

# TZU-CHI *USA Journal*



**Tzu Chi Youth:  
Seizing the Future Today**  
Celebrating Water and Connection  
Advocacy and Partnership



# CONTEMPLATIVE WISDOM

Thoughts for meditation, contemplation,  
and reflection

**Dharma Master Cheng Yen**

*Founder of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation*

By combining each others' strengths and  
compensating for each others' weaknesses,  
together, we can reach the state of perfection.  
With such a relationship, there is no competition,  
only improvement.



# CONTENTS

TZU CHI USA JOURNAL  
ISSUE 69 | SUMMER 2023

## Contemplative Wisdom

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen

## 03 Editor's Note

By Anik Ghose

## 04 DHARMA STORIES

### The Cycle of Love

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen  
Translated by the Dharma as Water Team



## COVER STORY

### Tzu Chi on the International Stage: Advocacy and Partnership

By Ida Eva Zielinska

## 20 FEATURE STORY

### Celebrating Water and Connection: Tzu Chi Hosts UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

By Anna Sipek and Ida Eva Zielinska

## 30 PORTRAIT STORY

### An Inside Look at *Uprooted: Compassion After Displacement*

By Dilber Shatursun

## 36 FEATURE STORY

### Seizing the Future Today: Tzu Chi's Ongoing Environmental Youth Initiatives

By Adriana DiBenedetto

## 44 PORTRAIT STORY

### Commitment Blossoms: One Tzu Chi Youth's Story

By Ida Eva Zielinska

## 56 WORDS OF WISDOM

### Being Able to Give Is a Blessing

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen  
Translated and Compiled  
by the Dharma as Water Team

## 59 Dharma Q & A

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen

## 60 Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation Global Relief Efforts

By Adriana DiBenedetto

## 62 Tzu Chi USA Relief Efforts

By Adriana DiBenedetto

## 64 Tzu Chi USA Directory

**Cover:** This year's Tzu Chi Annual Community Weekend saw young volunteers in Irvine, California, collaborate with the Second Harvest Food Bank to support local communities during Easter weekend. *Photo/Tzu Chi Young Leaders*

- Publisher: Debra Boudreaux
- Publishing Director: Ting Fan
- Editor-in-Chief: Anik Ghose
- Deputy Editor: Ida Eva Zielinska
- Editors: Adriana DiBenedetto, Dilber Shatursun
- Art Director: Ling Soo
- Senior Designer: Tom Yang
- Translation: Dharma As Water Team
- Contributors: Tzu Chi USA Volunteers

The Editorial Team sincerely thanks all contributors and invites feedback and contributions. Please contact us at [journal@tzuchi.us](mailto:journal@tzuchi.us). Read the online version at [journal.tzuchi.us](http://journal.tzuchi.us).

© copyright 2023 **Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation** All rights reserved. All photos are the property of Tzu Chi unless otherwise noted. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage-and-retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. All articles contain the views of their authors, which do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation.




## Even if disaster can strike at any moment we're there every step of the way.

In the blink of an eye, everything can change.  
But, with years of disaster relief experience under  
our belts, Tzu Chi USA volunteers have what it  
takes to help you meet your family's, neighbors',  
and community's most important needs.  
We don't just provide monetary support.  
We provide a shoulder to lean on.

**Help us assist families after disasters.**



Donate at  
[donate.tzuchi.us](https://donate.tzuchi.us)

elcome to the Summer 2023 Issue of the Tzu Chi USA Journal. Our theme centers around the notion of **One World**, with stories celebrating collaboration, partnership, and connection in addressing global problems that affect us all on this spinning planet Earth we all call home.

“Tzu Chi on the International Stage: Advocacy and Partnership” reveals how beginning in 2003, recognizing the importance of engaging with international organizations, Tzu Chi started establishing a presence within the United Nations System. As members of the Global Partnership Affairs Department recount, the scope of involvement has flourished since then.

In conjunction with UN affiliations, the Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief in New York City hosted the Water for Healing, Justice, and Action: Building Blocks of a New Resiliency Paradigm event in March. “Celebrating Water and Connection: Tzu Chi Hosts UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event” recaps the program, which “championed the primordial nature of water and why we need to respect and protect it, guaranteeing access to all.”

Environmental protection is just one aspect of Tzu Chi’s agency concerning global issues; helping people seeking refuge in other countries after fleeing their homeland is another. In “An Inside Look at *Uprooted: Compassion After Displacement*,” we preview an upcoming exhibition coming to the Tzu Chi Center this summer, showcasing Tzu Chi’s dedication to aiding global refugees.

