

Assembly Resolution No. 289

BY: M. of A. Buttenschon

**RECOGNIZING** August 2023, as Karen American Heritage Month

**WHEREAS**, This Legislative Body is justly proud to recognize August 2023, as Karen American Heritage Month; and

**WHEREAS**, The Karen are an ethnolinguistic group of Sino-Tibetan language-speaking ethnic groups; and

**WHEREAS**, These Karen groups reside primarily in Kayin State in the southern and southeastern portions of Myanmar; and

**WHEREAS**, In the late 20th Century, many Karen people were forced to flee to refugee camps along the Thai/Burma (Myanmar) border; and

**WHEREAS**, In 2007, about 150,000 refugees were already living in nine camps along the Thai/Burma border: Ban Don Yang, Ban Kwai/Nai Soi, Ban Mae Surin, Mae La, Mae La Oon, Mae Ra Ma Luang, Nu Po, Tham Hin and Umpiem Mai; and

**WHEREAS**, Some refugees have been in the camps for more than two decades; and

**WHEREAS**, Karen people make up 90 percent of residents in the refugee camps; the first wave of Karen refugees fled to Thailand in January of 1984; and

**WHEREAS**, Large numbers of refugees are now leaving the camps in Thailand because the Thai government is trying to shut them down; more people are also fleeing Burma, creating an overflow in the camps; and

**WHEREAS**, The Karen population throughout the world is estimated at about 3 million to 6 million; 70 percent are Theravada Buddhists, and 20 percent to 30 percent are Christian; they all value education; and

**WHEREAS**, By trade, they are farmers, weavers, basket makers, teachers, small traders, medics or traditional healers and religious leaders; and

**WHEREAS**, Like the Montagnards who helped United States soldiers during the Vietnam War, the Karen aided British troops against Japanese occupation during World War II; and

**WHEREAS**, Beginning in 2000, the Karen started resettling in the United States and Canada; and

**WHEREAS**, The State of Minnesota has the highest concentrated population of Karen people in America; other states with significant Karen populations include California, Texas, New York and Indiana; according to the Minnesota Karen Association, there were more than

17,000 Karen living in Minnesota in 2017; and

**WHEREAS,** The Karen peoples' two most important holidays are The Karen New Year which usually falls in December-January because the Karen people follow the lunar calendar, and The Karen Wrist Tying which is observed annually in August throughout the world; and

**WHEREAS,** They come together and celebrate Karen New Year and Karen Wrist Tying throughout the State of New York; for the past few years, they have celebrated their holiday in Albany, Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo; and

**WHEREAS,** Karen people enjoy meals which consists of rice, fish paste, vegetables, and sometimes meat; they also enjoy spicy food; and

**WHEREAS,** Karen throughout the United States attended rallies in Washington and New York to oppose the government oppression in Rangoon, Burma's largest city; and

**WHEREAS,** After a consultation conference on June 13, 2018, Karen Organization of the United States of America (KOUSA) and Karen American Organization (KAO) leaders explored the possibility of working together and merging the two organizations in order to improve operational effectiveness, increase cooperation, strengthen and acclimate Karen communities in the United States; and

**WHEREAS,** The leaders of the two groups agreed to merge and collaborate as one entity and became the Karen Organization of America in August of 2018, in Omaha, Nebraska; and

**WHEREAS,** Today, the Karen Organization of America offers extensive resources and support to help the refugees survive and thrive in a new land; their mission is to maintain Karen history, keep Karen traditions alive, and help bring Karen people together from all around the world; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED,** That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to recognize August 2023, as Karen American Heritage Month; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Karen Organization of America.