

Japan Volunteers Invited to the Summer Festival

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Thursday, 26 August 2010 16:56



Volunteers returned to a city in western Japan devastated by an earthquake six years ago to celebrate its recovery and the aid they provided during its time of trouble.

On 23 October 2004, the Chuetsu earthquake, measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale, hit Ojiya City in Niigata Prefecture, killing 68 people and derailing the high-speed "Shinkansen" train for the first time in Japan's history. Tzu Chi volunteers arrived to provide hot food and packages of aid, including blankets, to relieve the distress of the residents; they have not forgotten the kindness provided to them in their hour of need.

Six years on, the volunteers were invited back by the local community to join their summer evening festival. It was a journey of four and a half hours from Tokyo to Ojiya. When they arrived, they were given a warm welcome by the deputy mayor of the small town, Mr Kazama. He showed the visitors round, to see how the town has recovered from the disaster. "This part has been fixed," he explained. "The photo was taken from here. This was a vacant lot, where we used to come for temporary shelter. Now it is a four-storey building."



The residents and the volunteers were both excited to see each one another again after an absence of six years. But this time the volunteers were there not to provide relief but to take part in a festival. The town has held an annual summer evening festival for the past 13 years, except for the year after the quake. Tzu Chi is the first outside organization invited to attend. The volunteers sang a Japanese song and did a sign-language performance, to an appreciative audience.

The town's mayor, Mr Katsumata said: "During our most critical time, you brought us blankets, which we have kept. Of course we hope that there will be no more earthquakes, but, if anything does happen, we will be able to use them again." Volunteer Chen Jinfa said that everyone was smiling. "That is what we have been looking for most during the past six years," Chen said.

It was a hot day, reflecting the feelings among both residents and volunteers – a joyful and heart-warming reunion.