

## Tzu Chi Begins Relief Effort in Flood-hit Thailand

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

Wednesday, 09 November 2011 11:35

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The foundation has begun its relief work in Thailand, which is suffering its worst flooding in 50 years. It has delivered 120,000 bottles of drinking water from Malaysia to the army and hot meals to the flood survivors and sent a team from Taiwan and Philippines who are preparing the next step.

Since August, Thailand has been devastated by flooding, the most severe in five decades. Of the country's 28 provinces, eight are inundated by water. In many places, it has remained for three months and shows no sign of receding. The flooded area includes much of the capital city of Bangkok; thousands have evacuated from their homes, while others are living on upper floors with the rest of the house covered in water. From September 24, Tzu Chi volunteers have been providing cooked food and comfort to the survivors.



On the front line of the battle against the floods are 50,000 soldiers who are spending the day with water up to their waist or their knees. It is exhausting work, even for men who are in excellent physical condition. The Thai Army Wives Association appealed to the foundation to provide drinking water for the soldiers. In response, volunteers in Thailand organized the shipment of 120,000 bottles in 5,040 cases from Malaysia. It was a journey of 1,500 kilometres from the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok. The operation took just five days and the water arrived on November 7 at the Army Club in the capital, where it was gratefully received. Gao Qing, representative of the Overseas Chinese Commission of the Taiwan government, expressed his deep thanks for this show of strength by the civil society of Taiwan, a sign of how its people care for others. Mrs. Naraporn Chanocha, chairperson of the Association said: "We thank you very much for fulfilling this mission to deliver the drinking water to us."



To prepare for the next phase of the relief operation, a team of 18 volunteers – 14 from Taiwan and four from the Philippines – arrived in Bangkok on November 3. They were carrying nearly 700 kilogrammes of goods, including instant rice, raincoats, water resistant suits and volunteer vests. The team is led by Dr. Chien Sou-Hsin, superintendent of the Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital.

On November 6, the group held a special meeting in Bangkok with local volunteers, business people and leaders of large companies to discuss how best to provide the aid. Chen Chao-hai, director of the foundation in Thailand, told the meeting: "after the flooding, the waters will slowly

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recede. How should we do the reconstruction work? What will the most appropriate way to help?" Such flooding has occurred in other countries, providing examples of what to do. These include Typhoon Morakot in Taiwan in August 2009, after which the entire country was mobilized to help, and Typhoon Ketsana in September 2009 in the Philippines; the foundation organized a work relief program under which 10,000 people gathered to clean up their neighborhood.

Alfredo Li, director of the foundation in the Philippines, said: "At that time I asked Master Cheng Yen how we should manage the people. She said in a relaxed way 'you should believe them. You do not need to supervise them, it is their home. They will certainly do all they can to clean their own home.'" Cai Sheng-hang, a volunteer who played an important role in the program, said: "At that time, we had a very simple idea, wanting to mobilize them in the shortest possible time. Master Cheng Yen said that, if we did not do the cleaning job very quickly, we could have been faced with burying the dead and it would not only have been a question of medical expenses."



One of the biggest issues is diseases carried by the water. Dr. Chien of the Dalin hospital said: "Water moves slowly but carries a large quantity of germs into the places where it flows. Most important is that people do not have wounds on their legs. These could be infected and they could be serious. The risk of infection causing Leptospirosis is very high."

Now is the time for everyone to work together, gathering the energy and concern of everyone. Her Su-chen, a Taiwan businesswoman who has been in Thailand for 40 years, said that this was the most serious flooding she had ever seen in the country. "I strongly support the idea of a work relief program. This gives me hope. I believe that Tzu Chi can help Thailand," she said.