

Distribution of Winter Goods in Remote Southwest China

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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Ahead of the lunar new year holiday, Tzu Chi volunteers returned to a remote area of southwest China to distribute food, clothes and other necessities to people in an area devastated by a major earthquake last July.

On July 10, the quake, with a magnitude of 6.0 on the Richter scale, hit Yaoan county, in the southwest province of Yunnan, injuring nearly 400 people and destroying or damaging 14,000 homes. Tzu Chi volunteers rushed to the area to survey what kind of relief they should provide. For the winter distribution, volunteers came from the provincial capital of Kunming and from Shanghai, Suzhou and other cities in east China as well as Taiwan. They want to help a community that is still rebuilding after the quake. The lunar new year, which falls in mid-February, is the most important festival in the Chinese calendar, an occasion for family members to come together to celebrate.

The volunteers brought quilts, jackets, warm underwear, cooking oil and rice for 4,000 households, or 15,000 people, in four districts of Yaoan. In one of them, Guantun village, residents came before sunrise, with baskets on their backs, to await the arrival of the volunteers. One resident said: "We thank Tzu Chi, thank you all for everything you have brought. These are the things we need most – rice, oil and grains." The head of the Yaoan county government, Jin Wei, was there in person to convey his thanks. "The Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation has brought gain, cooking and clothes to the people of Yaoan. This is a sign of deep friendship. As the representative of the people in Yaoan County, I want to express my deep thanks."

The volunteers not only had to bring the goods and hand them out, they also had to help the recipients take it home. Most of the young people have left Yaoan to find work elsewhere, leaving the elderly behind. The majority of those who came to the distribution were the old and women. They are used to carrying home bags of rice but this time the load was too heavy. Undaunted, the volunteers rose to the challenge. One of them, Jian Mingzhen, helped to carry the items in a cart. "I have made several trips already using this cart. There are many items. It is not easy. Although I am tired, I feel happy doing this." Deng Chaori, a volunteer from Yunnan, said that they wanted to give people the best-quality goods. "We need to be sure of both the weight and the quality," she said.

The hard work of the volunteers means that the people of Guantun township will enjoy a joyful New Year holiday this February.