From a school in Turkey providing education for Syrian refugees to our recent efforts in Poland to support displaced Ukrainians, Tzu Chi pays particular attention to the next generation; helping refugee children heal and preparing them for the future. In that regard, the voice of youth is vital as the world copes with the uncertainties and complexities ahead.

“Seizing the Future Today: Tzu Chi’s Ongoing Environmental Youth Initiatives” illustrates how Tzu Chi youth, whether compassionate students or young professionals inspired to make an impact, tackle the world’s most prominent concerns. Through their annual Community Weekend, where they **unite and serve** together, Tzu Chi Young Leaders benefit communities and inspire change.

Looking more in-depth, “Commitment Blossoms: One Tzu Chi Youth’s Story” brings a captivating portrait of Ashley Yong, a Tzu Chi youth representative and member of the Global Partnership Affairs Department team. We can see how her dedication to Tzu Chi’s philosophy and missions has brought her to the forefront in the international arena.

All combined, it’s a thought-provoking issue.

by **Anik Ghose**

# The Cycle of Love

*"May our compassion reach every corner of the world. May it bathe sentient beings in happiness like the soft and gentle touch of moonlight."*

*Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

There was a famous celebrity, Miss Chen, who was very enthusiastic about public welfare and devoted herself to Tzu Chi volunteer work. She once took a trip to the US to help with fundraising events to raise money for the Project Hope school reconstruction project after the 921 earthquake [a disaster in Taiwan that caused around 2,400 deaths and 10,000 injuries]. The taxi driver taking her to the airport overheard her telling a friend about her trip. He said to her, "You are a Tzu Chi volunteer. Is that why you are making a special trip to the United States? For the sake of the 921 Project Hope?"

Miss Chen replied, "Yes! Our Master has a very heavy burden. Tzu Chi volunteers around the world care very much about this project, so there will be several fundraising dinners in the United States." The taxi driver

then shared, "During the time of the 921 earthquake, it was really touching to see Tzu Chi volunteers who were so dedicated and worked so hard to help the survivors."

He continued, "I am so fortunate to give you a ride today. I should also contribute a little bit, but I am only a taxi driver and not financially well off. Because my wife is about to give birth, I happened to spend eight hundred Taiwanese dollars to buy a gold charm as a gift for my newborn son. I want to donate it to Tzu Chi so you can auction it at the fundraising dinners; I want the proceeds to be given to the 921 Project Hope."

Miss Chen was very moved. She brought this gold charm to the United States, and while hosting a fundraising dinner, she told the guests the taxi driver's story. Everyone was touched and enthusiastically offered



to buy that gold charm. It sold for a thousand US dollars, and another person donated an additional thousand dollars.

The buyer was a Tzu Chi volunteer in the United States. He asked Miss Chen to bring the gold charm back to Taiwan and said, "I was moved by this father. His wife is about to give birth. Please bring this gift back to the original owner."

From this true touching story, we can see that human nature is full of love. This taxi driver is not well off, but he did his best to spread his love to the United States. His love touched another person, who returned the gift to him. Think about it, isn't the cycle of love beautiful?

People who live with love are truly the most blessed! There are so many natural disasters and manmade calamities in

the world, causing pain and suffering that are beyond words to describe. We also experienced many natural disasters and manmade calamities, but fortunately, we were able to get through them. We should therefore be grateful that we can live in safety and peace.

In addition, if everyone can dedicate their love to people and society, all of the love can be gathered to form immense power. With one common goal, we can unite our strength. It is as I often say, "Many drops of water make a river; many grains of rice make a bushel." Power can be gathered bit by bit to become immense. In this case, is there anything that cannot be achieved?

Even with a great difficult mission like Project Hope, we should have confidence that we can complete it. 🌱



# Tzu Chi on the International Stage: Advocacy and Partnership

*Written by Ida Eva Zielinska*

**W**hile Tzu Chi volunteers are at the forefront of Tzu Chi's global missions, providing charity and disaster relief assistance, offering educational and medical care services, and more, another team is working behind the scenes: The Global Partnership Affairs Department, or GPAD, in short.

Tzu Chi officially created GPAD two years ago. However, its roots and activities go back to 2003: Recognizing the importance of engaging with the international community, Tzu Chi became a

member of the United Nations Department of Public Information (UN DPI), now the United Nations Department of Global Communications (UN DGC).

Tzu Chi USA Chief Executive Officer Debra Boudreaux recounts that the global affairs group was known as the UN Task Force at that time: "From this core team, we got ourselves through the door." When Tzu Chi formed GPAD, she remained, although without a specific title, "It's just support, participation, engagement, facilitating."





