma/Myanmar
- Civil war in Burma/Myanmar
- Who are Karen/Pwa K' yaw
- Karen Language
- Karen traditional clothing
- Marriage
- The traditional festivals & social life
- Refugee/IDP Camp
- Karen refugee resettlement
- Karen culture- Do's & Don't
- Question & answer



# Karen Culture Presentation

Practice Karen language;

Good morning!-Ghaw ler ergay!

My name is –yer me mayh\_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you!-Ta Blu!



# Burma/Myanmar



# Brief history of Burma/Myanmar

- Burmese ethnic group 60% of the population, 40% of land.
- Burmese dominate the government and economy.
- British colonized Burma in 1886 and throughout WWII
- During WWII, Karen aligned with British and Burma's with Japanese
- When British were negotiating independence after WWII, Karen advocate for independence from Burma and for their own land.
- However, British's promise to consider the cases of the Karen went unacknowledged upon Burma's independence in 1948



# Brief history of Burma/Myanmar

- For a brief period after independence, Karen attempted to live peacefully with the Burman majority,
- Some Karen even held government and army position of leadership
- However in 1948 the Burmese Government sponsored political militias known as “Sitwunda” separate from the regular military,
- In January 1949, Some Sitwunda attack Karen villages, and later the Army Chief of staff general Smith Dun (a Karen) was removed from his position and imprisoned.



# Brief history of Burma/Myanmar

- Karen National defense organization (KNDO) fought to protect communities.
- Any attempts at negotiations among the ethnic groups were destroyed by assassination and military oppression.
- Major ethnic minorities engaged in conflict: Karenni, Karen, Arakanese, Chin, Kachin, Shan, and Mon.
- 1988 Protests: students, workers, and others launched nationwide protests calling for freedom and democracy.
- January 2012: The government signs a ceasefire with the Karen.



# Civil War



- “Four Cuts” policy; rather than targeting guerrillas, targets civilians who support them – cutting off access to food, funds, information and recruits
- Mix blood
- Forced porters, Forced labor/ labor camps, Beatings, rape, Human shields, Forced relocations, Executions, Land mine sweepers, Burning of villages and laying landmines.
- Military Rule 1962 – 2010

“In twenty years you will only be able to find Karen people in a museum” by Army General Shwe Maung.



# Executions

- Massacre on April 28th, 2002:



# Civil War

- Burning of villages



# Civil War



- Internal Displace Camp



# Civil War



- Internal Displace Camp



# Civil War



- Internal Displace School



# Torture/Abuse



- Forced porters



# Who are Karen?

- The Karen people are an ethnic group living in South-East Asia with their own distinct languages and culture.
- The Karen people are very diverse, with different ethnic and language sub-groups.
- Most Karen people practice Buddhism and Animism (spirit worship) Christian.



# Who are Karen?



- Karen sub-groups

- Skaw Karen unDpSDR or y>xH; (Largest group)

P'ku<sub>(yul)</sub> Bway (bSJ) Kei Ker (uJRcX.) Kei Bah (uJRbg) Moug Nay Pwa (rDReh>ySR)

- Pwo Karen ySd> or rd>xH;(second largest subgroup)

