

After an eighteen-month-long application process for land use and four months of construction, the Tzu Chi Morita Elementary School was finally inaugurated.

1997/1 · Pan Ming



TZU CHI FOUNDATION



Only a border away from America, in the dry mountain areas of Mexico, where there is no water or electricity, residents live a hard life. Early in 1994, the Tzu Chi branch in southern California started to conduct distribution and free clinics in the border city of Tijuana and the Pipila region.

In December 1995, the Tzu Chi Mexico liaison office was set up. It took over the work of giving aid to the poor living in Tijuana and Pipila, and also extended their reach to such places as the city of Mexicali, where long-term charity as well as emergency work was carried out.

Also in December 1995, members of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Los Angeles began to make regular visits to Pipila, where they provided free medical care and physical examinations. In June 1999, forty medical personnel, together with over a hundred members of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Youth Association and volunteers from the United States and Canada traveled to Mexicali in the sweltering heat of forty degrees Celsius (104 F). They took along with them all kinds of medical equipment, with which they held a large-scale free clinic that served over a thousand people.

The Mexican Tzu Chi members also participated in the event by distributing one month's worth of food and necessities of life to 1,300 impoverished families. "The help we are able to provide is limited," a volunteer said. "Our main goal is to combine local resources and encourage locals to extend their love and care for their fellow countrymen."

Morita, a small shantytown in the barren hills south of Tijuana, is a settlement of immigrants who came from the southern parts of Mexico. The administration failed to keep up with the speed at which the population grew; and so the area remained underdeveloped and without water or electricity. School-age children did not go to school because there was no school. Tzu Chi learned about the situation through their numerous missions there and decided to help

## Mexico

### Poverty

Project time: 1994-present

Aid provided: Free clinics, daily necessities and construction of elementary school



the villagers build a school. After almost six months of running back and forth between different government departments, the building permit and land were finally obtained. The Morita Tzu Chi Elementary

School was officially opened in November 1996. It was a place where children could receive proper education, as well as a venue where regular free clinics and distributions of daily necessities were held.

Since its inauguration, the Tzu Chi Mexican liaison office has been involved in many emergency relief operations. When the northernmost state of Baja California Norte experienced heavy rainfall incurred by El Nino, Tijuana was also seriously affected. Tzu Chi volunteers went twice to survey the situation and centered their relief on distribution of food and blankets to the local poor.

In September 1999, a temblor measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale shook Mexico. Shortly after that, in October, continuous rain gave rise to massive mudflows that killed over four thousand people and destroyed the homes of two hundred thousand. It was the worst flooding in Mexico in forty years.

Responding to these disasters, Tzu Chi members in Mexico and southern California formed a fact-finding team to survey the hard-hit state of Veracruz, where they distributed emergency medical supplies and relief cash. Following that, free medical services, food and mattress pads were provided in the disaster areas of Alamo, San Miguel Larica and Gutierrez Zamora.



The Tzu Chi Morita Elementary School also serves as the base for Tzu Chi's long term charity work in the area.

1997/1 · Pan Ming

The child smiles after she is handed a comforter.