Tzu Chi USA Chief Executive Officer and Global Partnership Affairs Department member Debra Boudreaux shares the meaning of Tzu Chi's "Great Love" pendant with attendees of the 62nd United Nations Women's Assembly in New York in 2018, explaining that love knows no nationality or language. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*

Debra Boudreaux (third right), Johan Alwall (left), Ashley Yong (second right), and Yotam Polizer (third left), Global CEO of IsraAID, one of Tzu Chi's partners in assistance for Ukrainian refugees, take a group shot in Romania in May 2022. *Photo/GPAD Team*

**The whole concept of the Global Partnership Affairs Department is to bring Tzu Chi's horizons to the global level. The global level tells us to 'think big, but focus on grassroots efforts.' From the grassroots, you find your partners, then work from the regional to national, and then to international, to global.**

**Debra Boudreaux**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Tzu Chi USA

GPAD's work is critical in introducing Tzu Chi's spirit of compassion in action and one global family approach to aid while seeking, forging, and maintaining international partnerships and collaborations toward joint humanitarian missions.

**Overall, the role of global partnership for Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation is to foster greater cooperation and collaboration across borders and cultures in order to create a more compassionate and just world for all.**

**Branda Ng**  
Manager  
Global Partnership Affairs Department





Steve Chiu visits UN Headquarters in New York City for the first time in 2011. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team

**When organizations that have never met Tzu Chi before learn of our approach to our work and aid, the most common response we receive as a team is remarks around how holistic and all-encompassing Tzu Chi's interventions are.**

“

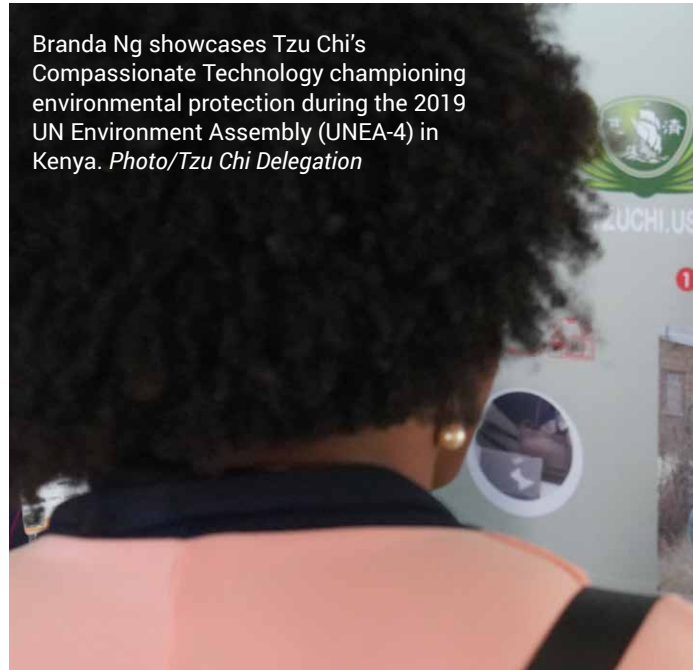
**Steve Chiu**

*Program Director*

*Global Partnership Affairs Department*

From GPAD team members' perspectives, let's explore what GPAD does and why it's essential for Tzu Chi, whose aid footprints have already reached 128 countries and regions. The voices contributing to this narrative are all Tzu Chi veterans – beginning with Tzu Chi USA CEO Debra Boudreaux, who joined the world of Tzu Chi over 30 years ago in 1989 as a media volunteer, then began volunteer training in 1991.

Johan Alwall, a specialist on the team, became part of Tzu Chi as a volunteer in 2008, serving full-time by 2013, then assuming roles involving English language needs within the organization. Ashley Yong, a youth representative and project manager, joined as a Tzu Chi Youth Group member in 2010. [Read about Ashley's Tzu Chi journey in detail in our portrait story beginning on page 44]



Branda Ng showcases Tzu Chi's Compassionate Technology championing environmental protection during the 2019 UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-4) in Kenya. Photo/Tzu Chi Delegation

Branda Ng joined Tzu Chi in 2003 as a Collegiate Association member in Singapore; after roles in medical missions and Tzu Chi Global Headquarters offices in Taiwan, she is now a GPAD manager. For Steve Chiu, a GPAD program director, his first memories of Tzu Chi date back to 1999 when he was just a seven-year-old child, and he proudly declares, “Tzu Chi has consistently been a part of my life ever since.”