East Pwo Karen and West Pwo Karen



# Karen population and geography

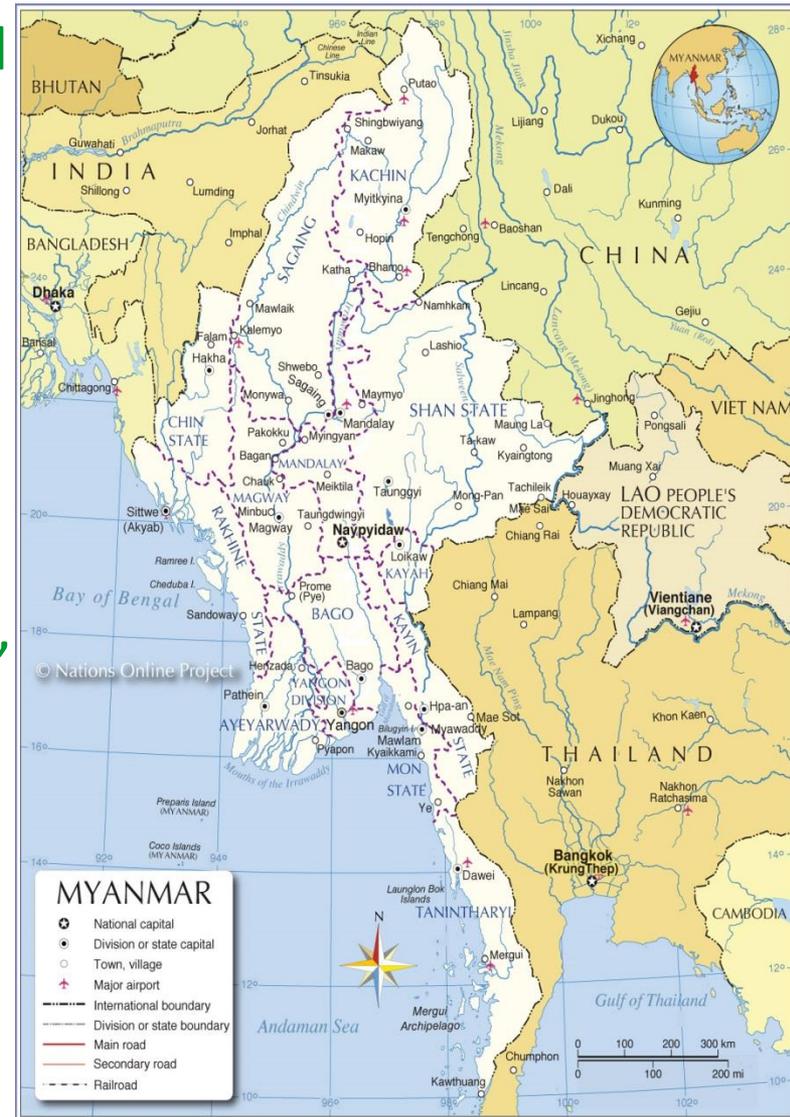
-Karen; Pronounced “Kah-Ren”, we call our self “Pwa Ka Nyaw or Kanyaw “

-Karen people live in southeast Asian, in Burma (Myanmar) and in Thailand.

