

The Unbearable Looks of the Suffering Mozambicans

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In May 2019, TIMA members from four continents, six countries assemble in Mozambique that was ravaged by a tropical cyclone. Upon returning to Taiwan, it was hard to forget the innocence in the eyes of the Mozambicans living in such hardship and poor hygiene. I do hope eyes like those would be answered with tens of thousands of gazes from around the globe, working together to overturn the suffering in the world, making changes

come true.

I remember the first time I joined an overseas medical outreach was the Philippines, 1997. In the blink of an eye, medicine has accompanied charity in disaster relief for over two decades. I followed the path of Tzu Chi volunteers to Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Cambodia and Mexico. This time to Africa, the scope encompassed Asia, America, Oceania, and Africa; TIMA doctors from Taiwan, U.S., Australia, Malaysia, and

South Africa held several large-scale free clinics in various locations across Mozambique.

Taiwan Medical Outreach Team took two days traveling from Taiwan to Mozambique one-way—departing from Taoyuan, transit in Hong Kong, to South Africa, and then to Mozambique. Some may think the journey is a long one. Thinking back at early 1500's, Cheng Ho of Ming Dynasty conducted seven voyages to the western ocean (Indian Ocean), becoming a historical pioneer in trans-oceanic voyage, 80 years before Columbus's discovery of the new world. Around six centuries ago, Cheng Ho's vast fleet reached Port of Beira, Mozambique, laying a long and deep relationship between the Chinese and the Africans. Tzu Chi Medical Team arrived at the same land their predecessors once did. They spent a full year reaching their destination, while today it only takes two days, how can one not be appreciative of how far we've come.

Unlike the short friendly visits of Cheng Ho or the pillages of other colonial countries, Tzu Chi united the blessings from around the world, supplementing local deficiencies with tangible resources, as well as intangible resources like compassion and love. When the team arrived at the scene, months had passed since the brunt of the disaster, and yet plenty of tents still stand.

At the free clinic, waves of people

flooding in from all directions. Patients overwhelmed us with excruciating symptoms like lymphedema with foot wound, hand contracture after burn injury, facial neurofibroma, cornea eaten by bacteria and so on. We learnt that the city of Beira has the second largest hospital in Mozambique with seven surgical rooms available, however the cyclone had the roof ripped off, leaving only one available for general anesthesia surgery. Judging from local healthcare, it is understandable why so many complications that would not have occurred in Taiwan are prevalent in this country. Comparatively speaking, Taiwan's healthcare is so much better.

Every day the lines were long. Empathizing with the despair and urgency of these patients in line, the physicians and surgeons, fearing that the lack of illumination after dark would interfere with treatments and disappoint all these people traveling from afar, worked their hardest with speed and precision. In only four days a total of nearly 5,000 Mozambicans received treatments. Many people were curious, how did these doctors communicate with the locals? My personal take on it is that, "Love needs no translation, so is the relief of suffering." We could evaluate the patients' conditions from their expressions and reactions.

A single disaster affected more than millions of Africans, took away



their loved ones and their belongings. Months of pain and suffering, the eyes of these victims illustrated their equanimity even in the time of hardship. Hearts congregated, waiting for the troubles to pass, to embrace a better tomorrow with smile and joy. Only innocent minds are capable of it.

When the catastrophe caused by the tropical cyclone lost its attention in the media, international NGOs began pulling out. Global Tzu Chi volunteers continued to provide care and tangible assistance, local volunteers responded with their years of community work, and the medical team, exposed to the risk of malaria, HIV, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, brought invaluable resources, traveling from around the globe to Mozambique. Through this free clinic the disaster victims felt that the world had not abandoned them, that Tzu Chi from Taiwan 12,000 km away still remembered them, and stayed with them every step of the way.

I have joined countless Buddha Bathing ceremonies, however this one in Mozambique was spectacularly different. Listening to Mozambicans singing “Do not seek the Buddha far away on Vulture Peak” with Mandarin, all of the sudden I had an urge to cry. Such emotional experience reminded me of our medical outreach to Mexico, where Tzu Chi volunteers lined up in order in front of

church at the city square, singing the Tzu Chi anthem, “Honoring Tzu Chi’s founding ground, we bow to the Still Thoughts Hall; Tzu Chi Foundation, team is vast and mighty; compassion for the sick and poor, traveling streets to care for their needs; compassion for the suffering, giving medical, financial help and food...” That emotional moment remained with me to this day.

How remarkable is it for Tzu Chi volunteers traveling to foreign lands with their medical expertise and witness how love can change people in the midst of pain and suffering? I could not help but to feel honored as a Tzu Chi member. When other organizations chose to conclude their operations in Africa, Taiwanese chose to root themselves in foreign lands, working for the benefit of the locals with love and compassion. I believe this effort will grow to have profound impact worldwide.

Thanks to the compassion of Master Cheng Yen, granting the doctors of Tzu Chi an opportunity to visit Eastern Africa, experience the seriousness and severity of health and education issues over here, and look into the innocence in the eyes of these people. When others have forgotten about it, I still hope those innocence gazes would be answered with tens of thousands of gazes from around the globe, working together to overturn the suffering in the world.