## Presence Within the United Nations System

The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation (BTCF) has officially been an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) since July 19, 2010. “Obtaining special consultative status with ECOSOC was the culmination of almost ten years of efforts from Tzu Chi volunteers to participate in, share at, and engage with various United Nations Conferences,” Steve Chiu says, adding:



Sharing Tzu Chi's perspective, which embodies founder Dharma Master Cheng Yen's views and Buddhist wisdom, is vital for the GPAD team.

**What motivates me every day coming to work is the opportunity to share and spread Master's philosophy and Tzu Chi's methods of empowerment. By ourselves, no matter how big we grow, Tzu Chi can only reach a small number of people in suffering, but if we can spread our philosophy and principles, we can make a greater impact on the world.**

“

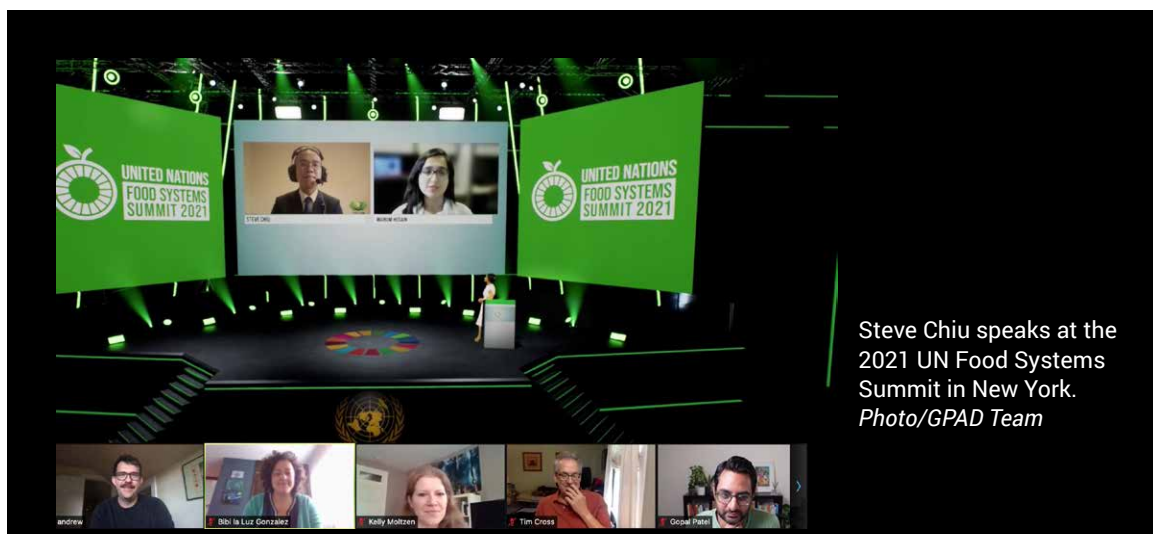
**Johan Alwall**

*Specialist*

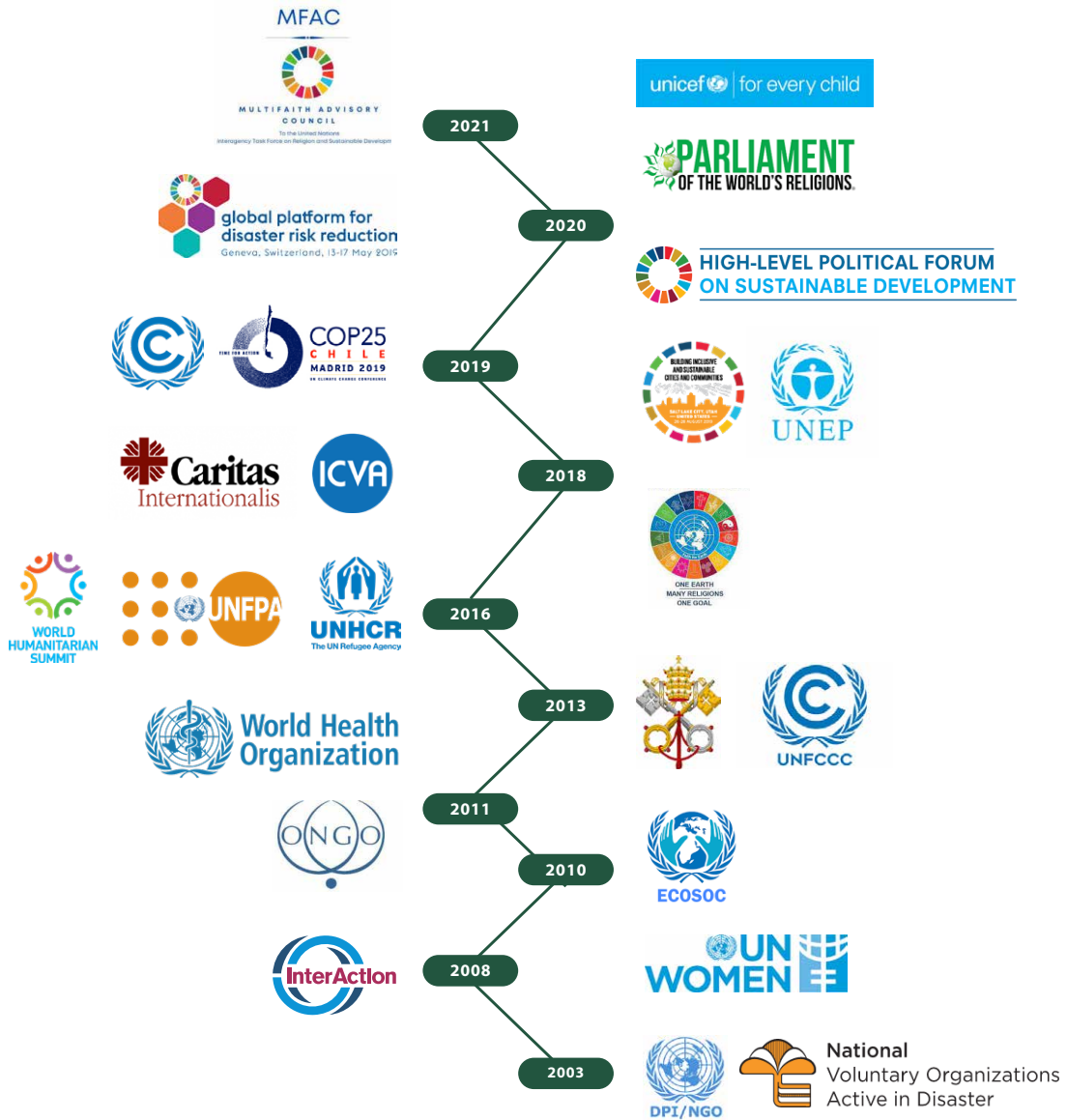
*Global Partnership Affairs Department*

*“Having special consultative status and engaging with the UN ensures that the international community recognizes and understands Tzu Chi's best practices and know-how. BTCF can advocate for practices and policies that align with the values and actions of Tzu Chi volunteers from around the world, helping shape the consciousness of members of ECOSOC while being in community with like-minded civil society organizations that seek to amplify the impact being made on both the global and local level.”*

