

Tzu Chi's Aid to Azerbaijan

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[June 1997 relief mission](#)

Project time: December 1996-July 1997

Aid provided: Wheelchairs, tents, warm clothes and waterproof pads

In 1988, a war that was to last six years erupted between Azerbaijan and neighboring Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. By the time a cease-fire agreement was signed in 1994, roughly a million Azerbaijanis had been forced out of their homes and scattered in forty-nine refugee camps in the country.

In 1996, Izart Rustamov, deputy prime minister of Azerbaijan, contacted Tzu Chi to request humanitarian assistance. After twice surveying refugee camps in southern Azerbaijan, Tzu Chi decided to provide humanitarian aid to orphans of war and refugees. The foundation worked together with the University of London and the Leonard Cheshire Foundation International of the United Kingdom to implement a relief project at the refugee camps in Saatli, Sabirabad, Aghjabadi and Barda.

The project included:

- (1) replacement of old tents with insulated tents that could accommodate six people at a time;
- (2) donation of wheelchairs for the handicapped;
- (3) donation of blankets and winter clothes.

The project was completed in June 1997. The following month, massive floods in Central Europe seriously affected Azerbaijan. Tzu Chi immediately contacted the Leonard Cheshire Foundation and Save the Children USA to distribute three hundred tents to flood victims on its behalf. Additionally, Tzu Chi cooperated with Relief International from the United States to provide waterproof mattress pads to over three hundred families in hard-hit Yenikand village.

Refugees in Azerbaijan, having suffered from long-term war and forced deportation from their homeland, were especially appreciative of donated goods and people who showed concern for their plight. An Azerbaijani translator and a local policeman, touched by the warm humanity of Tzu Chi members, donated half a month's wages to Tzu Chi to help their fellow countrymen.