

Tzu Chi Rebuilds Three Schools in Myanmar

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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On June 16, the Tzu Chi foundation handed over to the government of Myanmar two secondary schools to replace those destroyed by Cyclone Nargis in 2008. They were the second and third such schools the foundation has built; the first was handed over in March 2010. The children will now be able to conduct their studies in peace and safety.

The handover ceremony was conducted on June 16 for the Mayangone Number One High School and the Number Four Ahlone High School. In attendance was the Chief Minister of Myanmar who said: "We will care for the children in our nation and are very grateful to Master Cheng Yen."

The foundation has been working in Myanmar since it was devastated by Cyclone Nargis on May 2, 2008. It left 130,000 people dead or missing, displaced tens of thousands and caused damage of more than US\$10 billion; it severely affected the Ayeyarwady River region, one of the country's most important rice-producing areas.



Between May 2nd and September 18th that year, the foundation provided short- and mid-term emergency relief -- rice, basic living supplies, free health clinics and medical visits. It also helped the farmers to resume work in their rice paddies and purchased rice seeds and fertilizer that were distributed to villages and families in need. At the same time, it gave school supplies to students.

It also started to plan long-term aid, to rebuild three schools in Yangon, in order to enable the children of Myanmar to pursue their dream to receive education. This was "Project Hope". The first of the three, Number Four Basic Education Middle School in Thingangyun Township was completed and handed over in March 2010. The other two were officially handed over on May 16 this year.

The hope of our society lies in our children and their hope lies in education. The design, structure and construction of the three schools were all personally undertaken by Tzu Chi volunteers. We thank the volunteers in Malaysia and the committee members of Tzu Chi construction team from Taiwan for their dedication during the past five years. Their love and attention to detail, along with the support of Tzu Chi worldwide, have made possible the solid structure, bright classrooms and new furniture of the schools.



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Master Cheng Yen hopes that Great Love will bring light to education in Yangon and that the children will use this love as a driving force in their academic pursuits. When they are accomplished academically, they will contribute their talents to help others in need.

To express their gratitude for Tzu Chi's help in rebuilding their school, the students of Mayangone No.1 High School spent more than two months learning the sign language song "Fulfill a dream"; it was in Mandarin, a language they have never learned. During the official handover ceremony, 10 of the children dressed in white tops performed the song in unison and perfect fluency and with great joy.

The Tzu Chi volunteers in the audience were captivated and filled with gratitude. Volunteer Wang Ming-de said: "I flew here to Myanmar almost every month during the construction project. Seeing these children attend the school with such joy makes all the effort worthwhile."

For the volunteers, all hard work is happiness. For the students and teachers of the Mayangone Number One High School, having a stable environment for classes after the devastation of the cyclone is a cause of great joy beyond words.



In the large meeting hall of the school, the re-building work was documented in Chinese, English, and Burmese. The old school had been built with overlapping galvanized sheets. In 2008, it was destroyed by a fire caused by a short circuit in 2008; the cyclone struck soon after. Since then, the students had to attend school in morning and afternoon shifts. The rooms were crowded and the roof leaked during the rainy season. Then Tzu Chi decided to help re-build the school; the new building was completed after three years of work and is bright and clean. The students can finally study in peace.

Among the students who sang the Tzu Chi songs in Chinese on stage was Kaidansing, who is battling throat cancer. She took a day off from her chemotherapy and donned a wig to go on stage. She said: "I could only sing softly because I feel exhausted when I raise my voice." She had finished a chemo session in the morning and was vomiting moments before she went on stage; still, she overcame the pain and stepped forward. "My family did not want me to participate. Only my grandma supported me because she likes singing too. She also agreed that this only lasted one day and would help the school."

We cherish this love as expressed with such beauty and goodness by the children, in return for the love shown by the Tzu Chi volunteers.

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