

Tzu Chi Builds Public Toilets in Haiti

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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Nearly two months after the terrible earthquake in Haiti, so much remains to be done. The volunteers of Tzu Chi are working as hard as they can – building public toilets, preparing pre-fabricated homes and helping to look after 40 orphans.

Since the earthquake on January 12, a majority of people have been living outside in unhygienic conditions, with a serious shortage of public toilets. The city hall of Tabarre district, where the volunteers have been working, used to have eight such latrines before the quake; but, like the hall itself, the eight were damaged and none have been repaired. The staff have been forced to work in makeshift offices nearby. They gave approval to the volunteers to build eight squat toilets and provided the land. Workers first dug a large, wide hole in the ground. “If you look at this now, we are digging until we reach a depth of 1.8 meters below ground level,” said volunteer Miao Wanhui. “This hole will hold about 4,000 litres of excrement. This is a public toilet, so it will be full in about three months. At that point, a sewage truck will come and take away the human waste.” The work began on February 24 and was due to be finished in three days.

The site is not far from a site for dumping rubbish. When street cleaners heard of Tzu Chi’s project and knew that it would benefit the ordinary people, they worked quickly to remove the rubbish; they wanted to make their contribution. The new public toilets will give the survivors of the quake a cleaner and more pleasant option, next time nature calls.

Pre-Fab homes to survive the rainy season

With the rainy season imminent, the volunteers have been distributing waterproof tarpaulin sheets, to give people shelter from the weather. The foundation is considering a step further – pre-fabricated homes that will last 10-15 years. On March 2, builders of these homes arrived from Tainan, in southwest Taiwan, in Hualien to present them to Master Cheng Yen herself. The next step is an assessment on whether they are suitable for sending to Haiti.

The homes can be erected in three-four days. One model has 25 square metres, with a high roof, loft bedroom and basic bathroom. “It is made of a plastic-wood composite material,” said Chen Songmao, assistant manager, research and development, of Ta Chen Stainless Pipe, the manufacturer. “It is waterproof, light and earthquake-resistant. It also has a small garden. It is well insulated, so it is warm in winter and cool in summer.”

The aim is to give residents safe and comfortable shelters, cheap and sturdy, that can be put up in a short time. The foundation is now considering whether to ship the homes to Haiti. Whatever the decision, everyone wants to help the people of Haiti through their ordeal.