



Building a new society for Karenni

# KSDC NEWSLETTER

June 2016

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“The vision of the Social Development Center is to promote the lives of the people who have suffered human rights abuses, to teach non-violent skills to build up a new society, to develop the rule of law, to value human dignity and to protect the environment”



## About SDC

by **Aung Sun Myint**

SDC is located in Karenni Refugee Camp 1 on the Thai - Myanmar border. It was founded in 2002 by three alumni of EarthRights School Burma (ERSB).

The ERSB Alumni had learnt about Democracy, Law and the Environment. They wanted young people in their community to be able to study these subjects, so they founded SDC.

SDC has produced over 200 human rights and environmental activists since its formation. Our coordinator and co-founder Aung Sun Myint continues to work with our team to realize the vision he set out with his fellow ERSB alumni in 2002.

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## This month at SDC



by **Principal Myar Reh**

June has been an eventful month at SDC. Both our Basic and Advanced courses are now in full swing and our students are working very hard, enjoying learning about Human Rights and improving their English.

There has also been much cause for celebration. We held a Freshers' Welcome Ceremony for the 52 new students on the Basic Course at the beginning of the month, and we recently took part in the World Refugee Day and the Karenni National Day festivities with many others in our community.

I am very excited to announce that we are about to publish our long-awaited report on land confiscation in Karenni State. We began the research for this in 2015 and interviewed many villagers whose land has been unjustly confiscated by the Burmese military. Our report includes direct testimonies and recommendations on how we think the situation could be improved. A copy will be available on our website soon, and we hope that you will read and share it with others.

In this newsletter, there are articles by the students on the World Refugee Day and Karenni National Day celebrations, as well as a reflection by our new volunteer Emma on her first month teaching at SDC. We hope you enjoy it!

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## Photos of activities at SDC over the last month



*Advanced Course students receive their new t-shirts*



*Afternoon activity: coconut leaf hat making*



*Students practice their leadership and management skills in a fun way*



*Principal Myar Reh welcomes the new Basic Course students*



*The fashion show king and queen, selected by the audience*



*Students prepare food for the welcome party*



*Performing traditional Karenni dancing at the opening ceremony*

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## World Refugee Day Celebrations

by **Khoon Lap Pleh, Sor Reh, Shar Reh and Darja Markek**

On 4<sup>th</sup> December 2000 the United Nations declared that from 2001, 20<sup>th</sup> June of every year would be celebrated as World Refugee Day. It's a day to draw public attention to and stand in solidarity with displaced peoples across the globe. The UN Refugee Agency states that every minute, 24 people leave their homes to escape war, persecution and terror, and their figures show that there are currently over 65 million displaced people in the world, the highest number since WWII. There are nine refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border and all of them had their own World Refugee Day celebrations.



*The Advanced Course students take a fun photo to celebrate World Refugee Day*

Every year, the Karenni people living in Karenni Refugee Camp (1) celebrate World Refugee Day on 20<sup>th</sup> June. Many different groups live in the camp, including Kayah, Kayen, Kayoh, and Manu, Manoh and Prem.

This year, many Karenni people and organisations, including KSDC, took part in a march for World Refugee Day. After this, many different ethnic groups showed their traditional dances on the stage. The UNHCR also organized a competition for students in the camp to submit poems, essays and art on their hopes and dreams for the future. We were very proud that one of our Advanced Course students won the third prize for his painting!

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Leaders from the UNHCR, the Thai authorities, Karenni groups and NGOs attended and gave speeches. Many NGOs organized fun games that the students could play in order to celebrate. The atmosphere was very fun and we were very happy because we could show our unity with others living in the camp, and the other displaced people all over the world.



*Preparing to go on the march, despite the rain*



*The march has begun!*



*Students wait to see traditional dance performances*

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# Anniversary Celebrations

by **Khoon Lap Pleh, Sor Reh and Shar Reh**



*Happy attendees: the celebrations begin*

On Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 700 – 800 people, including students, Karenni organisations, and public figures celebrated the 141<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Karenni National Day on NyaMo Mountain. The journey up the mountain took more than 3 hours on foot, so we were very tired by the time we reached the top! The students danced and shared food to celebrate this day. Leaders from the Mon and Pa’O ethnic groups also attended the festival and spoke about how they were inspired by the Karenni people. The Karenni leaders gave speeches describing the history of the day, about the current political situation and to encourage the Karenni people and youth. We were very happy to hear from the leaders and take part in the celebrations. The Karenni National Day is important for preserving the culture of Karenni people and we hope that we can continue to celebrate it for many years.



*View from NyaMo Mountain*



*SDC students and trainers at the celebration*

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## SDC – First Impressions

by **Emma De Vynck**



After a brief skillful motorbike ride from Nai Soi village, we approached KSDC—my home for the next 6 months—a home I now share with 20 students, several staff, 2 foreign volunteers, several dogs, numerous geckos and lizards, an

endearing troupe of chickens, and a diversity of unknown insects that buzz and whir at all hours.

In my first days here, I have encountered the commitment and compassion of Karenni peoples of all ages engaged in profound community development activities. It is clear that I have entered a rich web of community engagement, activism, and support. This limited but burgeoning learning is continually informed by a patchwork of both brief exchanges and sprawling conversations with students, staff, and others I've met in my first week here.

KSDC's commitment to supporting and championing Karenni people through human rights education is a profound response to their complex and ever-unfolding story. Students share life with one another, cooking, cleaning, singing, and pursuing community development studies. There's also plenty of Burmese pop music and tasty Karenni food. I'm not quite sure what I've stepped into—but friendship and fun are of no shortage in this place. Many lives are being lived, within limitation, and beyond seeming boundaries.

