

Banting Pantai Kelanang Boat Sinking Tragedy

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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At 12 midnight on June 18, a ship overloaded with 97 Indonesian workers sank into the Banting Pantai Kelanang seashore after it was hit by strong waves following a storm. At about 11 pm, the rescue centre confirmed that 61 passengers were rescued, while 9 were dead and 27 feared missing.

Of those rescued, 30 were sent to the Teluk Panglima Garang Police Station, while another 31 have been detained at the Klang Customs. The bodies of the victims were sent to the morgue at Klang General Hospital. A total of 150 army and police personnel were mobilized in the air and sea search and rescue operations. This team will be stationed at the site until all 27 missing are located.

According to the Malaysian Authority, most of the passengers were Indonesian workers working all over Malaysia. They had their families and relatives with them, including a 4-year-old child and a pregnant woman. All of them had official working permits to work in various industries in Malaysia, including construction, restaurant and as maids. With “Bulan Puasa” (Muslim fasting month) fast approaching, they wanted to return home to celebrate Hari Raya. Together with some others who had overstayed illegally, they paid the shipping agent to make arrangements for them to depart from Malaysia to Aceh, Indonesia, illegally.

Just want to go home safely

At 11 am, a volunteer received the internet news about the tragedy and immediately reported to the Klang Liaison Office. This office immediately contacted volunteers staying in the vicinity to visit the scene and assess the situation, as well as, set up an emergency disaster response team. Upon receiving the notice, volunteer Nai Keng Hak immediately prayed in his office for the passengers’ safety.

Twenty-two Klang volunteers and five KL & Selangor volunteers then drove to Teluk Panglima Garang Police Station where 30 survivors were detained. Only two volunteers, Nai Keng Hak and Lee Ley Hua, as well as, the Indonesian Ambassador, H.E Herman Prayitno, were permitted to enter the detention room. Nai gently placed his hand on the shoulder of one survivor, who was still in shock. With tears streaming down his eyes, he said softly, “I just want to go home safely.”

Nai’s heart went out to the survivors, who sat on the floor without a mat. As the night would be cool and chilly in the empty detention room, volunteers immediately prepared necessities like warm blankets, tooth paste, tooth brush, towels and breads, as well as, feminine hygiene products, for distribution to the survivors.

As only five people were allowed to enter the detention room, Nai immediately arranged for four volunteers to join the Indonesian Ambassador in distributing the goods to the survivors. Even though some volunteers were unable to enter the detention room, their love and care have

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reached the hearts of the survivors through the distributed relief aid.

Volunteers distributed the goods with respect and sent their blessings to each of the survivors regardless of them being retained as illegal workers. Lee hugged the survivors like a lovely mother and said, "These are our blessings for you. To be safe is good enough."

Ambassador witnessed the great love

Volunteer Hng Chin Hing took the opportunity to introduce the origin of Tzu Chi and its missions to the Indonesian Ambassador using the "Two Decades of Inspiring Great Love in Malaysia". He also shared the story of Tzu Chi Aceh's Da Ai Village and gave the contact of Tzu Chi chapter in Indonesia to the Ambassador. Seeing the volunteers donned in the blue and white uniforms, the Ambassador's Secretary, Alia Fitriati, who accompanied the Ambassador, recalled having heard from her relatives about the Tzu Chi Foundation in the aftermath of the South Asia Tsunami many years ago.

The Ambassador extended his deep condolences to the victims' families; and informed that the survivors were very depressed and had lost everything. During the press conference, His Excellency also expressed his appreciation to Tzu Chi for the humanitarian aid provided. He said, "Thank you Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation for extending care to the survivors and providing them with blankets and necessary goods."

He also informed that the Indonesian Government had given full authority to their Malaysian counterpart to conduct the rescue and to record and investigate this tragedy. He then took the opportunity to advise all Indonesian workers not to use any illegal channel to return to their home country. Starting from this year, the Indonesian Embassy has been cooperating with the agencies to ensure that even the illegal workers can return home safely.



Caregiving at the rescue centre

At 10 pm, in the cool and windy night, volunteers arrived at the rescue centre and delivered bread and bottled drinking water to the rescue team, who had spared no effort in the frontline rescue operations throughout the day. Volunteers thanked the rescue team for the humanitarian relief spirit displayed in the tragedy and also expressed their respect and encouragement to the team.

Commander of the rescue operation, Yahya Bin Mohd Sham, informed that everyone had been saddened by the tragedy. However, it was imperative that no effort would be spared to locate and rescue survivors and minimize the number of casualties.

He also expressed that the rescue mission had the full support and cooperation from four governmental organizations, namely, the fire and rescue department, the maritime police, the royal police and the civil defense department. They had dispatched 19 well-equipped vessels of

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different sizes and a helicopter in the search and rescue operation. In addition, medical personnel were also mobilized to provide medical assistance.

After briefing on the progress of the rescue mission, Commander Yahya expressed his appreciation and thanks to Tzu Chi volunteers for the care extended; and said that their presence as a Buddhist organization, in the rescue centre, giving emotional support to the rescue team, had fully demonstrated the spirit of great love.

In this tragic moment, a token of necessary goods and consolation from the volunteers was timely in comforting the panicked survivors, who are left with nothing but their lives.

By Soon Hock Chuan and Siow Lee Kien at 2014/06/18
Translated by Lim Sai Ho