With this at heart, “Over the past 20 years, Tzu Chi has worked hard to engage with the United Nations and seek accreditation with various UN agencies whose work aligns deeply with Tzu Chi's missions and footprints,” Steve tells us. Debra Boudreaux points out that UN DPI (now UN DGC) membership was “just the entry level for us. And then from Tzu Chi's four major missions [Charity, Medicine, Education, Humanistic Culture], we slowly expanded each within the UN family's structures.”



Steve Chiu speaks at the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit in New York.  
*Photo/GPAD Team*



Timeline of Tzu Chi's Participation in UN Organizations

“The result of these efforts is building a tremendous network of organizations, partners, and agencies that deeply understand and appreciate Tzu Chi’s perspectives on sustainable development, humanitarian assistance, and the empowerment of the most vulnerable,” Steve confirms.

Moreover, “The GPAD team is constantly exploring new ways to utilize this network to strengthen Tzu Chi’s advocacy at the international level and help Tzu Chi volunteers deepen their impact at the ground level.”



The UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development appoints the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation to serve as a co-chair on the Multi-Faith Advisory Council. *Photo/ United Nations*

Currently, BTCF participates in the activities of UN Women, the UN Refugee Agency, UNICEF, and UN Youth affairs. In 2019, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) affirmed BTCF as a Non-Governmental Organization Observer entitled to submit written suggestions or publish related plans.

