



Karen Organization of Minnesota

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The Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM) Announces Open House

Open House Scheduled for August 5, 2010: 4:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.

Saint Paul, MN – The Karen Organization of Minnesota (“KOM”) announces its open house, which will be held on August 5, 2010 from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at its office at 1394 Jackson Street in Saint Paul, Minnesota. KOM is opening its doors to the public, client, partners, and donors to introduce its services and to celebrate nearly one year of serving the Karen and other refugees from Burma living in Minnesota.

The Karen (pronounced Ka-REN) are an indigenous ethnic minority from the mountainous regions of Burma and Thailand, where they constitute the second largest ethnic group in each country. The Karen continue to be persecuted by the Burmese military junta, who have conducted acts of genocide against the Karen people in Burma and refugee camps in Thailand. Many Karen families who fled Burma and Thailand have resettled in St. Paul, Minnesota. Currently, St. Paul is home to one of the largest populations of Karen outside Southeast Asia. An estimated 4,000+ refugees from Burma have come to Minnesota, with an average of 700-800 resettling annually directly from Burma or moving from elsewhere in the United States.

KOM’s mission is to provide resettlement and adjustment services, and foster cultural knowledge and understanding for the Karen and Burmese refugees in Minnesota. The organization formed out of the Karen Community of Minnesota (“KCM”), which is a volunteer based community group housed at the First Baptist Church in downtown St. Paul. KOM received 501(c)(3) non-profit status in December of 2008.

Thanks to generous funding from the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Minnesota Department of Human Services Resettlement Program Office, KOM opened its doors for services on 1394 Jackson Street in St. Paul on October 1, 2009, in the heart of the Karen village (zip code 55117). The KOM staff provide employment, housing, safety, social and other integration services, such as civic participation, that are critical in the resettlement process.

The open house will provide a fun and informative introduction to the Karen and other refugee communities from Burma as well as KOM’s core services. The event will feature Karen dance performances, sports activities, colorful Karen bags and clothing for purchase, authentic Karen food, a presentation from the KOM’s new Executive Director and Board, and a film screening.

The open house will also honor KOM's staff and board members for their commitment to the organization and community. All are welcome!

"Come see who the Karen are and why they have so much to offer us here in America," said Chong Bee Vang, KOM Executive Director, inviting everyone to KOM's open house on August 5, 2010. **"Their family bonds and community support are remarkable. Their perseverance is truly amazing. Their will for freedom is what drives them for success. It is rare in this era to still see such group of people who still look out for the best interest of another and not just themselves. Their culture and values are priceless."**

"Come learn about Karen culture and KOM's services and involvement in the community!" said Wilfred Tunbaw, KOM Social Services Director.

"Since we are a new and small community, your support and partnership is such a warm feeling of welcome and inclusiveness into the American community," said Eh Taw Dwe, the Vice Chair of the KOM Board. **"You are cordially invited to come see the result of our struggle, the success and the fruit of your distribution and support. You have walked with us for many years and many miles to be here to celebrate the open house of the first Karen organization in Minnesota. Please know that you have deeply earned our respect and commitment to help you in your work, just as you help us."**

KOM's open house will follow a successful summer in obtaining a capacity building grant for organizational development from Blue Cross and Blue Sheild Foundation of Minnesota, as well as a grant in collaboration with Vietnamese Social Services and the Chinese Social Service Center from the Minnesota Department of Health's Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative to start a health program targeting Heart Disease, Stroke, as well as Breast and Cervical Cancer for the Karen and other refugees from Burma.

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