

Tzu Chi Hopes to Give Aid to Qinghai Earthquake Survivors

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The foundation wants to provide help to the survivors of the earthquake that struck a town in the south of Qinghai, western China last Wednesday. It provided aid to the same area in 1996 and remembers it as the most difficult mission Tzu Chi has ever undertaken.

On April 14, the quake, which measured 6.9 on the Richter scale, struck the county seat of Yushu, a Tibetan prefecture in Qinghai province, killing more than 1,700 people and destroying thousands of buildings. The government and the military have rushed thousands of tents and clothes and provided food and water to residents living in the open air.



Volunteers visited Yushu prefecture in the winter of 1995. In November, five snowstorms struck the area, killed thousands of livestock and bringing temperatures to as low as minus 47 degrees Celsius. More than 60,000 people were in danger of running out of food. The volunteers formed an assessment team and went to the Qinghai plateau, 4,500 kilometers above sea level; they traveled 800 kilometers in seven days. After their assessment, they returned in April 1996 to deliver the aid. They focused on four townships in Yushu prefecture that had been badly hit; they brought highland barley, enough to feed families for two months, and gave money to families that had lost livestock. Highland barley is the staple food of residents of that area.



It was the most difficult mission in the 44-year history of the foundation, because of the altitude, weather conditions and remoteness. To train for the harsh conditions, volunteers had to train hard and buy oxygen packs. "We exercised and climbed mountains every day," said volunteer Guo Dingrong. "I had never thought to see tough men defeated in just one day by altitude sickness. We have a picture of someone sleeping standing up – that was how hard the distribution was." Last year, volunteers from the greater Shanghai area returned to Yushu to visit the residents. "If I have been to a place, I always hope the lives of its people can improve," said Guo. "When I saw the serious earthquake in Yushu, a place that I helped before, it was hard for me to accept. I hope that its people can get help as soon as possible." So the volunteers are closely following the situation in Yushu, in the hope that they can deliver the appropriate aid when the time is right.

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