**Engagement, participation, and that's step one. From there, we're moving into a stakeholder position. From the stakeholder position, we can have the capacity to make a statement, to present initiatives, to share about Master Cheng Yen's legacy, and also to promote Buddhism in action.**

**Debra Boudreaux**  
 Chief Executive Officer  
 Tzu Chi USA



A Tzu Chi delegation participates in the fourth session of the UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA-4) in Kenya in 2019. *Photo/Tzu Chi Delegation*





Branda Ng explains Tzu Chi's SDGs commitments at the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's information station during UNEA-4 (the fourth session of the UN Environmental Assembly) in Nairobi, Kenya. *Photo/Tzu Chi Delegation*

Most recently, the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (UN IATF-R) appointed BTCF as one of the four Co-Chairs of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council to serve a two-year term starting in 2022. Boudreaux explains more:

*"All faiths have the same language: Love. It's just how to carry out this love across communities of different faiths that we work through. As a co-chair, we have more capacity to share with them, to share the Buddhist perspective, and we have more capacity to invite them and convene meetings at the Tzu Chi Center for discussion. So, it's a stakeholder position, and we have more capacity to let people be aware of Buddhists in action."*

## Advocacy for the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Another way GPAD (and Tzu Chi overall) engages with the United Nations

and aspects of its agenda is through diligent work toward and advocacy for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 in the hopes of reaching them as a global community by 2030. The SDGs provide "a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future."

**Working across all four missions and eight footprints [including International Relief, Environmental Protection, Bone Marrow Donor Registry, and Volunteerism], we find that Tzu Chi's work deeply intersects with the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and truly is representative of the cross-cutting and holistic approach that the SDGs aspire to have.**

“

**Steve Chiu**  
Program Director  
Global Partnership Affairs Department

As Branda Ng explained, Tzu Chi, a Faith-based Organization, is committed to several of the 17 SDGs through its work in charity to provide basic needs and economic empowerment; hunger and malnutrition relief; health care initiatives, medical outreach, encouragement of healthy lifestyles and disease prevention; educational support for disadvantaged children and adults, plus character education programs; promotion of environmentally sustainable and plant-based diets, recycling, and avoidance of single-use plastic products; support for peace through spiritual guidance, and; creation of partnerships in all regards.

Ashley Yong shares that Tzu Chi is committed to the SDGs even internally, and to support that, will consistently “Provide comprehensive Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to Tzu Chi volunteers through workshops; Interlink Tzu Chi community programs to SDGs using SDGs terminologies and knowledge, and; Use SDGs in the media/design for events and activ-

ities.” She also points out GPAD’s efforts to align with the SDGs and its targets by assembling gender-balanced panels, ensuring zero-waste events, etc.

## Partnerships and Empowerment

Among the UN’s 17 SDGs, the last is Partnerships for the Goals, and seeking and forging these is central to GPAD’s role within Tzu Chi.

**By forming partnerships, Tzu Chi can increase the impact of its relief efforts, share resources and expertise, promote interfaith and intercultural understanding, and build a network of support that can be leveraged during future crises.**

**Branda Ng**  
Manager

Global Partnership Affairs Department



The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation supports UN Sustainable Development Goals 1-4, 12-13, and 16-17.



In May 2022, members of the GPAD team visit an institution that Tzu Chi is helping in Moldova as part of the aid mission for Ukrainian refugees. Photo/GPAD Team

Forming global partnerships during international emergencies is especially important, as it was in 2022 after the war between Russia and Ukraine erupted and created a Ukrainian refugee crisis. Thanks to GPAD's efforts, Tzu Chi secured a Memorandum of Understanding with several organizations serving displaced Ukrainians, including UNICEF, Camillian Disaster Service International Foundation (CADIS), IsraAID, Polish Women Can Foundation, Airlink, ADRA International, Project HOPE, and World Hope International.

Although, crises are not the only context where partnerships are essential:

**There are many parts of the world where there are no Tzu Chi volunteers, but great local needs, whether due to natural or man-made disasters or as a result of long-term marginalization and poverty. In these situations, finding local or international partner**

**organizations is often the only way to respond to the suffering encountered by the people.**

“

**Johan Alwall**  
Specialist  
Global Partnership Affairs Department

Johan Alwall identified the long-term effects of sharing Tzu Chi's values and methodology (which inspire both partners and assisted communities and lead to enhanced mutual care and self-reliance) by citing the example of Sierra Leone, where “a strong local community volunteer culture has grown since Tzu Chi started working with local partners. Now, whenever there is an emergency or calamity in a community, volunteers quickly gather to assess the situation and assist the residents.”

Empowerment is equally prominent within GPAD's goals. Concerning partnerships, it's a two-way flow benefiting Tzu Chi's missions and its partners' aims and activities. Johan elaborates:



*"We always pay close attention to our partners' suggestions while providing expertise and guidance to maximize the effects of the collaborations. In particular, working with local partner organizations in locations where we're unable to routinely go ourselves (whether due to the security situation or simply to distance and travel expenses), we listen closely to their assessments of the situation and their suggestions for solutions. Based on available resources, we then work with the local partners to adjust the proposals until an optimal outcome can be reached."*

Concurrently, GPAD collaborates with the international community to promote grassroots empowerment. "In our project assessments, we particularly value projects that help local communities develop resilience and sustainability in the face of the challenges they encounter," Johan says.

