

# **Building A New Life**

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## **Burmese Refugees & Their Resettlement**

City School District of Albany  
Professional Development Fair

**March 27, 2010**

**Asian Languages BETAC (ALBETAC)**

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# Let's start with the name...

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- ❑ What's your first name and last name?
  - ❑ What does your name mean to you?
  - ❑ Understanding the Burmese name
    - There are no last names.
    - The day of the week is embedded in a person's name.
    - Salutation is often embedded in a person's name as well.
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# Common Burmese Names

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- ❑ Khin Sann Myint (female)
  - ❑ Maung Sann Myint (male)
  - ❑ MaThan Nu (female)
  - ❑ Ko Than Nu (male)
  - ❑ Salutation denotes age in addressing a person
    - Ma, Khin, Daw
    - Maung, Ko, U.
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# Workshop Content

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- ❑ Who is a refugee?
  - ❑ Resettlement : a new homeland
  - ❑ Burmese refugees in the United States  
e.g. Kayins (Karens), Kayinnis (Red Karens-Kayahs)
  - ❑ Experiences before coming to the United States
  - ❑ Burmese refugee -- problems & issues faced in a new homeland
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# Who is a refugee?

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According to **Article One of the 1951 Geneva Convention**, a refugee is a person who:

- ❑ is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence;
  - ❑ has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion;
  - ❑ and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there for fear of prosecution.
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# Refugees in the United States

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- The U.S. has received nearly 3 million resettled refugees since 1975.
    - **Vietnamese in the 70's – 80's**
    - **Russians after the end of the Cold War**
  - The new resettlement program began to offer resettlement to over 50 nationalities per year & Burmese are the newest refugees to arrive in the US.
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# Map of Myanmar



Administrative Divisions and States in Myanmar

# Geographical Facts of Myanmar (Burma)

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- ❑ Population: 50 million
  - ❑ Bordering countries: Bangladesh, China, India, Laos, Thailand
  - ❑ Total Area: 678,500 sq km
  - ❑ Capital City: Naypyidaw since 2005  
(The old capital city Yangon is still the most prominent city of commerce.)
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# From Burma to Myanmar

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- ❑ Burma became independent from the United Kingdom in 1948, as the "*Union of Burma*".
  - ❑ In 1962 a coup took place and in 1988 a second coup took place. The current Head of State is Senior General Than Shwe.
  - ❑ In 1989, the military government is named SPDC.
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# Ethnic & Language Composition of Myanmar

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- ❑ There are (135) ethnic groups.
- ❑ 8 major ethnic groups are officially recognized

Bamar ( Burmese)	68%
Shan	10%
Kayin(Karen), Kayah(Kayinni)	7%
Rakhine	4%
Mon	2%
Kachin & Chin	4%
Overseas Chinese	3%
Overseas Indian	2%

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# Myanmar Refugees

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- ❑ Since the 1988 political upheaval, Myanmar is undergoing an unsettled period .
  - ❑ Many people from Myanmar (especially the Eastern part of the country) have crossed over the border into Thailand .
  - ❑ Over a 150,000 refugees from Myanmar are still believed to be in the camps in Thailand.
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# Who are the Myanmar Refugees ?

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- Many are from the different ethnic groups Kachin , Chin ,Kayin (Karen), Kayinni (Kayah) and Mon.
  - Kayin (Karens), Kayinni (Kayahs) are the largest ethnic groups to be resettled in the United States.
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# Myanmar Refugees in the U.S.

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- The International Organization for Migration recently issued information regarding Myanmar in the refugee camps as follows:
    - from 2004 – 2008, the United States has resettled over 64,000 refugees from Myanmar;
    - in 2008, the United States offered to resettle as many as 50,000 refugees.
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# The New Immigrants in the United States

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- Except for Alaska, Myanmar refugees have resettled all over the United States.
  - Karens are the largest group among the refugees .
    - In Bakersfield, California, there are about 20,000 Karens.
    - Approximately 4,000 Karens are in St Paul, Minnesota and Fort Wayne, Indiana.
    - Approximately 3,500 Karens are in Atlanta, Georgia, and Chapel Hill, South Carolina.
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# The Top 5 States Receiving Burmese Refugees (2008)

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STATE	Refugee Arrivals	Amerasian Arrivals	Total Arrivals	% Arrivals to U.S
California	9,472	8	9,480	15.75%
Texas	5,113	17	5,130	8.52%
New York	3,628	3	3,631	6.03%
Michigan	3,292	6	3,298	5.48%
Arizona	3,005	0	3,005	4.99%

*Source : Dept . of State , Bureau of Population , Refugees & Migration , Refugee Processing Center*

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# Proposed Refugee Admissions by Region (2010)

