

## The Opening Day of Village for Typhoon Survivors

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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On February 11, the Great Love Community built by the Tzu Chi Foundation for the survivors of Typhoon Morakot is opened. The first 500 families moved in on a day of happiness and celebration, after nearly three months of intense work by thousands of people to have their homes ready for Chinese New Year.

Tzu Chi foundation is building the Great Love Community, with 1,500 homes, on a site of nearly 60 hectares in Shanlin on the outskirts of Kaohsiung. Last week the first 504 families moved in, after receiving approval from the county government. The ceremony on February 11 celebrated the arrival of these families and the dedication of more than 20,000 construction workers, volunteers and residents to complete the project.

The guests of honor were President Ma Ying-jeou, Prime Minister Wu Den-yih and chairman of the Legislative Assembly (Parliament) Wang Jin-ping. Their presence was evidence of the government's strong support for the project and the work of the foundation, which it regards as an important building block in Taiwan society. Greeting them was Lin Piyu, vice president of the foundation; Master Cheng Yen sent a message by video.

The festivities began at 1430 with events to welcome the residents to their new homes. They included free haircuts and medical examinations, an exhibition and the writing of inscriptions to hang in the homes. Then a dance troupe formed by the residents held a song and dance performance, to welcome the president and express thanks for their new homes. The president entered one of the two new churches built on the site and placed on the wall a carving with words written by Master Cheng Yen during the time of the typhoon: "in times of trouble, we must cultivate compassion; in times of change, we must test our wisdom."



Then the president and a group of volunteers released coloured balls in front of the houses and gave the residents orchids, books and carvings of Master Cheng Yen's sayings to take to their new homes. "All I have seen today has been very moving," Ma said. "In less than three months, Tzu Chi has turned a piece of wasteland into 'the land of peace blossoms' (a haven of peace away from the turmoil of the world)". Master Cheng Yen sent a message by video, in which she said: "Although I am physically in Hualien, my heart is with you. I give my blessings to all of you, so that everyone gives thanks for the last year and greets the new year with devotion and sincerity." President Ma presented a gift of red envelope and 2,400 pieces of chocolate, wrapped like coins in gold paper, to the residents and those working on the site. On their behalf, Lin Piyu accepted them and, in return, gave him a red envelope as a symbol of good fortune and blessing.

The foundation arranged a dinner with 300 tables as the residents' first meal in their new home. They clasped their hands together in prayer to give thanks for all the blessings they have

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received and to pray for blessings for the whole world. The volunteers prepared meticulously for the newcomers by buying more than 80 items for each of the homes, including food, kitchen utensils, bedding and items for the bathroom and the reception room. They also added a diary that records the events of the last six months since Typhoon Morakot and an inscription from Master Cheng Yen: "Love is the most precious value of humanity. When it is expressed at the place and time when it is most needed, it is the most valuable life." The Great Love village is a permanent home and expression of this love for the whole world.

After the typhoon struck southern Taiwan on August 8 last year, the foundation was the first organization to reach the scene of the disaster. In total, it provided 700,000 hot meals; more than 200,000 volunteers went to the scene, to clear the debris, clean up homes and console the survivors.

Master Cheng Yen then launched an appeal to her members in 52 countries around the world, to raise money to build a new home for them. After the government allocated nearly 60 hectares in Shanlin township, they began the construction work on November 15. Volunteers from all over Taiwan went to the site to help, to do grouting and lay stones and bricks. The first shift worked from 0630 in the morning until late afternoon, when a second shift took over, working until the site was bathed in the light of the moon. In total, more than 20,000 volunteers and residents worked together to build the first group of homes.