Ashley Yong pinpoints that GPAD also empowers young people, women, and members of marginalized groups within the scope of its activities, giving them a voice on the global stage by providing speaking opportunities, a chance to attend or participate in the planning stages of meetings and events, and so on.



In June 2023, Tzu Chi and the Polish Women Can Foundation cement plans for the Safe Haven cooperation project, leading to a center opening on June 29 and providing Polish and English language courses, psychological counseling, legal consultation, and more for Ukrainian refugees.

*Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*





Co-organizers of the 2022 Holistic Climate Solutions Summit take a moment to rejoice. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*

## Embracing New Opportunities

“Some of the latest milestones in GPAD’s history haven’t been new UN entities that Tzu Chi has become accredited to, as we already have our hands quite full working with our existing UN partners,” Steve Chiu announced. Coinciding with Climate Week NYC, GPAD’s September 2022 Holistic Climate Solutions Summit – a seven-day, 22-event summit that was co-organized with 25 partner organizations and centered around existing holistic approaches and models that can tackle our climate crisis – was a first for the team.

In 2023, partnerships emerged at the forefront of humanitarian support for those impacted by two successive earthquakes

that struck Türkiye near the border with Syria on February 6. First, that same month, to immediately ensure earthquake survivors could receive hot food, Tzu Chi partnered with the nonprofit organization World Central Kitchen, which provides emergency food relief, serving fresh meals to disaster survivors.

In March, Tzu Chi formalized a collaboration with Dünya Doktorları Derneği, the Türkiye arm of the Doctors of the World International Network, comprising 17 national chapters that work together in 80 countries serving the most vulnerable people in need of health care. In fact, Tzu Chi has worked with Doctors of the World International before.

As Po-Wen Yen, Chief Executive Officer of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation stated during the signing ceremony, Tzu Chi has worked with Doctors of the World since 1993, and this latest joint venture will combine expertise, resources, and efforts to make a meaningful difference in the lives of the survivors.

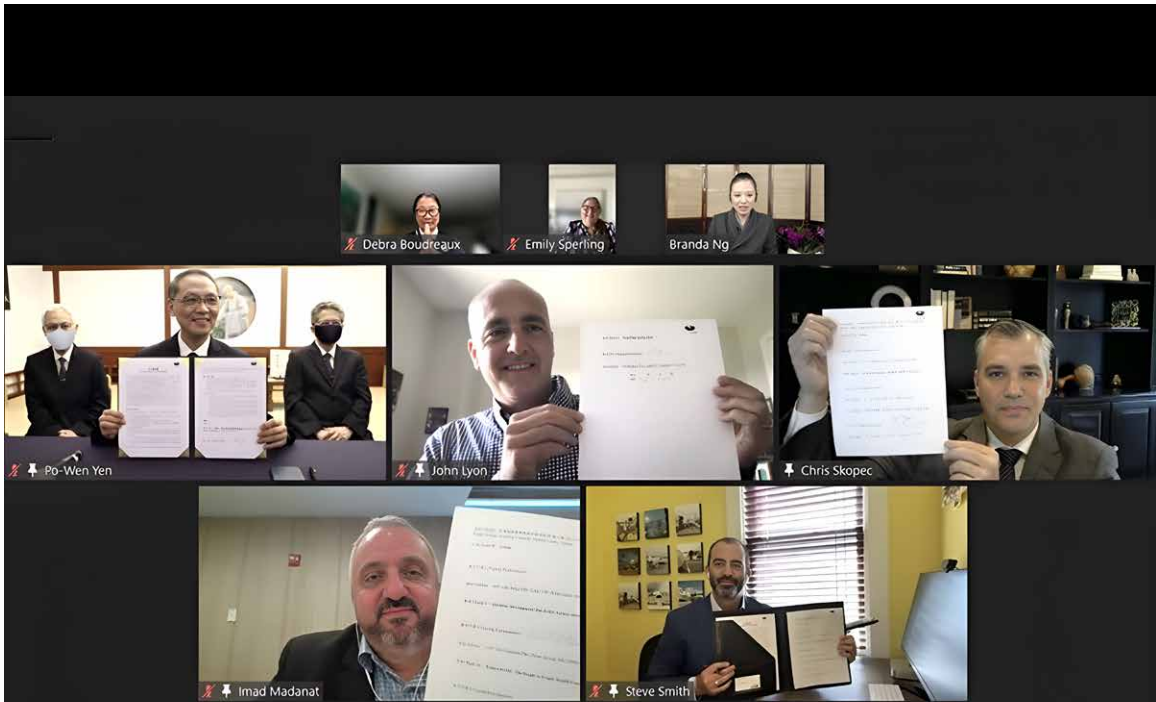
**Our collaboration will work towards providing physical and mental health support to those who have been traumatized by the earthquake.**

