

## **Relevant Cultural Information**

### **Karen People - Quick facts**

- \*The Karen people (pronounced Kah- Ren) 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 practise Buddhism and Animism (spirit worship) but about 15% are Christian
- \*There are between six and seven million Karen people living in Burma (Myanmar), and about 300,000 “Thai-Karen” living in Thailand
- \*More than 140,000 Burmese Karen refugees have fled to Thailand to escape war and human rights abuses
- \*The Karen people in Burma have been fighting a sixty-year civil war against the Burmese military regime for autonomy and cultural rights
- \*Between 2005 and 2011 almost seventy thousand refugees from Thailand, most of them Karen, were resettled in third countries including America, Canada and Australia

### **Karen Festivals**

#### **Karen New Year**

The Karen New Year is based on the full moon and is held on the first day of the month of Pyathoe in the Buddhist Lunar Calendar (in December or January in the Western calendar). Karen New Year celebrations include singing, bamboo dances, speeches, and eating sticky rice and fried chicken.

#### **Revolution Day**

Karen Revolution Day commemorates the beginning of the Karen uprising on 31 January 1949. At KNLA bases inside Burma military parades are held at dawn, followed by speeches and traditional Karen dancing.

#### **Buddhist New Year**

The Buddhist New Year (also known as the Water Festival or *Thingyan*) is shared by all Buddhists in Burma. For one week Karen villagers will throw water at each other, go to each other's houses to eat and drink, and if they are Buddhist, go to monasteries as well.

#### **Wrist Tying**

An annual wrist tying ceremony called Lar Ko Kee Su is held in August each year. The festival includes singing, dancing and eating. Buddhist monks may chant a blessing and tie a white or yellow string around the wrists of people who visit them.

### **Our Students**

Most of our students have been born in Refugee camps. They will have had disrupted schooling. The families have come out on a Humanitarian visas. The families will be now permanent residents of Australia.

Find more information about the Karen at [www.karen.org.au/docs/Karen\\_people\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.karen.org.au/docs/Karen_people_booklet.pdf)