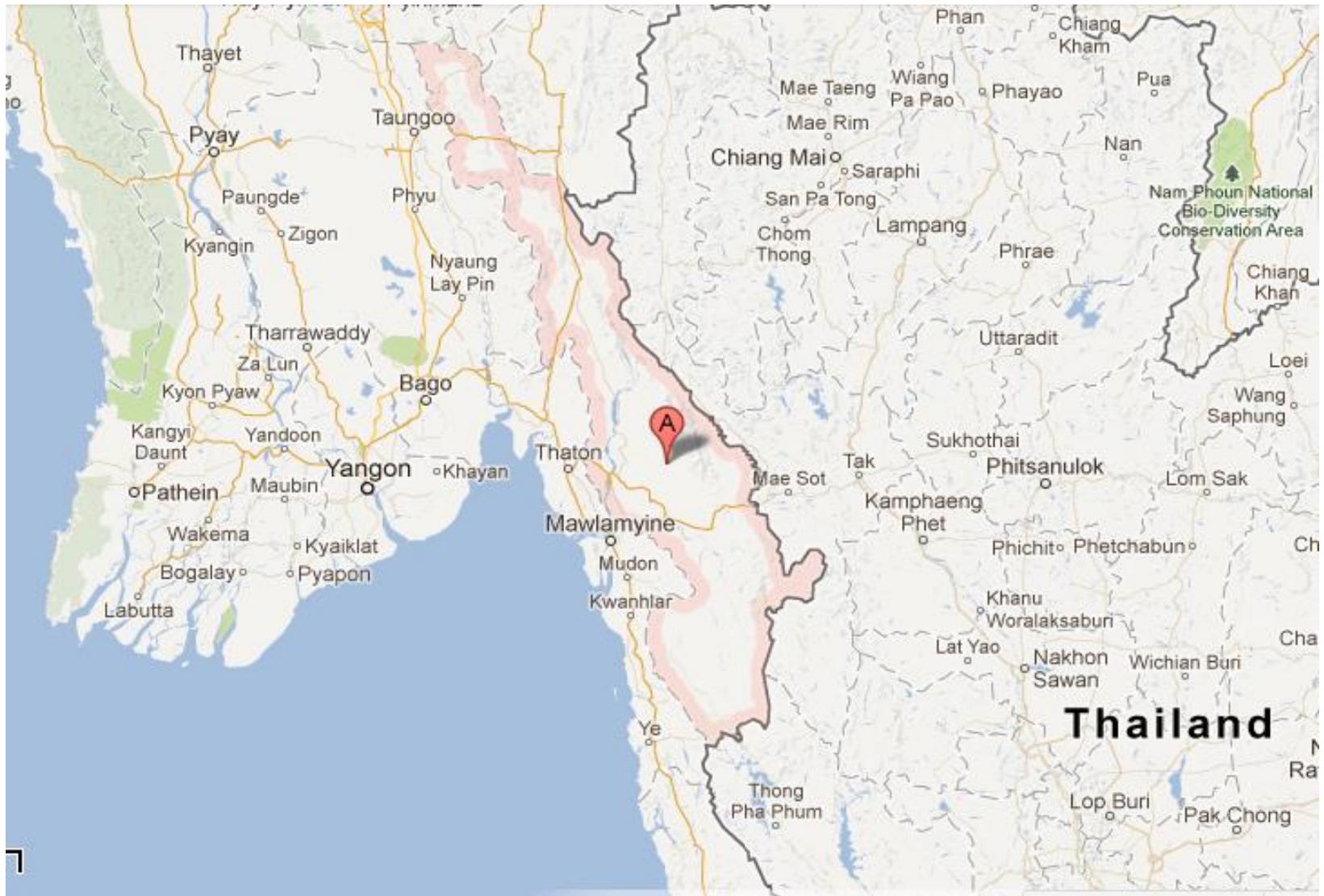
Karen population in Myanmar: 7-9 Million

-In Myanmar Karen people in Southeastern Myanmar or Karen state, Tavoy, Irrawaddy Delta, Pegu Division.

-In Thailand Karen people in Southern and eastern Thailand.



# Karen state/Kaw Thoo Lei



# Karen Language



## Drum Publication Group Transliteration of common, spoken Sgaw Karen to English

Consonants	
ဂ	g
ခ	k
င	gh
ဃ	hk
စ	ng
ဆ	s
ဟ	hs
ဌ	sh
ည	ny
တ	t
ထ	ht
ဒ	d
န	n
ပ	p
ဖ	hp
ဗ	b
မ	m
ယ	y
ရ	r
လ	l
ဝ	w
သ	th
ဟ	h
အ	(not written)
ဓ	ahh

Consonant Clusters	
ၼ	r
ခ့	ch
ဂ့	j
ၼ	l
ၼ	y
မ့	mw
ဟ့	hsg
မ့	hpw
မ့	sg
ပ့	pw
ဗ့	bw
ၼ	w
ၼ	gh
ၼ	di
ၼ	maw

Vowels	
ၼ	uh
ၼ	ah
ၼ	eh
ၼ	ay
ၼ	ee
ၼ	oo
ၼ	u
ၼ	oh
ၼ	aw
no vowel	a

Tones	
ၼ	<u>a</u>
ၼ	a
ၼ	ä
ၼ	à
ၼ	ā



# Karen Language



weHRtHRw>od.vdb.xGJ'D; ySRunD tw>qJ; w>vRvDR. ySR [h.w> od.vd w z.  
rh>0J; o7.zD'X., o7.rk.zD[Jqdph,o7. rk.pdySJRrl'D; o7.rk.rXpH.oD'.vDR.

w>od.vdwbsDtHRuuJxD.t8D>b.w>qD.xGJrRpXRtDRvX **Ramsey County**  
**Human Service Dept** 'D;b.w>wDcd.7dmrJtDRvX **Hmong American**  
**Partnership** eh.vDR.

pH;bsk;b.ySRud;8R'J;vXt[JxD.w>od.vdweHRtHRvDR.

w>bsk;



# Activity/Name

- Say your name in Karen language;
- ,rHRrh>pDR/eD>\_\_\_\_\_. Yer me mayh\_\_\_\_\_.



