

Volunteer Care For the Families Outside Prison Fire in Honduras

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Tzu Chi volunteers in the central American state of Honduras provided food to 500 relatives of inmates killed in a devastating fire. They helped at a temporary kitchen and provided instant rice sufficient for four to five days.

The fire broke out on February 14 in a town named Comayagua, 75 kilometers north of the national capital, Tegucigalpa. Before it began, the town mayor received a telephone call from an inmate who threatened to burn down the 70-year-old prison. When the fire broke up, the keys to the doors could not be found in time; firemen could only watch the prisoners trapped inside. The blaze killed 359 out of the 856 inmates, while more than 400 escaped. Most of the bodies were charred and unrecognizable; it will take time to identify the remains. It was the worst prison fire in Honduras for a century.



The government set up temporary accommodation for the families of those who died, to enable them to retrieve their loved ones. It housed about 500 people, who were waiting desperately for news; with no food, they became angry and restless. The Tzu Chi volunteers offered to help and discovered that the temporary kitchen at the accommodation had run out of food. Volunteer Chang Hung-tsai acted quickly and asked fellow members to bring eleven boxes of instant rice from a storage room. It was enough to feed 500 people for four to five days.

The government is investigating the cause of the fire. The situation remains unstable but the volunteers will continue to care for and help those in need.