

Volunteers Give Cornflour to Flood-hit Hondurans

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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Volunteers in the central American state of Honduras have distributed sacks of cornflour to some of the tens of thousands who have lost their homes to floods. Many had eaten nothing for several days.

Central America has been badly hit by the continuing abnormality of the global climate. Over the last two weeks, torrential rain and strong winds have hit El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala; more than 100 people have been killed and nearly one million affected. In Hualien, Master Cheng Yen is extremely concerned about the plight of these people and has held video-conferences with her volunteers in the region. She said that the foundation would as soon as possible transport blankets, medicine and other necessities to Central America. The volunteers must also express their concern and comfort and help those affected, giving them the hope to leave the disaster behind and return to their homes, she said.

On October 23, volunteers left Tegucigalpa, capital of Honduras, in vans loaded with 275 crates of cornflours; they headed south for Choluteca, capital of the province of the same name. As soon as they left the capital, they found the road flooded and full of pot-holes, which made the journey slow and difficult. The World Food Program had already shipped grains to the city government of Choluteca but the quantity was insufficient. The volunteers saw long queues of people standing for four hours in front of the city hall; there was no food for them. Unable to tolerate the people starving, the volunteers decided to distribute one sack of instant cornflour to each household. They explained to Mayor Quintin Soriano: "first, we will give the materials to people who have had nothing to eat for several days and let them fill their stomachs." The city provided a name list. After confirming the identities, the volunteers distributed the food to 125 affected families. Mayor Soriano's wife eagerly joined in the distribution: each recipient was met with a smile and an expression of thanks. With their stomachs empty after several days with no food, they were extremely happy to receive a sack of cornflour from the foundation.



After finishing this distribution, the volunteers went to other districts of the city that had been affected by the floods. Within five minutes, nearly 1,000 people arrived at the scene. Initially, they remained in good order as the distribution started. But some people feared there would be none left for them; they began to break ranks and tried to seize their sack. The situation became out of control: the volunteers were unable to continue. To calm the anxiety of the recipients, volunteer Zhang Hong-cai promised again to them that each person would receive his share. Finally, at the request of the volunteers, the people re-formed a line and continued to take their bag according to the name-list.

There is widespread poverty in Honduras. Most of the burden of finding work, looking after the

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family and seeking relief falls on the shoulders of the women. The volunteers came to homes that had been destroyed by the floodwaters; inside one dilapidated house with the walls painted black, they found a single mother and her twin babies. When the floods came, they were able to sleep thanks to a hammock made of cloth and were not covered by the water. When the waters receded, the mother put a small mattress on the floor as a warm bed for the babies. She told the volunteers that, because there was no man in the house, no-one made a fire for her nor provided food; it was left to her to use bricks made of earth to cook the meals.

In Honduras, it is possible to see many such poor people; they live in homes made of wood, corrugated iron, cement or even paper. Once floods come, their homes cannot resist the water. To be brutally frank about it, the root cause of the suffering from the floods is poverty.

Once they had completed their inspection tour, the volunteers rushed to a reception center for the affected people, where they distributed more goods. In addition, they expressed their love and concern for the people, especially the elderly and the poor. The greatest result of this distribution was, in addition to spreading the love of Tzu Chi to the people of Honduras, the recruitment of eight local volunteers. Let us hope that these eight will become Bodhisattvas and spread the love of Tzu Chi across this country.