

Tzu Chi Serves Hot Meals to Refugees in Serbia

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Thursday, 17 March 2016 10:08



As European countries have been tightening their border controls, many Syrian refugees have been stranded in Serbia. This has increased the burden of local governments. So the Commission for Refugees of Belgrade asked the Tzu Chi Foundation to provide assistance in relieving the shortage of food for them. After a discussion, the volunteers agreed to provide hot meals for 10 days. However, due to local regulations, they could not cook at the refugee centers but had to bring pre-cooked food.

Hot meals provision

On March 12, the volunteers began to provide nearly 900 servings of vegetarian meals at the Adasevci and Sid refugee centers. They set up a dining area and heated the pre-cooked food.

The dining hall was full of people waiting patiently for the hot food; it was not easy to have hot, cooked food on the road. It was the hope of all the volunteers that the food would not only fill their stomachs but also warm their tired hearts. Volunteers were very happy to see the satisfaction and smiles on every face.

Remar is an international charity organization. After seeing Tzu Chi's relief work and its volunteers putting into practice the principles of love, gratitude and respect, it invited Tzu Chi to serve the refugees together and offered their kitchen for Tzu Chi volunteers to heat the food.

Grateful for the distribution

Even though the first day of hot meal provision was a success, a small number of the refugees did not like the taste of the food. In a morning meeting with the Commission for Refugees on March 13, Tzu Chi volunteers said that every dollar used to purchase food was a donation from the general public; therefore, if people found they did not like the food, they should be advised not to take the meal and so prevent any waste of food.

On the first day of the hot meal provision, volunteers were really happy to see that many refugees were satisfied with the food; some even asked for a second one. On the second day, many young people voluntarily came to unload the goods from trucks when Tzu Chi volunteers arrived.



On the second day, many refugees came forward to show their appreciation; some even helped to clean the dining area. The head of the Commission for Refugees in Belgrade came to visit the volunteers and expressed his thoughts about Tzu Chi; he said that, in the beginning, he

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did not think the Foundation would be able to distribute hot meals. However, after days of observation, he saw the discipline of volunteers and their sincere care for every refugee; finally, he came to believe in the work of the organization. He then expressed his gratitude to Tzu Chi for its assistance.

"I only hope that we can settle in a peaceful and war-free country," said Maryam. She and her family have stayed at the Sid refugee center for over 20 days and were waiting anxiously for permission to continue their long journey.

Volunteers also spent time in the children's playroom with children and provided 200 packs of diapers. They discovered there a girl with a red, swollen eye and reported this to the commission with a request for proper medication.

The team of Tzu Chi volunteers from 12 countries and regions gathered in Serbia and began the relief work on March 1. "The weather is bitter cold," said Master Cheng Yen, the founder of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation. "It is not an easy task for volunteers in Europe to gather in one country and to assist people stranded in the refugee centers. I am very moved by the efforts of everyone. I pray and thank you for overcoming so many difficulties to serve people."

In the two days of providing hot meals, Tzu Chi volunteers gave about 890 meals at the refugee centers of Adasevci and Sid. In addition, the volunteers carefully measured each person and provided proper clothing; as of March 9, they had distributed over 2,060 winter coats, hats, gloves, scarfs and socks.