

Meet **MAY OO MATRAW**. May-Oo is a former refugee from Burma and a member of the Karen ethnic nationality. She fled Toungoo, her hometown in Burma, in 1988 after the military coup and came with her family to one of the refugee camps in Thailand, near the Burma-Thai border. She went on to high school there and eventually finished her schooling in one of Burma's liberated areas in a school run by the Karen Revolution. With her experience in the war-zones, struggling to survive the aggression of the Burmese military regime, as well as the malaria mosquitoes along the Burma-Thai border, May-Oo developed a strong interest in the fundamental affairs of her country and the people's health, education, and peace.

May-Oo came to the United States in 1993 under the United States' Refugees Resettlement Program and went to Bakersfield College in Bakersfield, California in 1994. In 1996, she interned with the Natural History Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Transferring to San Francisco State University in 1997 as a junior, she majored in Speech and Communications Studies.

1997, she was a volunteer in Las Mesas, Nicaragua's remote village, with the Nicaragua Center for Community Action, a California Bay Area based organization, and she volunteered in El Tablon and Estansia, El Salvador, with the Doctors for Global Health (DGH). She joined the Burmese government in exile based in Washington and New York and participated in the United Nations human rights conferences covering the UN Human Rights Commission, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Commission on the Status of Women – both in New York and Geneva. She headed the exile government's Women's Affairs Department until returning to law school in 2000.

She is currently undertaking a PhD in the Indiana University Maurer School of Law. Her doctoral thesis explores the constitutional design for a post-conflict state, after years of divisions and ethnic-based armed conflicts. May-Oo's broader research interests cover legal theories of sovereignty, inclusiveness, international human rights jurisprudence, federalism and constitutional law. She got her LL.M from Indiana University School of law with a thesis entitled Governance and Public Health Law: an analysis of public health law and malaria in Burma. Currently, she is also a fellow in the Center for Constitutional Democracy at Indiana University Maurer School of Law.

She was a Snyder Research Fellow at the Lauterpacht Research Center for International Law- University of Cambridge (England) in 2002. May-Oo's essay "Burma, democracy movement" appears in the *International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*, Immanuel Ness (ed.) by the Blackwell Publishing, 2009, summarizing the Burma's struggle for democratic change. Her writings appear both in Thailand-based Irrawaddy and Washington based Foreign Policy in Focus frequently.

May-Oo co-founded the Going Home Where We Belong Program in 2007 with the hope to gather Karen/Karenni refugees who have got themselves educated in their third countries such as the US and UK and organize activities where these people

participate to share their education to those who are far less privileged and still remaining in the conflict zone back home in Burma. She designs and teaches courses in local governance, public policy making, democracy, and human rights to the leaders of the Karen National Union at the brigade and district levels. Most recently, she has published a photography-documentary book entitled *Stories of Resilience and Hope: Reflecting on War, Ethnicity, and Liberation Struggle in Burma* (Blurb Publishing 2009).

Recently, May-Oo has initiated a community education center for the Burmese refugees who are resettled in Indianapolis with the aim to advocate, educate, and empower the Burmese refugee community as well as the greater Indianapolis and beyond. She is currently the president of the Burmese Community Center for Education, based in Indianapolis.

In addition to law and constitutionalism, May-Oo also studies film and photography, and she writes poems and stories, too. Some of her works are available on www.goinghomekarens.blogspot.com.