

Boundless Blessings

By Chin-Lon Lin, MD, Chief Executive Officer of Tzu Chi Medical Foundation

Following the second wave of Taiwan Tzu Chi disaster relief team two weeks after Typhoon Haiyan devastated the Philippines, a group of the Tzu Chi Medical Mission went to the hardest-hit Tacloban area to provide medical outreach and disaster relief. What I have personally seen and experienced from this trip left a deep impression on me. It also reminded me of the Chinese idioms that I learned from school.

I often heard from the teacher who said, “Everywhere a scene of devastation that meets the eye”(Chinese idiom: 滿目瘡痍) and “spectacle too horrible to endure”(Chinese idiom: 慘不忍睹). As a child, I would question what the situation would be like? I saw it on this trip to the Philippines.

The devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan is like a Tsunami. Wherever she hit, not an inch of earth was left intact. No buildings were undamaged — either the roof or window was blown away. The strong waves pushed large anchored cargo ships to the land. Things in their ways were “razed to the ground.” Unfortunately, I had these words to describe the devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan.

“The place of one mat” (Chinese idiom: 一席之地) means the size of the area (a mat) - a tiny area. According to the ancient Chinese novel (The Scholars), “What is needed for a night is just the size of a mat.” However, in Tacloban of the Philippines, each of us could only have half the size of a mat.

Because we were in the hardest-hit area, even the remains of the victims were still not handled. We could only stay in a medical school next to the free clinic. Since twenty-four people had to sleep in each classroom, everyone had to be content with the crowded space.

To accommodate more people to sleep in the space, members of Tzu Chi medical relief team had to fold up their sleeping pads. On average, each person had “the size of a half mat.”





The free clinic is about to end. Outside the classrooms Tzu Chi built for the victimized area, local students present baskets with apples and mangos to show their gratitude.

Although the area was tight, everyone was very grateful. Compared to the victims who lost everything, we were fortunate to stay in a sheltered area. Also better than the first wave relief team, we had mosquitos' nets for protection.

When the relief team arrived at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, I was assigned as a team captain carrying the Tzu Chi flag. As I came off the plane, everything felt familiar and cordial back in Taiwan; especially, the air felt fresher. Unconsciously, I sped up. Since I am a tall man with a long stride, my walk from the gate to the baggage claim had caused the other team members hurrying upto catch up my pace.

Although it was only a five-day trip, I felt differently on our return. The feeling of being home is sweet. In my mind, only the words like “there is no place like

home” can describe my feeling.

Although we were back, volunteers from the Tzu Chi Philippines still working hard to help the victims through the cash-for-work program. I would like to thank members of the Taiwan Tzu Chi Medical Mission providing free clinics and volunteers of the Tzu Chi Philippines for their invaluable services. The first stage of the cash-for-work program and large-scale relief distributions have been accomplished. The prefabricated classrooms were also commissioned one after another to allow children to return to school. In the up-coming long-term relief efforts, Tzu Chi volunteers will continue helping and accompanying disaster victims. With my sincere blessing, I wish the victims can return to their normal lives soon.