

## Because of You, Tacloban Will be Able to Recover

Written by Richard Bolisay

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In the Philippines, Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) has left the entire city of Tacloban in a state of ruin: collapsed trees, fallen houses, piles of debris, and heaps of garbage are everywhere. It has become a disaster site, leaving thousands of families homeless and jobless.

To address this problem, Tzu Chi Foundation has organized its cash-for-work program in Tacloban on November 20. Through the program, the residents will be assigned to clean their respective areas and at the end of the day, each of them will receive cash assistance worth P500 (11USD).

Tzu Chi Philippines CEO Alfredo Li clarifies that this amount is not salary or payment for their work. "This money is our assistance to help you recover from the tragedy. Please consider it our way of reaching out to you and your family," he says.



The participants in the cash-for-work program are gathered in the premises of Leyte Progressive School in Paseo de Legaspi, where Tzu Chi volunteers introduce themselves and the foundation to the residents.

Before heading out for the clean-up, both groups share a sincere and solemn prayer, to guide them in the activity and to hope for the immediate rehabilitation of Leyte and other provinces affected by typhoon Yolanda.

The residents from Barangay 65, Barangay 66, and Barangay 66-A are divided into groups, with ten members each.

Barangay captain Emeterio Lacanaria, 60, leads his team in cleaning their houses and streets in Barangay 66. As the head of the community, Lacanaria is able to encourage a lot of people to join the cash-for-work program. During the disaster survey a few days ago, he welcomed Tzu Chi's words with an open heart.

"We didn't expect this. After (typhoon) Yolanda, we didn't know where to go, what to do. There's no source of living. But when Tzu Chi came, it felt like an answered prayer," Lacanaria shares.



He is also happy that his constituents are supportive of the program. "I explain to them that this

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is our chance: we'd be able to earn money, and we can clean our community as well," he says.

Beverly Jane Arias, 28, who works as a secretary in Barangay 65, volunteers to be her group's leader. They have decided to clean the areas near the road first, before proceeding to clear the garbage from their houses.

"I am proud of my team. We have all worked together to tidy our areas. It's hard but it makes us all feel good. Tacloban is very blessed because of Tzu Chi," she says.

Arias adds that it has only been a day of clean-up and there is already huge improvement in their communities. "Because of you, Tacloban will be able to recover. We feel lucky that you're here. Thank you, Master Cheng Yen and every one from Tzu Chi."

She also shares that it's the first time that a group has truly addressed the biggest problem in their community: the piles of garbage and debris everywhere. "We have food, we have water, but no one is paying attention to the heaps of scattered trash. People are already getting sick," Arias shares.

At the end of the interview, Arias gets emotional. "These are tears of joy. I have been long praying for something like Tzu Chi to come to our city. And now you're here and we couldn't have been more grateful," she ends.



When the cash-for-work participants have returned to the assembly area at around 4 pm, they are welcomed by more Filipino and Chinese volunteers, who have flown all the way from Manila to help out in Tzu Chi's relief activities in Leyte.

Tacloban is filled with kindness and solidarity as more than 30 Tzu Chi volunteers stand in front to do a sign language performance of "One Family," an inspirational song about the importance of compassion in times of great need, and the residents join in to show their unity with the group's missions.

It's a touching sight of people working together towards one goal regardless of differences in race, religion, and nationality." Tzu Chi has given us hope," Jeffrey Colis, a resident of Barangay 66-A, says.

"We want to recover from this tragedy and we are thankful that Tzu Chi is here to help us out. They don't choose the people they help," Colis adds. He is hopeful that Tacloban can stand up after typhoon Yolanda. "It will take long, but we can do this. As long as we're all in this together, we definitely can," he ends.

On its first day, a total of 610 residents have participated in Tzu Chi's cash-for-work program. It will continue in the following days, which will include several nearby communities.