

Volunteers Distribute Rice to 888 Households in Flood-hit Cambodia

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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In their first major relief work in Cambodia for 17 years, Tzu Chi volunteers on December 4 distributed rice, oil and other necessities to 888 needy households in the capital Phnom Penh; all live below the poverty line. They came from Singapore and Malaysia and were joined by 120 enthusiastic local volunteers. Every household received a set of goods, including heat rub, 15 kilograms of rice, 5 kilograms of oil, 15 packets of vegetarian instant noodles and one kilogram each of sugar and salt.

In 1994, due to the long-term drought, the heavy rain caused severe flood in Cambodia; with the poor harvest, people suffered from food shortages. On December 8, 1994, Tzu Chi held a three-day distribution, which benefiting over eighty-four thousand people, and donated one hundred pumps to Battambang province.



Since September this year, Cambodia has been hit by severe flooding because of the overflowing of the Mekong River. The flooding has hit 17 of the country's 23 provinces and turned Phnom Penh into a pond, affecting 1.2 million people. It has severely damaged bridges and roads and forced people to use boats when they leave their homes.

At the distribution ceremony, Liu Ji-yu, chief executive of the Tzu Chi Singapore branch, passed on the care and concern of Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "the founder of Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, Dharma Master Cheng Yen, far away in Taiwan, could not bear to see you suffer from the floods and worsen your already hard life..."

One resident, who carried her child to the distribution, said: "our home has been flooded. There was no-one to help us but Tzu Chi. We are very happy. We have a difficult life and food shortages from time to time." After receiving help from volunteers to receive her goods, one old lady was very excited. She embraced the volunteers to show her feelings and gratitude that someone came to care for them in these difficult times.

The distribution caught the attention of CTN, a local private satellite television station which broadcasts Buddhist programs. Their cameraman captured the touching moments and transmitted them to the Cambodian people. One producer was moved and said: "Tzu Chi's distribution is different to others. It was very touching. Volunteers give with action, mind and wisdom."



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Organizing the distribution was no simple matter; it was a challenge to overcome the terrible weather conditions and work in an environment unfamiliar to the volunteers. The first obstacle was to write the distribution forms in the Khmer language. Fortunately, an entrepreneur from Malaysia, Huang Gui-chi, heard of the problem and asked her employees to help. She has invested in a clothing factory in Phnom Penh for 13 years and employs around 8,000 people. Huang asked those who knew Khmer to help fill out the distribution forms. In Oct 2011, she attended a Tzu Chi workshop for entrepreneurs in Taiwan and promised to join its volunteer work. In November, she went to the factory to check on her business and at the same time, took the chance to participate in the distribution.



On November 29, volunteers from Singapore arrived at Huang's factory. They explained the purpose of the distribution and played a video of the Tzu Chi Story with Khmer subtitles. With the help of the employees, the over 800 forms were signed within an hour. Over seventy staff participated in the operation on December 4.

That afternoon, at 2 p.m., volunteers went to the Chroy Chongvar district to survey the distribution site and give out forms in the villages. They found that, although the level of the Tonle Sap river had receded, the main road was still covered with water and piles of trash piled up on the side. They faced the next challenge; with many of the villages still flooded, how could they go in? They borrowed space in a roadside cafe and asked the villagers to come. Since one village was still under water, they had to rent boats to distribute the forms for each household; the villagers were surprised to receive them. The next day, November 30, they went to another village, where the residents lined up in an orderly and patient way. They put the young volunteers from Phnom Penh in charge of record and verifying the forms and distributing the forms. On December 1, 900 sets of relief goods were stored in Huang's factory, with the help of plant staff and volunteers.

The day before the distribution, at the request of the assistant village chief, 50 residents of the Chroy Chongvar District came to clean the distribution site; they weeded the lawn and collected trash. Working with one heart and mind, recipients and donors joined together to complete successfully the distribution on December 4.