

Tzu Chi Donates 300 Tonnes of Rice, 10,000 Shoes in Haiti

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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In June, volunteers of the Tzu Chi Foundation distributed 300 tonnes of Taiwan rice and 10,000 pairs of shoes to the people of Haiti, in the Caribbean. It was the sixth year in succession that the foundation has given the 'loving heart' rice, provided by Taiwan's Council of Agriculture, to the people of the island. This time they added shoes, provided by a Taiwan businessman in the Dominican Republic, which borders Haiti.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas; many of its people live on the edge of survival. In 2010, it was hit by a serious earthquake. According to the World Bank, it left up to 230,000 dead and caused damage and losses of US\$8 billion, equivalent to 120 per cent of GDP. Since then, Tzu Chi volunteers from the United States have been working on the island. With the help of the local OECC Overseas Engineering Company, they have carried out dozens of distributions and charity visits. From 2012, they started to give out rice provided by the Taiwan Council of Agriculture; up to now, they have distributed a total of more than 2,200 tonnes of such 'loving heart' rice.

Haiti's problems were compounded by Typhoon Matthew which struck in 2016. Volunteers from Tzu Chi, local and foreign, joined in relief work. The Taiwan owner of Sun Jade International Footwear, in the neighboring country of Dominican Republic, recognized the aid provided to Haiti by the foundation over many years, and donated 10,000 pairs of shoes. He hoped to protect the feet of the Haitian people. The normal procedures for moving 10,000 pairs of shoes are very complicated; each document requires more than 20 chops. But the local customs realized that the shoes were relief goods and that Tzu Chi was working with OECC, whom they recognized. So they cut the procedure time from the normal more than two days to five hours, allowing the shipment of the goods to proceed smoothly.

After the news spread that there would be distribution of both rice and a pair of shoes for each person, the venue was crowded and full of expectation. Haiti is so poor that some people do not even have one pair of shoes; even some of those who are working wear a pair of damaged shoes. When they are walking in crowded places, local people carry the shoes in their hands; they fear that their only pair will be lost.



After they received their pair, everyone tried them on to see if they fit. They wore them at once and sang and laughed. If the shoes did not fit, they raised them in the air to exchange them with someone else. Almost everyone was able to find a pair that was suitable; in a short time, they were happy. Local people are very moved by Tzu Chi's successive distributions of rice to them over the years; these have earned the trust of local people. After the trauma of the earthquake and the competition for goods that it caused, people mistrusted each other. But the foundation

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has overcome this – in temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius, everyone queued up patiently and the distribution took place in a calm and orderly fashion.

Father Zucchi has been helping Tzu Chi in its distributions for a long time. This time he mobilized his students to help with the transport. Using the Creole language of local people, he explained to the audience the foundation's concept of the bamboo bank. He told everyone that this distribution was possible thanks to the love of people in Taiwan and around the world. He said: "when people here see no hope for their life, Tzu Chi people use thanks, respect and love to help the residents of Haiti regain their confidence!"

The new Taiwan ambassador, Hu Zheng-hao, came to take part in the distribution. The Haiti television station and local media came to make interviews of the event. Last year Ambassador Hu went to see the foundation's relief operations after serious floods in France. Seeing the overseas work of the Tzu Chi volunteers, he felt very honored and moved.

The foundation said that it had now entered its 52nd year and used love to lay the road inch by inch. It has brought together many drops of love. It has enabled those who have suffered to receive help and enabled others to give thanks, respect and love, to help the poor and educate the rich and open the love in our heart. Even in the poorest country in the world, it enables those whose have received help to feel love and help others and enrich their souls.

Report by Chen Yi-qian, Tzu Chi Foundation, June 19. 2017.