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**17,000**

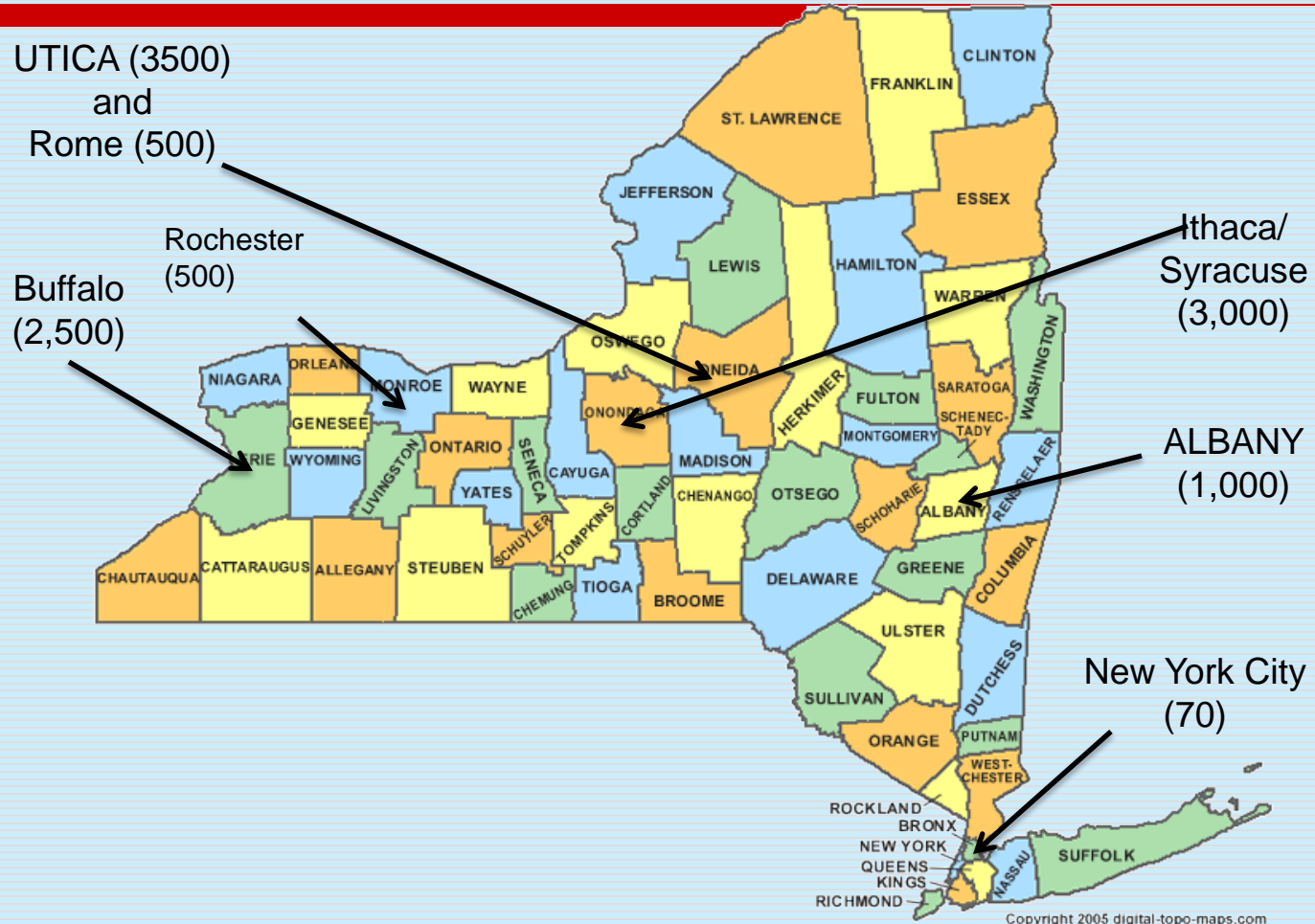
**East Asia (Including Burma, Cambodia,  
Laos , Thailand)**

*Source : U.S Dept of State, U.S Dept of Homeland Security , & U.S  
Dept of Health & Human Services*

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# Karen Refugees in New York State



# Issues & Problems Faced in New Homeland

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- ❑ Resettlement is a long & complicated process.
  - ❑ Resettlement changes life.
  - ❑ Refugees, upon arrival in new homeland, immediately face cultural adjustment and changing roles.
  - ❑ Resettlement agencies help with housing, employment, health care, education, money management, but cultural shock & stress is immense.
  - ❑ Family, sibling separation and adapting to a new environment and culture.
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# Issues Faced by the Karen/Red Karen Speaking Refugees

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## Similar to other immigrant groups

- ❑ Language difficulties
  - ❑ Generation gap in terms of acculturation
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# Issues Faced by the Karen/Red Karen Speaking Refugees

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## Unique issues

- ❑ May have ethnic conflicts within the same language group
  - ❑ Diaspora and breakup of the traditional nuclear families
  - ❑ Low literacy level in the Karen/Red Karen language
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# Ethnic Cultural Tips & Trends

