

Sichuan Earthquake

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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At 2:28 on the afternoon of May 12, 2008, a magnitude-8 earthquake devastated Sichuan Province, a mountainous region in southwestern China. Eighty thousand people were killed or reported missing, 300,000 were injured, and five million people lost their homes. Aid immediately poured into the disaster areas. Rescue workers helped save lives trapped in the rubble; humanitarian organizations sent in relief supplies and medical aid. Although hit hard by the disaster, the survivors are not alone on the road to recovery.



Shifang mourns

Wenchuan, at the epicenter of the great quake, is surrounded by mountains and hills. The earthquake damaged the terrain and caused mudslides to block the roads, restricting access to disaster zones and hampering relief efforts.

Shifang, in Deyang Prefecture, was one of the hardest hit areas, with more than 3,700 people killed and 31,000 people injured. In the village of Hongbai, located the farthest from central Shifang, 90 percent of the buildings collapsed in the tremor.

On the third day after the disaster, the road leading to Hongbai was finally cleared, and rescue workers brought in heavy-duty machinery to free survivors from debris. Two more days later, a rescue team from Singapore arrived. Although the chance of finding any survivors was slim, it would still be a great comfort to those who had survived the tremor if the bodies of their loved ones could be found and properly buried.

Tzu Chi volunteers inspected conditions in the Hongbai area. They saw collapsed mountains amidst lush patches of greenery. They saw people who had lost their homes lingering among the ruins.

The Tzu Chi team also visited Luoshui Township, especially Luocheng Village, where 95 percent of the buildings lay in rubble. Local residents had taken up temporary refuge in canvas tents. Luocheng Village has a population of over 40,000 people. Volunteers conducted free clinics and provided hot meals there. Rice distributions and construction of prefabricated classrooms and houses were also being planned.

Staying at their posts

At a square next to a temple in Shifang, several canvas tents were put up to serve as makeshift wards for the Shifang Women and Children's Hospital. The hospital had been destroyed in the tremor, but staff members continued to provide services. In the week after the quake, doctors delivered 12 babies on long tables set up in the better tents.

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