



1st Food Parcel donations to Tonga-volcanic eruption victims

Hunga-Tonga volcano, an underwater volcano of Tonga, erupted and produced a tsunami on 14 January 2022. As a result, many islands suffered severe damage, underwater communication lines were cut, leaving the whole population disconnected from the outside world for weeks. The aftermath of the volcanic eruption affected 84% of the Tonga population, many were evacuated. The New Zealand government sent humanitarian aid following the disaster.

Ken Laomahei who had come to Tzu Chi NZ for food parcel donations is of Tongan ethnicity. The 74 years old retiree was born in Kolonga Tongatapu, The family migrated to New Zealand in 1971. Ken Laomahei lived in Auckland. He is active in the local community and enjoys helping people.



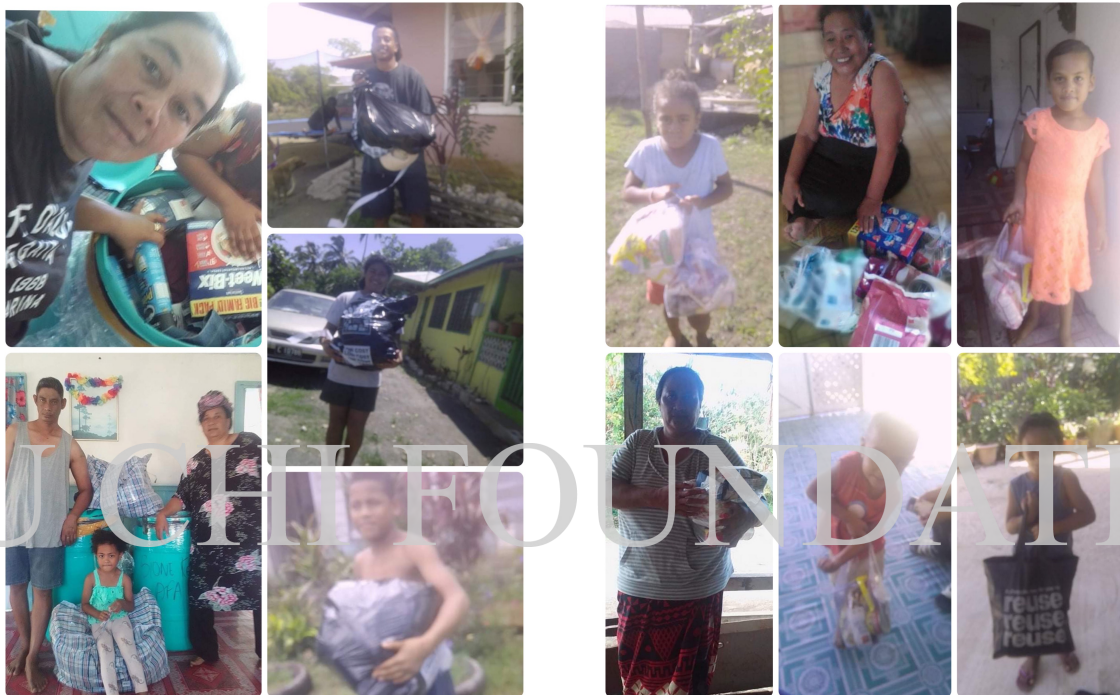
On 26 January, he wrote to Tzu Chi NZ requesting food parcel donations to his family in Tonga. Some New Zealand shipping companies had offered to send relief aid to Tonga for free. Ken wanted to send drinking water and food to his family in Tonga.

Upon receiving Ken's letter, Tzu Chi NZ decided to donate 24 food parcels to Tongan victims immediately because the ship will depart Auckland to Tonga at the end of the month.

On 27 January Ken Laomahei, his wife Mele, and his nephew came to Tzu Chi NZ to pick up food parcels. Tzu Chi volunteer Wang Ping explained the principles of Tzu Chi disaster relief, great love and compassion have no barriers. Tzu Chi NZ was grateful to Ken for providing an opportunity to help Tonga volcanic eruption victims. Ken was touched and his eyes were filled with tears.

On 28 January, Ken Laomahei sent a thank you message and informed Tzu Chi NZ that the donated food items had been packed in four drums for shipping. As promised, Ken also returned all 48 carrier bags to Tzu Chi NZ for reuse.

The ship departed New Zealand on 5 February. On 15 February, Ken called Tzu Chi NZ saying the donation had been cleared by the custom in Tonga.



In the Kingdom of Tonga, many houses are destroyed following the underwater volcanic eruption and the tsunami produced by the eruption. The internet that connects the country to the outside world is not yet completely recovered.

Tongan people in New Zealand were anxiously trying to help their families in Tonga by sending daily necessities to them. With the help of EIF Auckland, Team Lautoka and NZ Middlemore Sangam Inc, Tzu Chi NZ managed to join the Tongan community by sending goods to Tonga by free shipping. The donation was packed into the container on 30 January, and the ship departed Auckland on 5 February.

Tonga is one of the rare countries that were not affected by Covid-19. Since the volcanic eruption and tsunami, foreign aid workers had brought the virus into the country. To avoid the virus Tonga government closed the border for two weeks, which also affected the speed of relief aid delivery. On 15 February, Ken informed Tzu Chi NZ that the donation had arrived in Tonga.

Food and drinking water were most needed at that time. Tzu Chi's food parcels contain wheat flour, oats, breakfast biscuits, sugar, cooking oil and canned foods. The heartwarming donation benefited about 50 family members and neighbours.



On 22 February Ken and Mele arrived at Tzu Chi NZ at 10 in the morning for a small welcoming ceremony. Tzu Chi volunteer Wang Ping gave a briefing on Master Cheng Yen and the story of the Tzu Chi foundation. Ken and Mele agreed with Tzu Chi's principles and immediately filled up the volunteer form. The couple was presented with the volunteer yellow vest in the ceremony. Wang Ping also gifted the couple a Tzu Chi Blessing Wisdom Red Packet, Quadrilingual Jing-Si Aphorism and Jing Si multi-grain flour. Ken and Mele each put a coin into the bamboo bank for their kind deed of the day, and brought the bamboo bank home.

Ken and Mele shared the story and photographs of Tonga and the process of the delivery of the relief aid. Ken said, "My family in Tonga and I are grateful for Tzu Chi's help. They had received the same food that I have received from Tzu Chi. My family are very grateful. I believe in your great love, may God bless you all".

Today we have the first Tongan volunteers, and Tonga is the 127th country that received Tzu Chi international relief aid.

Meeting for Tonga volcanic eruption victims support

The Kingdom of Tonga consists of over 170 islands in the South Pacific Ocean, of which only 36 islands are inhabited. The islands have a tropical rainforest climate. The Hunga-Tonga volcano is situated about 64 km in the north of the capital of the country. The damage to that area is most severe, the tsunami sent the ship and rocks up the inland, some of the shops and houses were immense in the water, and everywhere was covered by volcanic ash.

Everyone was told to wear a mask and drink bottled water. Tzu Chi relief aid was sent to a village by the sea called Afa, which is about 28.7 km away from the capital city. Most villagers are related to each other. The next village is about 20 minutes away, Mele will get her family to share and care for the villagers.