

The meaning and history of Karen New Year



The Karen New Year is a relatively recent celebration – it was first celebrated in 1938.

Karen New Year is celebrated on the first day of the month of Pyathoe, in the Karen calendar.

The month of Pyathoe is special for Karen cultural solidarity, for the following reasons:

- Although Karens have different names for Pyathoe (Skaw Karens call it *Th'lay* and Pwo Karens call it *Htike Kauk Po*) the first of each of these months falls on exactly the same date.

- The rice harvest is completed in the period leading to Pyathoe, and according to Karen traditional religious practice, there must be a celebration for consumption of the new crop. It is also the time to divine the date for commencement of the next crop. Typically, this is also when new houses are constructed, and the completion of these must be celebrated.

- The first day of Pyathoe is not a distinct festival for any religious group, so it is a day that is acceptable to Karen people of all religions.

Karen New Year is celebrated throughout Burma, in refugee camps and Karen villages in Thailand, and Karen refugee communities around the world.

In Karen State Karen New Year celebrations are sometimes harassed by the military government, or disrupted by fighting.

Karen New Year celebrations typically include *Don* dances and bamboo dances, singing, speeches, and the consumption of lots of food and alcohol.