

The Distribution of Food Aid in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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To address the food shortages in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Tzu Chi volunteers have distributed food aid to 2,336 families in Phnom Penh since October 2015, in order to alleviate hunger and to improve general nutrition. This program will continue into January 2016. Working with the local government, business owners, the Cambodian armed forces, the police and the Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia (UYFC), three distribution sessions have put food on the tables of hungry families who struggle with poverty and illness.

This is not the first time that Tzu Chi has delivered aid to Cambodia. In 1995, Tzu Chi began its charitable services and disaster relief activities in Cambodia. Since then, Tzu Chi has been recruiting local volunteers and building partnerships.

The basic aid package for each household contains 20 kilograms of rice, two bottles of cooking oil, two packets of sugar, one packet of salt, a mosquito net and a multi-purpose wrap/scarf, all of which is packed in a reusable shopping bag. The amount of aid that each family receives depends on the size of the household. Larger families receive more aid.

Aid distribution

Volunteers visit families prior to aid distribution, to check or update information that is on record, so that each family receives enough aid for their basic food needs. In Dang Kor district, many residents who receive Tzu Chi aid scavenge a landfill site to earn money. Sometimes, they do not earn enough to have even one meal a day, let alone to support their family.

Mr. Ming-Hsuan Hsieh, a Tzu Chi volunteer, said after a home visit, "When they have money, they usually purchase rice one kilogram at a time. If they don't have money, they don't eat. They go out to beg for food when they are too hungry."

The rice that is given as aid is donated by the government of Taiwan. Tzu Chi volunteers raise funds to purchase the remainder of the aid supplies locally.

Tzu Chi volunteers from Singapore and Vietnam have joined local volunteers in Phnom Penh to take part in the first three distribution sessions: in Mean Chey district on October 31st, in Dang Kor district on November 1st and in Russey Keo district on November 8th.



Volunteer physicians and a nurse also provided free medical treatment for aid recipients at the distribution sessions. A total of 80 patients received free medical services and medicine.

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Aid recipients with special needs, such as pregnant women or people with a disability, received priority treatment at the distribution. Volunteers also helped them carry their aid packages. Mr. Keov Savoeun, the leader of Chark Angre Loeu community, was impressed by the volunteers and by the orderliness and coordination of one distribution session. He volunteered to carry bags of rice and aid packages for aid recipients.

The meaning of providing aid

To maintain order and to begin with smiles for everyone, volunteers and aid recipients sang songs together in group exercises. Tzu Chi shared with aid recipients that Tzu Chi began with donations of small changes collected together. Then, volunteers began a donation drive so that aid recipients could help less fortunate people and experience the joy of giving. In this empowerment exercise, they joined the global donors to make a difference and learned that donating is not the sole privilege of the rich, but an act of love that is within everyone's nature. Tzu Chi hopes that this philosophy will inspire them to help themselves to a better future.

Mr. Va Tha, the deputy leader of Dom Nak Thom Village, was very impressed by Tzu Chi's philosophy of empowering families who experience hardship. He said, "Seeing every one of my fellow villagers leaving with smiles, I am grateful for Tzu Chi's help. Coming to this distribution session has been a valuable experience."

In the closing remarks of a speech at a distribution in Mean Chey district, Mr. Pech Keovmony, a local official, commented, "I praise Tzu Chi for giving selflessly. Tzu Chi volunteers also inspire people to do charitable work. I encourage everyone to donate."



Ms. Touch Sarom, a deputy commissioner from the Religion Department of Phnom Penh City, came to the distribution at Russey Keo district. She expressed her gratitude to Tzu Chi: "Now I understand that the main point in this distribution is to inspire love. Although these people are in need of aid now, they can also help others. We must learn to love each other and to be content and grateful for living in a peaceful country."

Before the end of the distribution sessions, Tzu Chi also donated one bag of 20kg rice to each policeman or armed serviceman who helped with security at the site. These public servants are also in need of food aid to feed their families.

After the distribution, Tzu Chi volunteers followed up with the recipients and visited to their homes. In this follow up evaluation, several struggling families who are living in extreme poverty and hardship were identified for Tzu Chi's long-term charity services and will receive further aid and assistance.

Tzu Chi volunteers are conducting assessments and making home visits for upcoming distribution sessions that will deliver more food aid to hungry families, so that they too can

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welcome the New Year with food on their tables.

Article by Yuru Chou