

## Kimberley signs on to refugee protection



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Friday, May 10, the East Kootenay Friends of Burma was proud to meet with Mayor Ron McRae and celebrate the statement made by the city that Kimberley is proud to protect our refugees.

Kimberley and Cranbrook are the first cities to proclaim that they are proud to protect refugees through the Canadian Council for Refugees' initiative to fight against the negative propaganda against immigrants from other countries.

Shauna Jimenez, a director of the East Kootenay Friends of Burma, said she is proud of the involvement of both Kimberley and Cranbrook.

"The most important thing about both towns is that the citizens are so committed and so helpful and compassionate towards helping refugees and they have been for 30 years and they continue to be," Jimenez said.

Hay Tha Htoo, Hay Tha Sher, Hser Bri and Ku Gay also met with the Mayor at Lindsay Park Elementary, with one of the school's classrooms. They are members of a refugee family that came from Burma with the help East Kootenay Friends of Burma.

Shauna Jimenez cleared up some of the confusion around immigrants and refugees.

She explained that the difference is that immigrants are people who choose to move countries for any reasons from being with their family or financial reasons whereas refugees are people who could be persecute or killed if they stay in their country of origin.

"So Friends of Burma will keep trying to do what we can in Kimberley and Cranbrook for our small percentage of that population," Jimenez said.

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The East Kootenay Friends of Burma has helped resettle Karen people from Burma (Myanmar) to Kimberley. She said that despite what people might think about the country, that there are still problems within the country's system.

"On a scale of one to 10 for democracy, Burma is on the way to one," she said. "So it still has a long way to go."

The Karen group of people in Burma is not the only one being attacked and murdered there. Jimenez said that the Chin and Kachin people groups are also being persecuted.

The Friends of Burma has expanded, with groups in Creston, Fernie and Nelson and three groups in Calgary.

Jimenez says that the group is always looking for more volunteers: people that can help with all kinds of jobs, from spending time with them and helping with the English, to helping them with tasks like going to the doctor.

The statement made by the City of Kimberley that the city is proud to protect refugees is a step forward not only for Kimberley itself, but also for the East Kootenay Friends of Burma and the Canadian Council of refugees, Jimenez said.

With this new step forward, the volunteers of the Friends of Burma will continue to volunteer their time to do their part in bringing people around the world to Canada.

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