

Thai Delegation Visits Tzu Chi for Relief Experience

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

Thursday, 24 November 2011 17:34



A delegation from Thailand, led by the brother-in-law of the Prime Minister, visited Hualien on November 16 to give thanks in person to Master Cheng Yen for the work of the Tzu Chi Foundation in helping its people combat the worst floods in half a century.

Torrential rains have caused serious flood, forcing tens of thousands of people to leave their homes and causing billions of dollars of losses to the economy. Since October, the foundation's headquarters has been in daily contact with its volunteers in Thailand and has provided hot food, medical care and other emergency aid, by land, sea and air.

On November 3, a team led by Dr. Chien Sou-Hsin, superintendent of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, and Stephen Huang, director of Tzu Chi's Global Affairs, visited Thailand to see the stricken areas. They saw that the country's pharmaceutical factories had been flooded, causing shortages of intravenous drips and dialysis fluid. The foundation immediately made contact with factories in Taiwan and flew 30,000 bags of drips and the liquids to Thailand. In addition, it transported from Malaysia 500,000 bottles of drinking water and 50,000 pairs of underwear for Thai soldiers working on the front line. It also shared with the Thai government and civic organizations its experiences in similar circumstances in the Philippines, where it organized a work relief program for local people to clean up the damage to their community.



Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra is in charge of the anti-flood operations in her country. She came to know that Tzu Chi had experience of disaster relief in 72 countries across five continents around the world; volunteers accompanied a group of young people in washing elderly handicapped people in a reception centre. So she sent a delegation to Hualien to meet Master Cheng Yen ask for the advice in the rescue effort. It was led by her brother-in-law, Dr Somchai Kovitcharoenkul, chairman of the Thai Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine Association, and included Sorayut Phettrakul, Vice Minister of the Interior, R. Adm. Piyoros, head of research at the Thai Royal Naval Hospital and Zhang Feng-hao and Chen Yu-heng, chairman and vice-chairman of the Taiwan Business Association in Thailand.

The delegation arrived at Hualien on the morning of November 16 and met Master Cheng Yen at the Jing Si (Still Thoughts) Abode in the afternoon. Sorayut Phettrakul said that they wanted to thank all the volunteers of Tzu Chi for all the aid they had provided to his country during the floods. "Before we came to Taiwan, we had heard on the news of the rapid response of Tzu Chi volunteers after the Sichuan earthquake (of 2008). Now that we have arrived here, we understand more deeply the work of the foundation around the world, how it has saved life of those who suffer and help those in disasters. We see great love in action. I am very moved and very uplifted. We would like to join the ranks of Tzu Chi and provide more efficient relief. We invite the volunteers to come to Thailand to help in the spiritual reconstruction after the floods

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recede and the cleaning up of the affected areas."



Master Cheng Yen said: "Buddhism speaks of the four elements out of harmony. Today these imbalances, of the earth and of the water, are very severe. The flood waters in Thailand are slowly receding. After this, we must restore the appearance of country as soon as possible. Only then is there an opportunity for regeneration. Tzu Chi has rich experience of this kind of relief work in Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar and this year in Japan and North Korea. We are happy to share this experience with Thailand.

"We can provide our experience of cleaning up Marikina city in the Philippines. After Typhoon Ketsana struck the Philippines in 2009, 80 per cent of Manila was covered in water, piles of rubbish were floating everywhere and mud was two to three metres high. Local volunteers organized a relief work program to encourage local residents to come out, clean their neighborhoods with their own hands and love their own place. In just 18 days, they cleaned up the city, allowing it to resume its normal business.

"Every day Tzu Chi members all over the world are praying for Thailand. We encourage the Taiwan and local business people in Thailand to participate actively in the reconstruction, to come together and quickly restore the country to what it was before and then business can resume."

On November 17, another team of volunteers, from Thailand and Indonesia, flew to Thailand to take part in the relief and medical effort and share their experiences.