1998/12 · Pan Ming

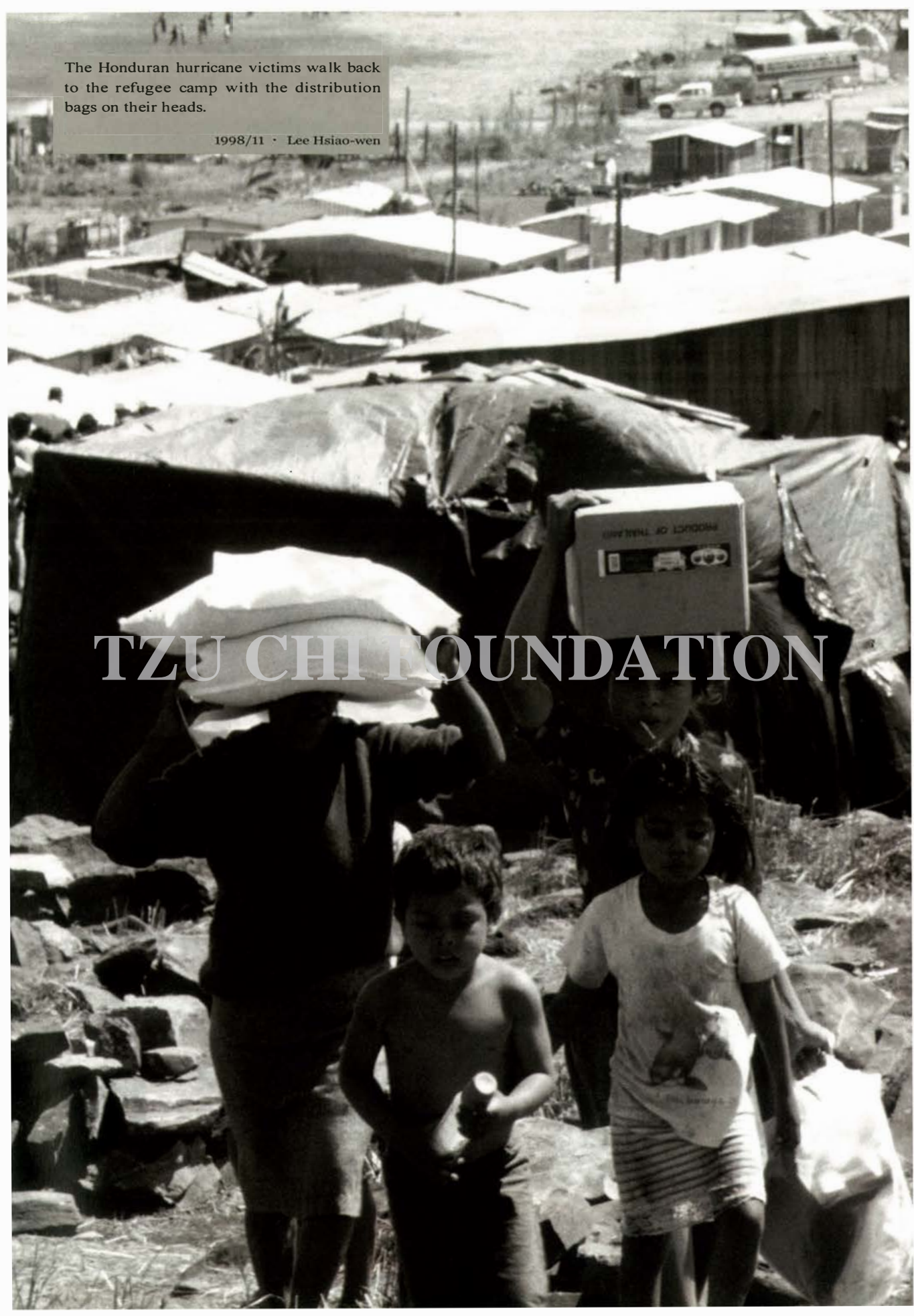




The Honduran hurricane victims walk back to the refugee camp with the distribution bags on their heads.

1998/11 · Lee Hsiao-wen

# TZU CHI FOUNDATION





# Central American Countries

In September and October of 1998, Hurricanes Georges and Mitch swept across the Caribbean Sea, ravaging such countries as Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Floods and mudflows inundated roads, wiped out bridges and took a heavy toll in human lives.

After careful investigation, a Tzu Chi inspection team decided to give priority to Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, and Polo and La Romana in the Dominican Republic, where help was scarce or late in arriving. The relief team distributed food and first aid kits and provided free clinic services.

In Honduras, malaria and dengue fever were rampant even before the hurricanes hurtled through. After the hurricanes, the contagious disease index rose to a staggering ninety percent. When the inspection team reached Tegucigalpa, they discovered that efforts to stop transmission of the diseases had been delayed due to lack of the necessary equipment and chemicals, so they immediately purchased water purification chemicals. At the same time, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Los Angeles acquired sterilizers, spray guns, helmets, goggles and masks, which were promptly shipped to Honduras.

