

Tzu Chi Helps Kaohsiung Gas Explosion Victims

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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On August 1 Tzu Chi members in the south Taiwan city of Kaohsiung rushed to help the many victims of a devastating gas explosion that killed 25 dead and injured more than 250. They went immediately to the 16 hospitals in the cities to comfort the wounded and their families and the relatives of those who have passed away.

The underground explosions occurred in late July 31 in the Cianjhen and Lingya districts of the city. The fire brigade received reports from residents of gas leaking just before 9.00 p.m. and the explosions began about midnight.

The explosions occurred in areas with both factories and residential buildings. They were violent, tearing trenches through main roads, overturning cars and trucks and sending flames leaping into the air, over an area of three square kilometers. Firefighters from neighboring cities rushed to Kaohsiung to help battle several fires which had been contained by Friday morning. More than 500 soldiers were called up to help in the rescue work. Among the dead were four firemen and residents of the area affected.



The rescue teams worked throughout the night, digging through the rubble in the hope of finding survivors. But the search was rendered very difficult by large slabs of concrete and cars piled up on the sides of the road.

The explosions meant that many people were unable to sleep. They were frightened by the force of the explosion and shouted in fear. One resident, Mr Song, recalled: "I was terrified. What had happened? It was like the firing of an artillery shell, the sound was deafening!" In the chaos and confusion, the rescue services worked without a break to deliver people to the hospitals. They used flashlight to look for survivors in the rubble.

Chen Jian-wu, a fireman, said of the time of the explosions: "there was nowhere to run. There was fire everywhere. In every direction it was fire!"



Of the injured, most were suffering from burn injuries. All the medical staff of the hospitals in Kaohsiung were called back for duty. Tzu Chi members went to the 16 city hospitals to care for the wounded and their families. The emergency wards were flooded with people. Doctor Li Shu-xin, of the Zhonghe Hospital under Kaohsiung University, said: "we opened all the intensive care units (ICU). Those with light injuries were treated in the emergency wards."

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At the Morning Volunteers' Assembly on August 1, Master Cheng Yen expressed her feeling for the victims of the explosion and reminded volunteers to put their own safety first. "While you are looking after others, remember that your own safety is important. There could be poisonous gas in the places where the explosions occurred. We must do all we can to serve. But everyone must be safe and well. This is my biggest hope." She said.

Report from Kaohsiung by Zhao Pei-ting, Wang Zhou-zhong, Lin Dao-ming and Chen Li-wei