# Name



- Karen people traditionally have only one name; they do not have last names. Women do not change their name when they marry.
- Karen people use honorifics.
- Grandfather=Poo, Grandmother=Pee, Uncle=Tee, Aunt=Moogar, Father=Par, Mother=Mo, Old brother=Jaw, Sister=Noh, Younger brother=Day Kwar, Younger Sister =Day Moo, Nephew=Po doh Kwar, Niece=Po doh Moo, Son=Po Kwar, Daughter=Po Moo, Grandson=Le Kwar, Granddaughter=Le Moo
- “Saw” placed in front of the names of Skaw Karen males
- “ Naw” placed in front of the names of Skaw Karen females
- “Mahn, Sa” placed in front of the names of Pwo Karen married men, unmarried men.
- “Nant” placed in front of the names of Pwo Karen females.



# Name



- Addressing someone in this way does not necessarily mean they are related in any way. Nor does it necessarily infer friendliness or affection.
- Only parents or parent-in-laws are addressed as Par or Mor.
- Karen parents or grandparents are often called by the name of their oldest, child or grandchild, even by their partners. For example, Naw Paw Htoo's father might address his wife as Naw Paw Htoo Mor, or "Naw Paw Htoo's Mother".
- Karen in mountain villages may not record birthdays at all.
- Buddhist Karen may record their birthdays according to the Buddhist lunar calendar.
- Karen born in refugee camps will usually, (not always) have a birth certificate and have an accurate birth date that follows the Western calendar.



# Meanings of Some Common Karen Names

- Naw – Miss/Mrs.
- Saw – Mr.
- Pah-Mr. (Male)
- Mu – woman(F)
- Paw – flower
- Moo-A live
- Htoo – gold
- Hsar – Star
- Eh – Love
- K'nyaw – Karen
- Gay – Good/Nice
- K'paw – light
- Lah – moon



