

## People's brings humanity to shelves

By **MAGGIE YOUNG**  
The Beacon

Haunting images of young lives engulfed in poverty and violence now stare back at customers as they wander through the Ocean Beach People's Organic Food Market, 4765 Voltaire St.

Seven black and white photographs taken by teenage Burmese refugees hang on a wall upstairs in the deli through Jan. 6. The pictures are part of an educational program sponsored by the AjA Project, a local nonprofit organization.

The photographers documented their lives in refugee camps and the hardships they face as part of the 100,000 Karen people hiding from the Burmese military in the hills of Thailand.

One of the exhibit's objectives is to raise public awareness about the civil war in Burma, according to AjA Project executive director Warren Ogden.

"The daily reality that results from these civil wars are really located in the experiences of the people who are living through the events," Ogden said. "These pictures provide an opportunity for a glimpse of their experiences, their lives."

The tragedy in Burma is important to local people because we are all part of the human family, said Nancy Casady, People's general manager.

"It is important to reinforce people's understanding that we are all interconnected," Casady said.

This exhibit is the part of the market's new effort to bring art to its customers.

The co-op celebrated its grand opening at the end of September after moving



**Fourteen-year-old photographer Gustavo Angel Baron Cruz writes that this photograph shows a kitchen like the one he had as a boy, before it was destroyed by a bomb. The photo is part of an exhibit at People's co-op of photos by teenage Burmese refugees.**

into a new building twice the size of the old location, Casady said. The increased capacity provides ample gallery space that will be utilized to display work from local artists and to create a sense of community.

"I think it is really important that people have art in their lives," Casady said. "That they realize experiencing beautiful things is a part of what it means to be human."

The AjA Project photography is the second exhibit to be displayed at the market. Two local painters, Amy Peck and Velma Gay received a great deal of feedback from customers last month when their work was displayed.

"It was provocative, that's what I think good art should be," Casady said.

A committee of volunteers from the staff and community will choose new shows for the market every three to four months, Casady said. They hope to display a broad range of styles and mediums that reflect the co-op's mission and vision in order to stimulate every customer's mind.

"It's healthy when people have new thinking," Casady said. "It's very good to have new thinking, and points of view and to recognize our differences. It is what keeps us alive."

For more information on Project AjA log on to [www.ajaproject.org](http://www.ajaproject.org).

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