

Pray for Hualien, Stay Strong after Earthquake

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The eve of Feb 6, 2018, at 11:50pm, the ground shook at a tremendous magnitude. The panic that came with the devastating earthquake still lives with many Hualieners. After the initial earthquake, many injured arrived at the hospital unassisted before the emergency radio station of eastern Taiwan broadcasted any information. Within 10 minutes, the patients exceeded 15. Judging from the news of collapsed buildings in downtown Hualien, the attending physician of the emergency team Chen Huang-Bin had reasons to believe the possibility of influx of injured citizens, and initiated Code Red Nine at 12:10am, summoning all available support.

I was staying in the hospital dormitory at the time, and the shock woke me as well. My gut instinct told me that this is a major earthquake, and there will be mass casualties. I rushed to the ER with just a jacket on. Along the way I saw that Jing Si Hall and the hospital were intact, which made me less anxious. The walk was about 8 minutes. When I stepped into the ER, I was moved by what I saw. The night shift staff who were ready to take off and the graveyard shift staff had completed team assignments under the command of the ER physician. Furthermore, our staff at home rushed to the hospital after receiving Red Nine and were ready to act on command. The driving force behind the rapid response is to ensure that all injured citizens could receive the best of care in the shortest possible time, and that anxious families can have a shoulder to lean on.

Approaching 2 am, the number of hospitalized patients had reduced to a manageable amount. We ended the Code Red Nine at 02:27am. By then, we had received 101 patients. At 03:30am, I visited one of the emergency shelters in the activity center of Chung-Hua Primary School, and at 04:00am I assigned one physician and one surgeon to the medical station at Chung-Hua Primary School, hoping to provide more care and assistance to the people who could not return home.

Many of our staff, in fact, had some personal issues to deal with prior to the earthquake. But most of them rushed to the hospital after hearing the news of collapsed buildings in downtown Hualien, and a great deal of them refuse to take rest after we ended the emergency, in fear of a sudden influx of patients. According to the stats, nearly 500 hospital staff were at the ER on the eve of the earthquake.

At the time of the earthquake, a cold continental air mass was moving southward. The cold weather and bitter drizzle were harsh on the citizens who had lost their homes. Master Cheng Yen and the masters of the abode were very concerned; Tzu Chi Foundation immediately initiated its disaster relief system, dispatching teams of volunteers to the collapsed Yunmen-Tsuti building, Marshal Hotel, and Platinum Twin Star building to set up care centers to take care of evacuated survivors, to provide hot meals, and to fully support the relief personnel. The Disaster Relief Coordination Center set by Tzu Chi Foundation began arranging and coordinating relief goods and hot meal distribution. On Feb 7 at 1 am, the dharma masters had prepared over 100 shares of hot meals, including hot ginger tea, steamed buns, and instant rice, ready to be delivered to the disaster areas for the citizens and the rescue workers to ward off the bitter cold.

In three of the emergency shelters, Chung-Hua Primary, Hualien Arena, and Jing Si Hall dormitory, there were Tzu Chi volunteers and medical professionals working in shifts to provide care, goods, hot meals, physiological and psychological recovery, and disease prevention. On Feb 7, emergency fund were delivered to the hands of the disaster survivors based on the severity of damage



The day right after the earthquake happened, Supt. Lin Shinn-Zong led the hospital staff to get together sending prayers.

to properties and the number of family members. Education centers were set up inside the shelters, ran by professors and students under Tzu Chi Education Foundation, to provide assistance to children's academic work. There were also recitation service for the deceased and companionship for the families.

Tzu Chi volunteers initiated its global relief system and started door-to-door visit on Feb 11, assigning dharma masters, supervisors and staff of Tzu Chi Charity, Medicine, Education, and Humanities missions, volunteers from Hualien, Taipei, Yilan, Taitung, Kaohsiung, Tainan, China, and the U.S. to conduct home visits to the neighboring communities of the disaster areas, and held a musical available to the public, hoping to bring peace and stability to the distressed community with religious prayer and musical performance.

For many Hualieners, the anxiety and panic persisted in the weeks after the earthquake because of the continuous sizable aftershocks, but they also

witnessed the beauty of humanity. Overseas Tzu Chi members prayed for the safety of Hualien and launched fundraisers. Tzu Chi volunteers from Ecuador, a nation that is also situated on the Pacific Ring of Fire and experienced a devastating earthquake in 2016, joined the Mexican disaster relief in 2017, and prayed for Hualien during the fundraiser on Feb 17.

“The world is impermanent, and the land is fragile.” These are the words from certain sutra that Master Cheng Yen constantly reminds us. Our lives and the environment we live in are fragile and prone to disaster and constant threat of death. The elements in nature are in dissonance, and frequent disasters are in consequence. We must stay diligence and adopt the karmic perspective in the face of impermanence. Although Hualien was scarred by the earthquake, and businesses need time to revive, we must remain grateful in our heart, bless and inspire one another, and pray for lasting peace in the world.



The earthquake struck on Feb 6 at 11:50pm. HTCH, led by Supt. Lin Shinn-Zong (with microphone), initiated mass casualty incident response on Feb 7 at 12:10am.