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- ❑ Losing one's temper in front of others is a serious matter to be avoided at all costs. A loss of control means a loss of respect of the community.
  - ❑ There are no secrets in village life and a village mentality is likely to have transferred to the U.S. Expect anything anyone does or says to be known.
  - ❑ Sharing and hospitality in the tribal culture is a tradition.
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# Ethnic Cultural Tips & Trends

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- ❑ Do not step over anything or anybody.
  - ❑ Do not pass things over another person sitting on the floor, including any part of the body.
  - ❑ Avoid walking in front of any person even in meetings and homes. If you have to walk in front, the head is lowered and the right hand is extended to make a path. Say excuse me.
  - ❑ Do not walk between two talking people. To do so means to have walked in front of the faces of everyone .
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# More Tips On Ethnic Culture

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- ❑ The right hand is used to give things.
  - ❑ Public display of affection is frowned upon. Married couples also do not display signs of affection.
  - ❑ Relationship between people is considered more important than time. Making and sticking to schedule is difficult.
  - ❑ Life is taken as it happens. Making long range plans and setting goals are new aspects and concepts.
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# U.S. Education & Burmese Refugees

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- Karen/ Red Karen refugees do find U.S. education bewildering e.g. compulsory education and strict attendance
  - Adults and language communication problems, issues – parental involvement in education
  - Most hard hitting is the new relationship between parents/elders and children
    - Children as interpreters for adults
    - Interdependent yet challenging relationships
  - Cultural differences- food , beliefs are widened
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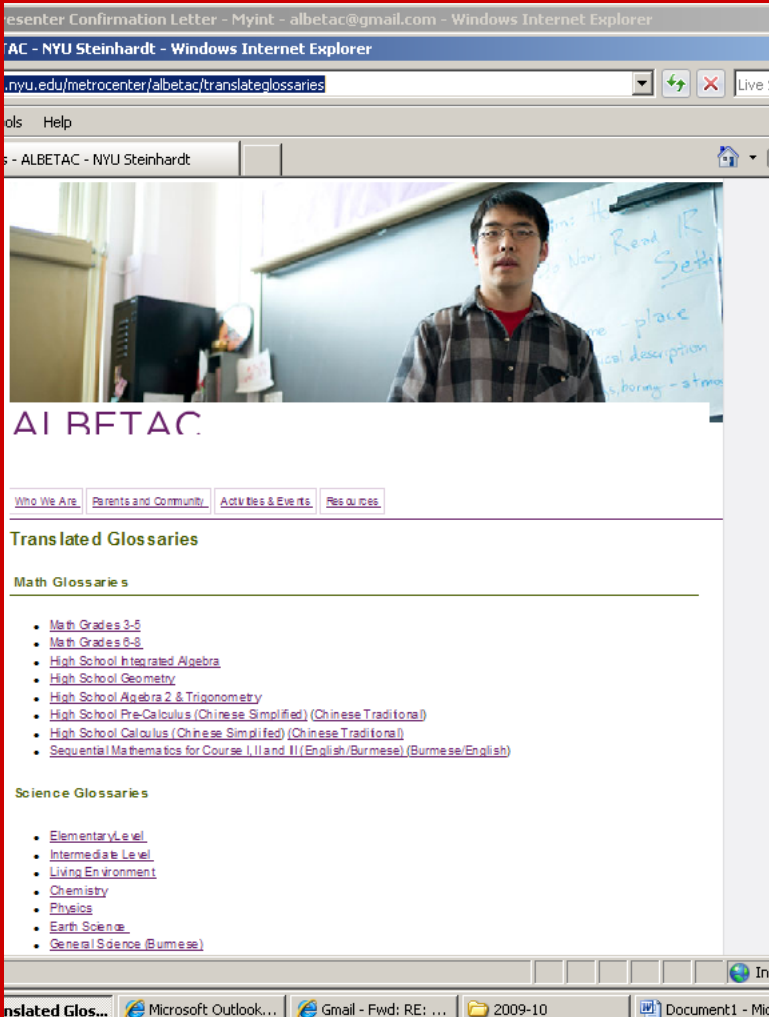
# ALBETAC Resources

## □ Glossary translation

<http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/albetac/translateglossaries>

## □ Contact us

[ALBETAC@gmail.com](mailto:ALBETAC@gmail.com)



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[steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/albetac/translateglossaries](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/albetac/translateglossaries)

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**Translated Glossaries**

**Math Glossaries**

- [Math Grades 3-5](#)
- [Math Grades 6-8](#)
- [High School Integrated Algebra](#)
- [High School Geometry](#)
- [High School Algebra 2 & Trigonometry](#)
- [High School Pre-Calculus \(Chinese Simplified\) \(Chinese Traditional\)](#)
- [High School Calculus \(Chinese Simplified\) \(Chinese Traditional\)](#)
- [Sequential Mathematics for Course I, II and III \(English/Burmese\) \(Burmese/English\)](#)

**Science Glossaries**

- [Elementary Level](#)
- [Intermediate Level](#)
- [Living Environment](#)
- [Chemistry](#)
- [Physics](#)
- [Earth Science](#)
- [General Science \(Burmese\)](#)

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