

MakeShift Schools at Haiti

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The devastating earthquake in Haiti in January destroyed or damaged half of the country's 15,000 elementary schools and 1,500 junior high schools. But the foundation is doing all it can to provide education to the children of Haiti.

In Port-au-Prince, a local volunteer, Jean Denis, has built temporary classrooms in the open air, with the tables and chairs attached to the ground by wooden studs and bound with wire. They are crowded into a tight space amid the ruins of a school that collapsed; the students are crammed together, attending the classes as best they can. "We teach the students to believe in themselves," said Denis. "We teach them to do good things and try to be better."

Last month a team of Tzu Chi educators from north America visited schools in Haiti, to see how they could help. One of them was Keshini Wijegoonaratna, the principal of the foundation's Great Love pre-school in Los Angeles. A native of Sri Lanka, she spent three weeks in 2004, helping the survivors of the southeast Asian tsunami. Moved by the same spirit, she came to Haiti. "My mother always said that life is not all about getting up and going to work. Do something – just as Master Cheng Yen says." The day of their visit was, coincidentally, Haitian national flag day; so the children were provided with flags, so that they could welcome their benefactors with a small gift.

The terrible earthquake reduced many schools to rubble but this has not stopped students and teachers from standing up again. The love which Tzu Chi has helped to bring is sowing the seeds of kindness, giving and love.