## Hurricanes

Project time: October 1998-February 2000

Aid provided: Daily necessities, sterilization and disease-prevention equipment, free clinics and reconstruction of elementary schools



Aside from providing medical care, sterilization equipment and daily necessities, Tzu Chi also launched a clothing drive in Taiwan. People responded with enthusiasm. Within nine days, three million items of clothing were collected. Fifty thousand volunteers pitched in to help sort, fold, sew and mend, iron and package the clothes. The clothes were to be donated in the most thoughtful and respectful manner.

In January 1999, sixty containers full of clothes and living supplies were shipped to Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Tzu Chi members from the United States took over from there to carry out the distribution.

The Tzu Chi American branch office mobilized more than eighty volunteers to distribute relief goods in Honduras. Working with a local Catholic charity organization, volunteers distributed clothes to refugees in eleven shelters around Tegucigalpa and the remote village of

Tzu Chi volunteers donated disinfectant and sterilization equipment to Honduras. A complete sterilization suit includes an overall, goggles, a spray gun, and rubber gloves and boots.

1998/11 · Yang Chien-jung



The hurricane aggravates the lack of medical resources in the poor mountain area of Mogote, Honduras. The Tzu Chi US Free Clinic organized a medical team to help the inhabitants.

1999/2 · Tzu Chi  
Southern California branch



The free clinics held at the makeshift tent attract many curious Dominicans, who have never received acupuncture before.

1999/2 · Chen Yueh-nu





Choluteca. Meanwhile, the Tzu Chi International Medical Association formed a medical team comprised of fourteen doctors from California, Texas, New York and the Dominican Republic. Before they set out on their mission, the team prepared necessary medicine and equipment based on information they had received about local needs. At the distribution sites and also in the poor Mogote mountains, the medical team provided free medical services for refugees.

In Nicaragua, twelve containers of clothes were distributed to victims. In addition, food, shoes, sewing machines and fabrics were provided for a women's and children's hospital, a shelter, and a local charity organization to help put the lives of the victims back on track.

The disaster did great damage, but it also brought out much love. The relief operation connected Taiwan, the United States and

Central America with love, and it created a cycle of love in the countries that received aid. In the Dominican Republic, Tzu Chi twice held distributions and free clinics that received much help from the local overseas Chinese community and Taiwanese businessmen. From conducting a general survey of the households affected by the disasters to purchasing and delivering rice, from organizing and packaging relief items to recruiting local doctors to participate in the free clinics, everyone pitched in to help and show their love.

To continue Tzu Chi's enterprise of love and carry out long-term charity in the country, local Taiwanese businessmen and the Chinese community established a Tzu Chi liaison office in the Dominican Republic. The Tzu Chi La Romana Elementary School, inaugurated in February 2000, is a visible achievement of local Tzu Chi members.