# Karen Traditional Clothing

- Married Karen women wear a sarong and sleeveless shirt

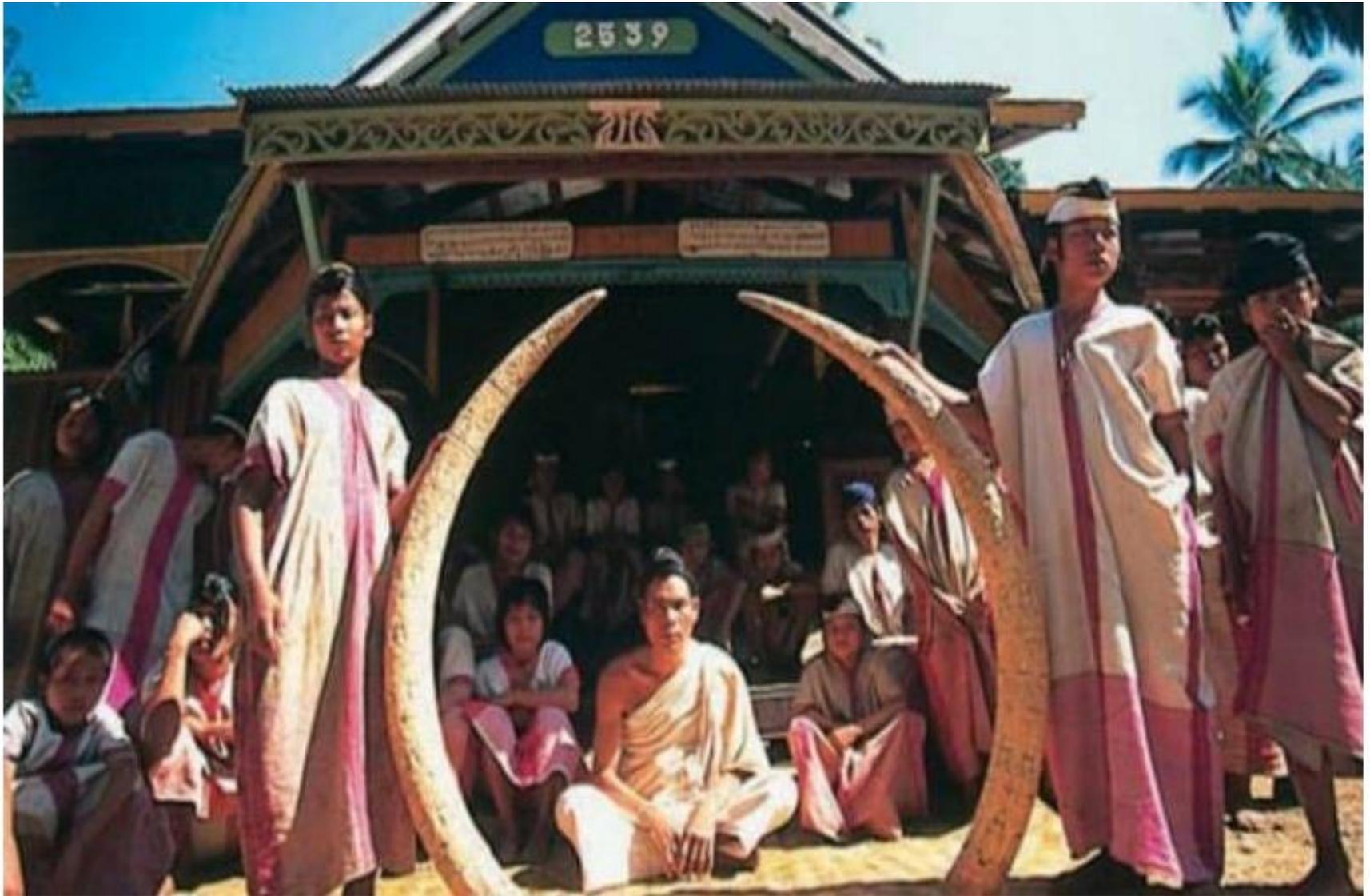


# Karen Traditional Clothing

- Karen men wear a sarong and a sleeveless shirt/



# Karen Traditional Clothing



# Karen Traditional Clothing

- Unmarried women wear a long white or black or blue dress.



# Karen Traditional Clothing

## Modern clothing



# Karen Traditional Clothing

- Clothing



# Karen Traditional Clothing

- Males and females tie their sarongs in different ways.
- The design of male shirts and sarongs are different to female shirts and sarongs
- Different Karen sub-groups have different designs for their clothing, but all follow the same basic pattern. Different sub-groups also have different designs for their shoulder bags and scarf.



# Marriage

- Wedding ceremonies depend on the religion they practice.
- Traditionally, some marriages are arranged or proposed by male's parent.
- After marriage, a husband will come live with his wife and her parents.
- Males and females typically will not live together before marriage but this value is changing with time
- Although it is rare, when divorce occurs, the children will stay with their mother.
- Woman or man with children are consider married even though without spouse.
- Men are honored in the home; however the women opinion is also well-respected.
- Woman controls financial.



# Marriage

- Wedding ceremony,



# Marriage



- Wedding ceremony,





- Harvest, boxing/wrestling, marriage party, wrist tying
- Karen national holiday: New Years, Wrist tying, Martyr day, KNU day, KNDO day, Independent day,
- Buddhist Karen; Water festival, New Year,
- Christian Karen; New Year, Christmas, caroling trips from village to village, thanksgiving.
- Karen people like to visit each other, No invitation is necessary.
- Hospitality is important.
- Anyone is welcomed to the home.



