

## Bringing Smiles Back: Flood Relief in Guatemala

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Thursday, 05 September 2013 15:40

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Recently, many places around the world have experienced heavy rainfall and floods, that have devastated both the homes and the hearts of residents. Unfortunately, Guatemala is no exception. The Livingston area in the Izabal province, Guatemala, was impacted by floods and torrential downpour at the beginning of August. After a disaster assessment, Tzu Chi volunteers decided to organize aid distribution efforts on August 18, 2013.

Despite the four hour drive to the disaster area, Tzu Chi volunteers were beaming bright smiles to everyone as they arrived. While some volunteers helped register families who were waiting to receive relief, other volunteers were busy with setting up the localities.

The event commenced with an opening ceremony where the volunteers introduced Tzu Chi and its activities to the villagers. Carolina, a flood victim, introduced Tzu Chi to Mayor Vicente Interiono Colindres and the affected families, explaining the organization's love and compassion for the community. Tzu Chi volunteer Tzu Fa then explained to everyone the concept behind the Bamboo Banks. Tzu Chi does not take a single penny from the donations it receives - all of the money is dedicated towards charity.



The mission of Tzu Chi volunteers is to go wherever there is a disaster in the world, paying their own travel and living expenses. Tzu Fa said, "Every penny that you donate counts; it can help disaster survivors around the world!" Her touching introduction was received with a loud applause and the Bamboo Banks that were circulated to the villagers were quickly being filled with coins. Afterwards, there was a minute of silence to pray for world peace and an end to all disasters.

After the opening ceremony, the distribution event began. The villagers were very polite and patient as they waited in line, quietly chatting with each other in their local dialect. Some villagers from remote areas had to travel a long distance to reach the distribution site. Flood survivors from the Chunacte and Sepac villages had walked for two hours and then taken a 45 minute bus ride to get there. Their smiles were radiant and filled with heartfelt happiness as they received the food relief.



On that day, 260 families from 7 different villages in Livingstone, Izabal, Guatemala received aid. Each family received 20 pounds of black beans, 5 pounds of sugar, 1 liter of cooking oil, 20

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pounds of corn flour, 10 pounds of rice, 3 detergent balls and 4 rolls of toilet paper. The villagers, who were not expecting to receive so much, felt very touched. As there was a lot to carry, Tzu Chi volunteers helped survivors carry the large bags of food. Some volunteers would place biscuits in the shirt pockets of villagers who had no hands left to carry any more. Vice Mayor Elfido Romeo Olivia Alvarado not only organized local volunteers to assist Tzu Chi in the event, but also helped out with the distribution himself.

As a token of gratitude, the Mayor gave Tzu Chi a handmade wooden boat. To further thank the Tzu Chi volunteers, who had travelled a long way to help lift the villagers out of their suffering, the Mayor organized a delicious Guatemalan vegetarian lunch for the volunteers. The villagers, who are not only suffering from flooded homes but also from increasing prices of household goods, were very thankful to Tzu Chi for helping to bring back their smiles in the midst of their adversities.

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