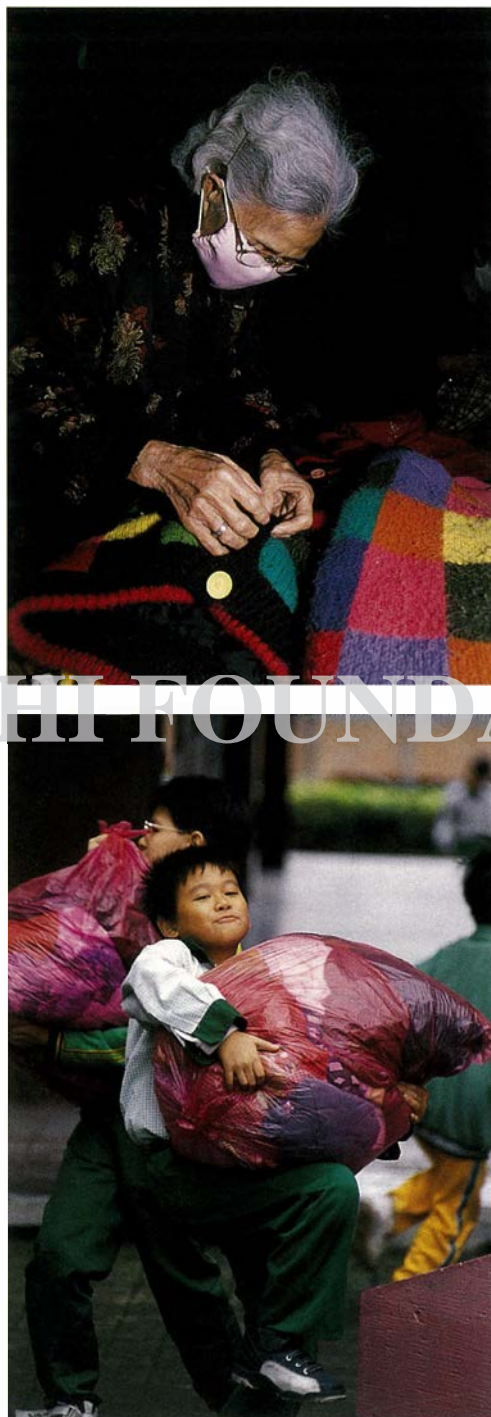
Nicaraguan children search through the dump for toys as well as food.

1999/2 · Lee Hsiao-wen



The volunteers show their respect for the refugees in Central America by packaging the relief clothing with scrupulous care.

1998/12 · Lin Feng-chi





The Dominicans see the distribution as a grand occasion and come in their best attires. Colorful as they are, the children are overjoyed when they are handed boxes of colored markers.

1999/2 · Chen Yueh-nu



Having learnt basic health knowledge from the Tzu Chi doctors, the local high school student volunteering as interpreter teaches the child the right way to brush his teeth.

1999/2 · Chen Yueh-nu

# TZU CHI FOUNDATION



# AMERICAS

## Colombia

3

### Earthquake

Project time: January 1999-February 1999

Aid provided: Medicine, food, housing and free clinics

On January 25, 1999, an earthquake measuring six on the Richter scale occurred in Colombia. The death toll rose to over a thousand and 150,000 people became homeless.

Five days later, a Tzu Chi fact-finding team arrived in Bogota, the national capital. On February 8, the volunteers surveyed the hard-hit cities of Armenia and Calarca. They found that almost eighty-five percent of the buildings were either destroyed or half-destroyed, forcing survivors to camp out on the roadside. There was also a severe shortage of food and medicine. The volunteers entrusted 280 first aid kits and two thousand packs of children's food they had brought with them to the Red Cross in Armenia for distribution to the victims.

A Japanese medical team, Medecins Sans Frontieres and the International Red Cross were all present to bring relief to quake survivors. To avoid overlapping of resources,



Tzu Chi met with the local government and Red Cross to coordinate relief efforts. It was decided that Tzu Chi

would distribute two months' worth of food to over four thousand refugees and conduct a two-day free clinic in the cities of Calarca, Circasia and Finlandia.

Because Tzu Chi had no office in Colombia, the relief operation was the joint effort of fifty Tzu Chi members from the United States, Argentina and Taiwan. Workers of the Colombian Red Cross and local high school students also gave much support, helping overcome difficulties in language, transportation and manpower.

Isabella, a local volunteer who served as translator, said, "Many people are unable to empathize with the victims. Tzu Chi people not only gave goods, they also embraced and interacted with the victims, which made them feel loved and cared for."



The worst disaster in a century took the lives  
of more than fifty thousand people and made  
five hundred thousand people homeless.

2000/1 · Tzu Chi Archives

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## Venezuela

**Mudflows**

Project time: January 2000

Aid provided: Medicine and water purification equipment

From late November through December 1999, it rained in what was normally the dry season in Venezuela. At around ten in the evening of December 15, mountain floods caused by heavy, continuous rainfall induced massive landslides and mudflows. The mudflows destroyed the homes of tens of thousands of people and caused countless deaths—some reports say five thousand, some say thirty thousand. The death toll may never be known.

