

Relief Mission Cut Short by Kim Jong-il's Death

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A relief team sent by the Tzu Chi Foundation to distribute more than 400,000 packs of rice to people in North Korea returned home after completing one third of its mission, because of the death of its leader, Kim Jong-il. The team decided that it was inappropriate to continue with the nation in mourning.

The country has long suffered from famine and widespread malnutrition. Flooding in June made the situation even worse. The foundation sent a first team to North Korea in November; they made a distribution of rice, infant formula and cooking oil.

The second team arrived in Beijing on December 16 and went on to Pyongyang the next day. They planned to distribute 440,000 packs of rice, equivalent to 6,800 tons. They began work and, during one day and a half, distributed 150,000 packs to those in need.



On December 17, Kim passed away; the official media made public the news on December 19, plunging the nation into deep mourning. In the light of this, the team decided that it would be appropriate to return home. They made the necessary arrangements with the local government to distribute the rest of the packs.

Team leader Luo Ming-sian said: "On December 19, the news broadcast the death of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. The people were mourning the death of their leader. Therefore the foundation announced its suspension of the relief program and decided to return home early. The relief goods from the love of Tzu Chi people around the world still needed to be given to the residents. Therefore Tzu Chi entrusted the National Committee for the Promotion of Trade to distribute the rest of the rice, more than 4,000 tons, to needy families."

Although the Tzu Chi volunteers had to leave early, their love remains in North Korea. While the distribution only lasted one and half days, the images of selfless giving will remain the warmest memories of the recipients.

By Chen Yan-shan and Li Chien-kuan at Taipei