

Tzu Chi Helps 13,000 Earthquake Survivors in Guatemala

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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On January 20, Tzu Chi volunteers held a distribution of food and essential goods for around 13,000 people in a city in the west of Guatemala in Central America. They came from urban and rural areas around Esquipulas Palo Gordon city, who were hit by an earthquake registering a magnitude of 7.4 on November 7th last year. It was the second distribution for the survivors of the earthquake; the first, for 8,000 people, was held on November 25.

The epicenter of the earthquake was in the Pacific Ocean, 22 miles off the west coast of Guatemala. It left 44 dead, the highest toll for an earthquake in the country since 1976, and deprived 73,000 households of electricity. It damaged 9,400 houses and forced 18,700 people to be evacuated. The department of San Marcos was one of the worst affected.

The volunteers held the second distribution at the request of the city government who were deeply impressed by the first one. They gathered at four o'clock in the morning in the capital, Guatemala City. From there it was a five-hour journey to the distribution site in Esquipulas Palo Gordon, in the department of San Marco. When they arrived at the community center, they were welcomed by the large crowd of those who were to receive the aid. Government officials and a team from the military were there also to assist in the distribution. Among were Colonel Estuardo Cassio Camara and his family; he had been his country's military attaché in Taiwan and met [Dharma Master Cheng Yen](#). Once he heard about the distribution, he asked to participate.



Volunteers from one section were divided into five teams to check the identities of 1,876 people from the 11 villages; at the same time, volunteers from a second section checked 433 recipients from Esquipulas Palo Gordo city.

Before the distribution, there was a solemn ceremony. In a speech, Luis Rivera, Governor of San Marcos Department, said that he wanted to let people know they were not alone and that there were government officials and volunteers to accompany them and distribute relief goods. Carlos Bautista, Mayor of San Pedro Sacatepequez, thanked Tzu Chi for extending its great love to all the earthquake survivors. The mayor also presented certificates of appreciation to Tzu Chi and Mr Hector, who represented those who gave support to the distribution.



Also present was Adolfo Ta-chen Sun, ambassador of the Republic of China in Guatemala, who

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has been a long-term supporter of Tzu Chi. At the ceremony, he explained to the audience that Tzu Chi's ECO blankets were made from recycled PET bottles and that the blankets were as soft as water.

In her speech, Ko Feng-chin, CEO of Tzu Chi in Guatemala, shared the spirit of the 'bamboo bank' era, saying that, no matter the amount, everyone had the chance to change from being a receiver of help to a donor. The participants listened attentively and understood the principles of Tzu Chi and the importance of environmental protection; they expressed their agreement and gave enthusiastic applause.

Out of respect to the victims of the earthquake, the volunteers placed carefully and neatly the large amount of relief goods. They collected every box and plastic bag for recycling. Outside, many people were waiting to see their family members walk out with their bag of goods. Although the bags were heavy, their hearts of the recipients were filled with joy. A total of 73 Tzu Chi volunteers carried out the distribution, with the assistance of local officials. The recipients numbered 2,290 households – a total of more than 13,000 people. Each household received corn kernels, black beans, sugar, oatmeal, biscuits, cooking oil, towels, soap, a blanket made from recycled PET bottles and a bucket.



The volunteers held the first distribution on November 25th last year in Salon Jose Luis Juarez Romero, the local city hall community center in San Marcos.

On November 11, the volunteers sent a survey team to the area. They saw most survivors crowded in shelters made of plastic cloth in the cold winter; their poorly built homes had been unable to resist the earthquake. The volunteers distributed the goods to 1,373 households – a total of about 8,000 people. Each recipient received 50 pounds of shelled corn, 20 pounds of black soybean, cooking oil, towels, soaps, the blanket made from recycled PET, reusable bag, bucket, cooking pot and biscuits.