It was the worst natural disaster to hit Venezuela in a century. In the worst-hit state of Vargas, large trees, rocks and mud sped down with the mountain floods, burying residents at the bottom of the mountain or washing them into the sea. Over a hundred thousand people stayed in temporary shelters set up by the government or charity organizations.

In January 2000, a fact-finding team of five US Tzu Chi members traveled through Vargas for four days. They donated



antipyretic, painkillers, gastrointestinal medicine, antibiotics and vitamins at numerous shelters. They also

conducted an evaluation of the actual needs for water purification equipment, large tents and heavy machinery.

On January 26, a second fact-finding team, including two water purification specialists, arrived in Caracas, the national capital. The water supply system in the disaster area had been damaged, and although organizations from the United States, Germany and France were providing clean water, it was not enough to meet the demands of the extensive disaster area. Most victims still drank directly from the river.

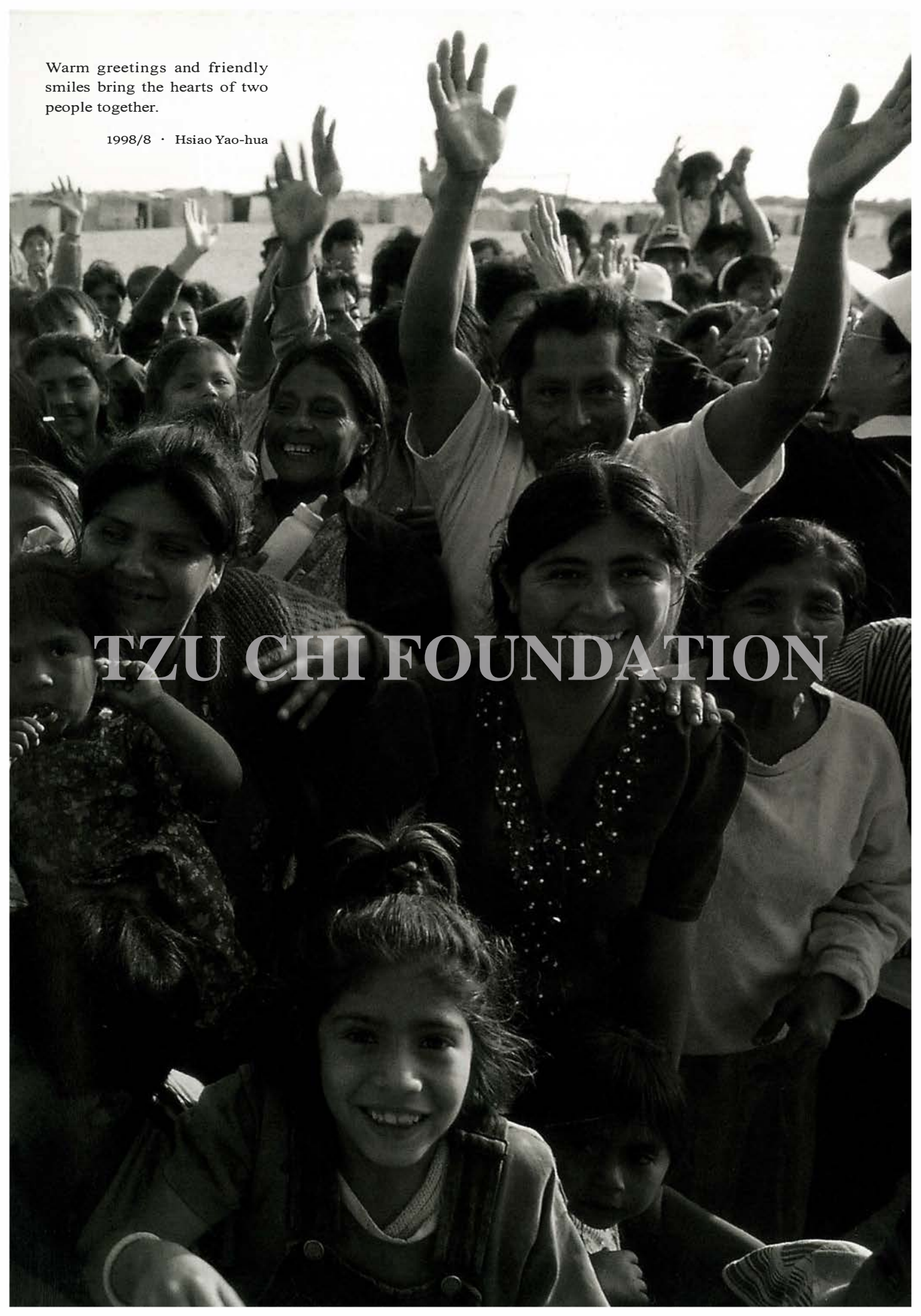
After evaluation, Tzu Chi reached the decision to donate mobile water purification equipment to hard-hit Naiguata, on the Caribbean coast. A specialist was sent to the city to help operate the machine, which produced five hundred tons of clean water daily.



