

Tzu Chi Takes Its First Step in Mozambique

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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The group of volunteers stood, nervous and expectant, outside a shabby house in a poor district of Maputo, capital of the southern African state of Mozambique. They had come to start the work of the Tzu Chi Foundation in one of the poorest countries in the continent.

A woman stepped out of the house; her name was Graca. She stood in front of the door with a sullen expression; her body language said 'go away'. The group was discouraged but decided they must try. One of them, Cai Dai-lin, stepped forward and said: "Tzu Chi is an international charity organization, with many volunteers already in South Africa. We are only starting in Mozambique and hope to extend our care, starting in this community."

For 20 years the foundation has been well established in neighboring South Africa, where it has built up a large corps of local volunteers. In August 25, 2012, a group of them from Durban arrived in Maputo to see what they could do. They were met by Cai Dai-lin, a Taiwan woman who moved to the country when she married. She and her husband want to promote the foundation in the city but have no experience. So they invited the group to come and give them advice; they visited families that require special care.

For much of the last 50 years, Mozambique has had a tragic history. It was a Portuguese colony for more than four centuries; an African liberation movement began a guerilla war in 1964. After 10 years of fighting, Portugal abruptly granted independence in 1974. There followed a bitter civil war between two guerilla movements, which lasted from 1977 to 1992. Only since then has the country gradually been able to rebuild its economy and provide a normal life to its citizens. For the last 10 years, it has registered one of the highest GDP growth rates in the world but remains one of the poorest countries on earth. A majority of the population lives below the poverty line and foreign aid accounts for half of the government's budget.

Inside the sealed reed house, hardships revealed

The Durban group returned to Maputo on September 20 for a second visit, of four days. This time Dai-lin decided that they should go to Maxaquene, one of the poorest districts of the capital, and interact with anyone they met and visit homes of the poor. The cardinal rule is: "when in doubt, just act."

So it was that they were standing outside Graca's shabby house, made of reed. With Graca unmoved, Dai-lin continued: "we have nothing but the best intentions to help people, but this community is so big that we may easily be lost. None of us knows anyone here either, so we wanted to see if anyone is willing to join us and care for those in need of help."

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