

Volunteers Rush to Help Manila Residents Hit by Slum Fire

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Thursday, 08 April 2010 00:00



Snap fires are the curse of the slums of Manila, where people live cheek by jowl in makeshift homes made of wood, plastic and corrugated iron. Once a fire starts in one home, it spreads quickly to the adjoining ones. So it was on Tuesday, April 6 in Barangay 101 in Tondo, one of the poorest areas of Manila; the fire burnt down the houses and belongings of 148 families. At the very same time, Tzu Chi volunteers were delivering aid to residents of another neighborhood of Manila ravaged by fire.

On April 7, the volunteers went to Barangay 101 to survey the damage and prepare for a distribution of aid the following day. They found the residents putting up shelters with whatever material they could find. Some even camped next to a busy highway, full of trucks driving at high speed. "It is very difficult," said one resident Maravic Camansi. "We survive by selling scraps, so there is no way that we can afford timber and nails." Another resident, Lolita Conge, said that life had become very hard because they had lost everything. The volunteers gave out what they could – rice, blankets, clothes, eating and cooking utensils and other daily necessities. During the distribution, the children learnt a few sign language words from the volunteers. The volunteers interviewed the families affected to find out their needs and promised to send aid the very next morning, including 10 kilos of rice, blankets and straw mats.

"After the disaster you have just been through, we came here not because we have a lot of money but because we have a lot of love," said volunteer Cai Shenghang. "We are here to care for you and help you through this difficult period." These expressions of love and concern moved the residents to tears. "Many thanks to Tzu Chi because it is the only organization that came to help us," said Normelita Brion. "You have given me and my husband a lot of help." She and other residents were disoriented by the sudden disaster but greatly warmed by the material and emotional support of the volunteers.

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