Warm greetings and friendly  
smiles bring the hearts of two  
people together.

1998/8 · Hsiao Yao-hua

# TZU CHI FOUNDATION



## Peru

**Floods**

Project time: May 1998-November 1998

Aid provided: Daily necessities, first aid kits,  
building materials and free clinics

In late 1997 and early 1998, Peru, usually dry and with little rainfall, experienced heavy floods under the influence of El Nino, the southward-flowing ocean current off the coast of Peru that causes environmental and climatic disturbances every few years. The floods killed over three hundred people, affected seventy thousand families and destroyed schools and medical stations. The floodwaters created the perfect condition for outbreaks of malaria, cholera, conjunctivitis and skin diseases.

Tzu Chi members from the United States evaluated the situation in May, and in mid-August a relief project was implemented. The distribution centered on seventeen towns in the three harder-hit areas of Lambayeque, Ferrenafe and Chiclayo counties. Food, drinking water, blankets, mosquito nets, waterproof sheets and first aid kits were distributed to two thousand households in these three counties. Free clinics providing both Chinese and Western medicines were simultaneously held at the distribution sites.

There were huts built by other relief groups, but they would last only one to two years. Tzu Chi therefore decided to provide



building materials and tools for the construction of brick houses to residents in six hard-hit villages in Chiclayo County. Three months later, when the houses were completed, the local

government, moved by the efforts of the volunteers, decided to construct water and electricity supply systems for the villages.

Once the villagers were resettled, the women began to engage in piecework. A twelve-hour workday earned them US\$6, and their lives markedly improved. Chang Chao-nan, a volunteer who participated in the relief project, said, "These villagers, living in brick houses and working for a limited amount of income, have displayed tenacity and contentment that is truly moving."

Another volunteer, Chang Chi-chin, remarked, "When we went to the villages to congratulate them on moving into their new homes, they thanked us with bright smiles, home-grown fruit and exuberant cheering. It was then that we realized how significant our humble efforts have been to them."

When the relief project reached its conclusion, Tzu Chi volunteers in Peru and Argentina continued to follow the developments in Chiclayo and to provide assistance where there was need.



The flood victims walk with surer steps  
as they return home with comforters  
and rice distributed by Tzu Chi.

1998/8 · Hsiao Yao-hua

# TZU CHI FOUNDATION



A photograph of a refugee camp. In the foreground, a dirt path leads towards a row of makeshift huts with corrugated metal roofs. Several people are walking away from the camera; two women in the center carry large white sacks on their heads, and a small child walks between them. To the right, another woman carries a sack, and a child follows. A tall, thin metal pole stands in the middle ground. In the background, a windmill is visible against a clear sky. The text "TZU CHI FOUNDATION" is overlaid in the center of the image.

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