

Tzu Chi Relief Teams Begin Work in Haiti

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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Two Tzu Chi relief teams have begun work in Haiti, to survey the needs of the earthquake victims and prepare the distribution of relief goods and set up a co-ordination centre.

The first team to arrive went to Petion-Ville, a district in the south east of the capital Port-au-Prince, to visit a supermarket and an elementary school which have collapsed. All that is left of the school is a huge pile of rubble, with desks and chairs sitting out in the open air. "It was a Christian school, which on a normal day could hold 1,000-2,000 students," said volunteer Steeve Lemite. "But right now, after the crisis, probably still have 150-200 students beneath the rubble. And probably the parents still have not found the bodies yet. We are still waiting on the government or any other organization to come and help pull the bodies out." People have no choice but to wait. The volunteers pray for the children, in the hope that the fallen walls can be cleared soon.

At the Caribbean supermarket nearby, the bodyguard who is accompanying the volunteers tells them that his best friend was crushed under falling masonry inside the building. As they drive along the city streets, they see concrete homes which have collapsed. The flimsy steel frames on which they stood were no match for the massive earthquake. There is one pile of rubble after another. For the volunteers, these are no longer images on a television screen but something in front of their very eyes. They are shocked and stunned.



Last week they visited the town of Kenscoff, 10 kilometres southeast of the capital. As the sun set, they saw rows of collapsed buildings and the residents living on the ground, inside flimsy tents made of bed sheets strung between poles that billow in the wind. Inside, they huddle under thin blankets on the stony ground; the blankets provide little protection against the cold winter nights. The residents say that they have lost everything. Before the earthquake, their life was difficult. Now it has become even worse. But, despite all this, the children seem to take the catastrophe in their stride and welcome the volunteers with a big smile. All these experiences make the volunteers more determined to find ways to bring relief to the people of Haiti.

The second team arrived in the country on Sunday morning, local time, after traveling by road from the Dominican Republic. They plan to carry out small-scale distribution of aid and work with a local construction company to set up a co-ordination centre in Port-au-Prince. Its first target is to bring daily necessities to 250 children at an orphanage.