

Tzu Chi Prepares Relief for Victims of Typhoon Haiyan in Philippines

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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The Tzu Chi Foundation is preparing relief effort for the victims of Haiyan, the most devastating typhoon ever to hit the Philippines. It was estimated a death toll over 2,000. Worst hit were the cities of Tacloban and Ormoc in Leyte province and Guiua island in Samar province.

Tzu Chi members in the country are closely following events every day and have begun their assessment of what aid needed. They are collecting information from many quarters in order to understand better the disaster. Over the Internet, volunteers in every area are praying that the victims of Haiyan can return to their normal life as soon as possible and overcome their difficulties.

Power and telecom cut: government doing all it can

Up to 10 p.m. on November 10, the number of households affected by Haiyan reached two million, or about 9.5 million people. A total of 1,645 reception centers have been set up, sheltering 95,000 households, or about 447,000 people. The number of buildings damaged reached 19,500, of which 13,000 had been completely destroyed.

The death toll is expected to rise because power, telecommunications and road links to the worst affected areas have been cut. The government, the military and civilian rescue services are doing everything they can. The government has mobilized 1,500 soldiers for the relief effort. The Roman Catholic church is praying for the welfare of the victims. Their greatest need is food, water, water-purification machines, power generators, medicines, tents, water buckets, blankets and bags of daily necessities.

On November 9, Philippine President Benigno Aquino held a news conference; he said that, since telecommunications links to many places had been cut, the government found it difficult to assess the scale of the disaster. On November 10, he went in person to Tacloban city to assess the damage and ordered the mobilization of relief teams nationwide. He also said the government had released 16 billion pesos (about NT\$10.9 billion) for relief work and reconstruction.

Airport brings relief, police sent to keep order

The power supply to Leyte province, one of the worst affected areas, has been completely cut. In Tacloban city, 90 per cent of the power poles have been blown over. The power company said that it could take up to two months to restore electricity to the entire province. The telecommunications company is doing all the repairs it can. It has already set up a base in Tacloban that provides telecom to the city government and the relief agencies.

The city's airport has become a channel for humanitarian aid, for military and commercial flights. Turboprop engine aircraft are being used. In the city, many supermarkets have been looted and

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money stolen from shops and ATMs. The government has sent additional policemen from Manila to keep order. The mayor has asked the president to declare martial law in the city.

Lucy Torres, an elected representative of Ormoc city in Leyte, said that 95 per cent of the entire area had been destroyed. "Because everyone is paying attention to Tacloban, my city has received no aid," she said. Its airport has been damaged and there are only three hospitals in the whole area; two of them have been damaged and supplies of fuel are short. If relief agencies can send teams there, she will provide people to ensure their security, she said.

The first place hit by Haiyan was Guiua in Samar province, with a population of 40,000. Its links to the outside world have been cut and people are traumatized. According to report, waves caused by the typhoons reached as high as 20 feet, destroying all the buildings on the island and cutting power and telecommunications links. Until now, no relief supplies have reached there. The governor of Samar said that 300 of its residents are confirmed dead and nearly 2,000 are missing.

The branches of the foundation in the Philippines are actively collecting information about the disaster and making their assessment. After they have completed this, they will start their relief work. At the same time, they ask everyone to pray for the Philippines, that the victims of Typhoon Haiyan can soon return to their normal lives and overcome their suffering.

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