# General etiquette



- Confrontation is avoided and problems are addressed in a group or by intermediary.
- They may not directly inform you if their needs are not being met or if they disagree.
- Men and women don't traditionally touch in public
- Women are very affectionate with each other, as are men with men.
- Such displays of affection do not indicate gender preferences
- Making and sticking to strict schedule is a difficult adjustment for many.
- Making long range plan and setting goals is a rather new concept for most.



# Karen Culture- Do and Don't

- Do take your shoes off before going inside a Karen home, even if you are told it is okay to leave your shoes on.
- Do not refer to the Karen as Burmese. When referring to multiple ethnic groups, use “refugees from Burma” rather than “Burmese refugees.”
- Do shake hands. Do not hug or kiss a Karen.
- When talking with Karen who does not speak English well, speak clearly and slowly, and check that the information is understood.
- When walk by someone bow your head to be lower than others.



# Karen Culture- Do and Don't

- One should avoid walking in front of those who are seated.
- One should walk behind them or ask permission first.
- Normally Karen walk behind those who are elder.
- Direct contact elderly is sometimes not consider polite
- Folding arm when talking to another is a sign of respect.
- Self-promotion is considered shameful.
- Pointing with the feet touching the head of someone is disrespectful.
- When handing something it is respectful to use two hands
- Avoid touching any adult on the head, as it is considered sacred.
- Do not go into the bedroom or kitchen of a Karen home unless you are specifically invited.

