

**International Organization for Migration/Bangkok
Cultural Orientation Southeast Asia Program**

ANNEX 1: BURMESE MUSLIMS

The Burmese Muslims make up around 10-15% of the populations of Mae La, Umpiem, and Nupo camps. The Burmese Muslim population arriving in the US will likely make up more than their proportional share of the camp population, as they seem very eager to resettle.

This group of people may identify themselves as "Black Karen", "Karen Muslims", or simply as "Muslims". They are, in fact, not Karen at all; they identify themselves with the Karen only from having lived in Karen State prior to their fleeing to Thailand. Some speak only Burmese, some only Karen, some both, and some speak quite good English. A small percentage are Rohinjas, from Arakan State, and speak Rohinja.

This Muslim group is originally from India. They look like ethnic Indians, dark skinned, the men with beards, faces angular and sharp, unlike the smooth cheeked, soft-featured, light-skinned Karen. By occupation, most are traders with their own businesses. In the Thai camps, nearly all the commerce is carried out by the Muslims. They own most of the shops in camp. In the US, they will likely be looking to start their own businesses as soon as they are able to put together some capital. As traders, they are more city-based and have more experience with outsiders than do the Karen, who are mostly rural-based farmers.

In CO classes, we find that their questions can be quite sophisticated, their thinking more critical, and their approach much more forward than that of the rather passive Karen. We give a lesson on what attitudes one should have in dealing with one's resettlement agency - passive, aggressive, or pro-active. The Karen play the passive part very well; the Muslims the aggressive! As traders, they are good negotiators. They're generally very friendly and outgoing.

Like the Karen, the Muslims love to learn, but their education is more geared toward business interests than the Karen love of education for its own sake. Many are self-taught and men will have a higher education than the women.

The men tend to be very dominant and make all the decisions. Family roles are strictly defined and the men are not expected to cook, clean, or take care of the children. Their job is to bring in the money. Parenting methods are swift and physical; absolute obedience is demanded of the children. Control over the wife is equally physical - the norm, rather than the exception. In CO classes, the women are sometimes shouted down by the men should the women try to speak too much. Female CO trainers report that they are respected by the men as much as they are by the women if, indeed, they know what they're talking about. With the Karen, the teacher will have respect just for the fact of being a teacher.

In religion, they appear to be moderate, though questions about getting time off on Fridays for prayer have come up.

Their food is much more Indian than South-east Asian. Rice is still present in most meals, with various curries, but it is also possible to have a meal with bread (roti), unheard of amongst the Karen.