

In Portugal, Tzu Chi Helps 420 Families Hit by Devastating Forest Fires

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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In Portugal, volunteers of the Tzu Chi Foundation gave gift vouchers to 420 families who were hit last year by the country's worst forest fires in decades. They will use the money to rebuild the life on their farms. The volunteers came from the U.S and six countries in Europe, including Portugal.

In the summer of 2017, Portugal suffered its worst drought for 90 years. The dry weather created the conditions for devastating forest fires in June and October which burnt an area equivalent to 19 times the area of Taipei city. They created heavy losses for the people living in the affected areas. The representative of the Foreign Ministry in Portugal specially sent a letter to the Tzu Chi Foundation asking for help. At the end of last year, the volunteers began to survey the damage and decide how they could help.

They held two distributions over two days in February in the cities of Vouzela and Tondela. The recipients can use the coupons to buy the farm tools they need in the Brico Marche supermarket in Vouzela. The volunteers came from the United Kingdom, Holland, Germany, Luxembourg, France and the United States, as well as Portugal. To make best use of the time, the volunteers carefully prepared the distribution site. Carlos is a local volunteer. He saw the news on Facebook and volunteered to help. Secondary school students also stepped forward to help as interpreters. Everyone worked together to ensure that the distribution went smoothly.



The distribution site was the Vouzela and Campia School, a secondary school, and the event was held on February 24. It was full of people waiting to receive their coupons. Only when the doors opened did they believe that it would really happen. A total of 420 farming families received the coupons, enabling them to buy farming implements and resume their work in the fields.

One of them, Maria, said: "It was very hard but I also feel blessed, because there are people who have remembered us. The help that Tzu Chi has brought to us is the blessing of mercy." As they gave the coupons, the volunteers thanked the recipients and bowed: this made them feel respect and loved.

Raymand L.S. Wang, representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center, was present at the distribution and was very moved. "They do not understand our language. But they held hands with us and sang with us the Tzu Chi song. You can see the faces covered with tears and their hearts bursting with emotion. This is the best love and concern that Tzu Chi can give!"

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