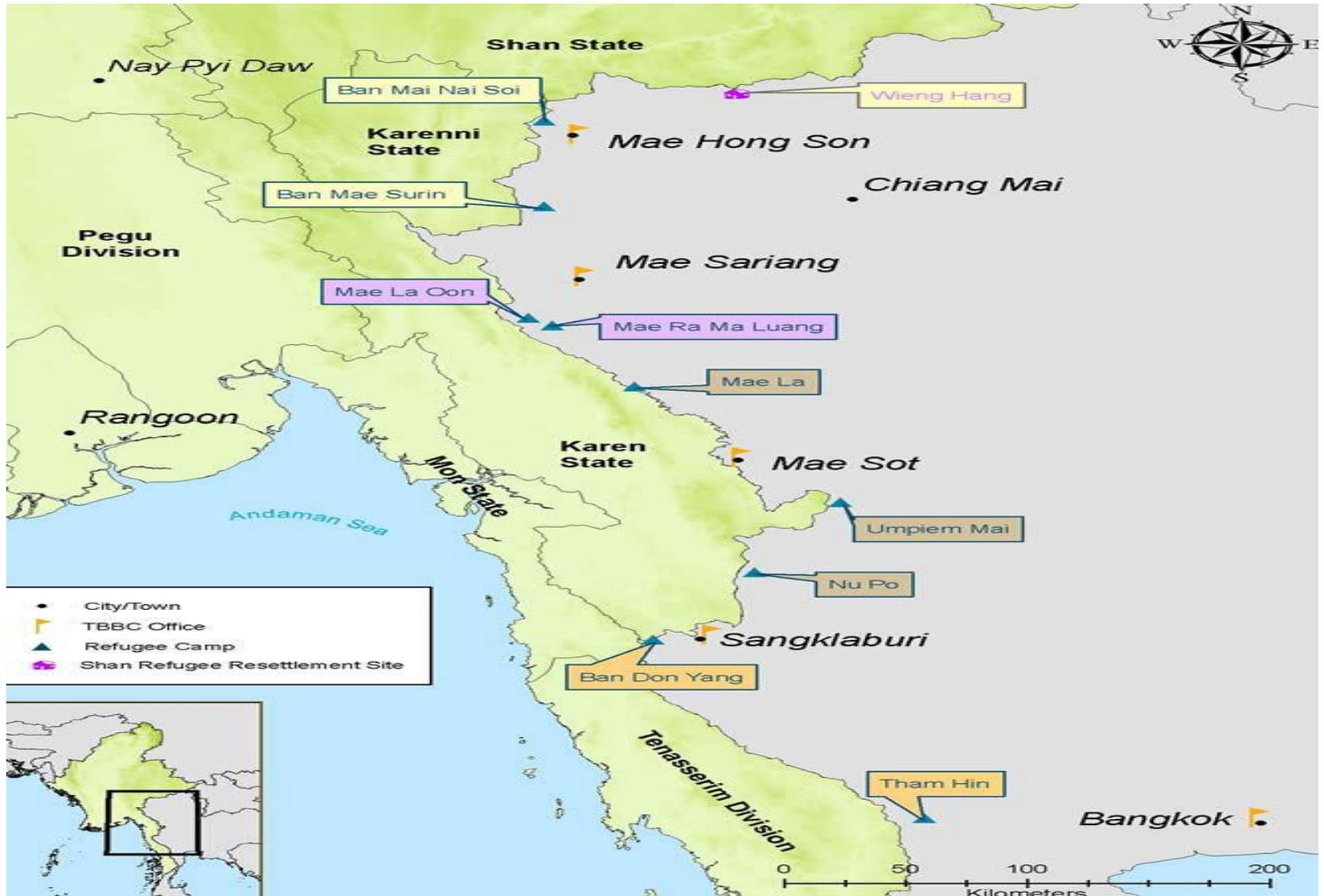


# Karen Culture- Do and Don't

- Parents or elderly eat first (foods will be reserved if parents/elderly is not present at the meal time).
- Communication is indirect.
- “The bigger issue, make it smaller, and the smaller issue, make it disappear.”
- Someone who smiles, nods and just says “Yes” may not understand what you are talking about but be too polite to say so.
- Do learn to speak at least some Karen phrases. It's nice for an icebreaker



# Refugee Camp



# Refugee Camp Populations: March 2017

Refugee Camps	Number of Refugee
Mae La Oon	9,136
Mae Ra Ma Luang	10,045
Mae La	37,930
Umpiem Mai	10,885
Nu Po	11,090
Ban Don Yang	2,767
Tham Hin	6,220



# Refugee Camp

- 9 camps along the Thai-Burma border
- Restricted movement from the camps
- Run by refugees themselves.
- Foods provided by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

## Monthly Food Rations;

- Rice, Flour, Fish Paste, Salt, beans, Cooking Oil, Dried Chilies



# Life in Refugee Camp



# Life in Refugee Camp



# Life in Refugee Camp



# Life in Refugee Camp



- School



# Life in Refugee Camp

- School



# Karen Refugee Resettlement

- There are more than 40,000 Karen refugees in 41 states. And between 6000 to 10000 Karen Live in Minnesota.



# Karen Refugee Resettlement

- Successes;
- -Education (about 200 high school graduates each year)
- -Homeowner
- -Business owner (8 grocery stores, one restaurant and interpreter agency.
- -Employment (police,spps,sppl,RC,nurse,manager or assistance manager)



# Resettlement Challenges

- Language barrier, Western culture, urban life.
- Stress of paperwork.
- Mistrust of police.
- Unfamiliar with laws on driving, hunting/fishing.
- Alcohol abuse.
- Domestic violence.
- Transportation.
- Interpretation.
- Job (job training, vocational training)
- Health.
- Housing.
- No formal education in U.S.



# Karen Culture Pentation



# Karen Culture Presentation

## **Contact information;**

### ***Ge Yang***

Program Manager/Data Manager

Direct: 651-495-1512

Email: [gey@hmong.org](mailto:gey@hmong.org)

### ***SoBwe Moo***

Employment Counselor

Direct: 651-495-1542

Email: [bwem@hmong.org](mailto:bwem@hmong.org)

### ***Mercy Thawda***

Employment Counselor

Direct: 651-495-1549

Email: [mercyt@hmong.org](mailto:mercyt@hmong.org)

### ***Paw Htoo***

Employment Specialist

Direct: 651-495-1530

Email: [pawh@hmong.org](mailto:pawh@hmong.org)

### ***Paw Haesoe Say***

Employment Counselor

Direct: 651-495-1548

Email: [pawhaes@hmong.org](mailto:pawhaes@hmong.org)