**Po-Wen Yen**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation (HQ)

Fraser Mooney, Executive Director at Doctors of the World USA, who represented the Doctors of the World International Network during the ceremony, highlighted the significance of this alliance:

**Although the media spotlight has largely moved on to other subjects, the effects being felt in the region have not ended. It will take years for these communities to repair and heal and that is why this year-long partnership with the Tzu Chi Foundation is so important.**

**Fraser Mooney**  
Executive Director  
Doctors of the World USA



On March 29, 2023, Tzu Chi formalizes a partnership with Doctors of the World Türkiye to support recent earthquake survivors in their region. *Photo/GPAD Team*



United Nations  
Climate Change



UN CLIM  
CONFER

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



An international Tzu Chi delegation participates in the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Scotland in 2021. *Photo/GPAD Team*



Steve Chiu represents Tzu Chi on a 2022 Future of Food panel during COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. *Photo/GPAD Team*

### Tzu Chi's Voice Matters

Whether in forging partnerships, SDGs advocacy, or a presence on the international stage, the GPAD team, BTCF, and every Tzu Chi volunteer collectively agree that Tzu Chi's unique voice matters and should be heard. And that voice leads back to Tzu Chi's founder, Dharma Master Cheng Yen.

# CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE UK 2021

IN ITALY



Throughout her life, Dharma Master Cheng Yen has shared many insights about the world and human nature based on her Buddhist teachings and personal experiences. She stresses the importance of serving others and positively impacting the world. Voicing is also important for Tzu Chi because it can help challenge the stigma and stereotypes often associated with poverty. When people living in poverty can share their stories and experiences, they can help to humanize the issue and show that poverty is not a personal failing, but a structural problem that requires systemic change.

**Branda Ng**  
Manager

Global Partnership Affairs Department



The power of Tzu Chi's advocacy and message is found within the understanding that if we are to create a better future for all, we cannot simply address the material lack/needs of those who are suffering. That is not enough. We must also work to unpack root causes and shift our societies away from the pursuit of materialistic progress at the expense of our planet's wellbeing. This in turn is why Tzu Chi's voice matters: We provide an alternative narrative to our commonly held notions of progress, and model what a good life truly looks like – a life of empowerment, service, and interconnectedness with the natural world.

**Steve Chiu**

Program Director

Global Partnership Affairs Department



We can see that the GPAD team has created engagement, participation, and a stakeholder position. As Tzu Chi USA CEO and GPAD team member Debra Boudreaux highlights, that's just the beginning:

From there, we can move to a higher level, to build up Buddhist teachings into the road map of the UN's various programs, various work streams, and from those teachings, it's how to engage the policymakers.

**Debra Boudreaux**

Chief Executive Officer


Tzu Chi USA



# CELEBRATING WATER AND CONNECTION:

Tzu Chi Hosts UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

*Written by Anna Sipek and Ida Eva Zielinska*



**G**athered together, the participants breathe in sync, their exhales, waves crashing on the beach. The meditation leader prompts them to inhale once more, reminding all of the cyclical nature of both water and existence. In March, the Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief in New York City hosted a two-day United Nations 2023 Water Conference Side Event, Water for Healing, Justice and Action: Building Blocks of a New Resiliency Paradigm.

The UN 2023 Water Conference was co-hosted by Tajikistan and the Netherlands and ran from March 22 to 24 at UN Headquarters in Manhattan. It included opening, closing, and plenary sessions, interactive dialogues, and side events organized by participants.

Tzu Chi's side event, held over two days on March 24 and 25, was co-organized by SCEN (Southeast Climate & Energy Network) and AHAM Education, a nonprofit whose name is an acronym for the Art of Happiness and Mindfulness and the Academy of the Heart and Mind. It brought together activists, experts, and spiritual leaders from around the world to fight for the sanctity of water.



Session participants watch *Wade in the Water: Drowning in Racism*, a 15-minute Emmy Award-winning film by panelist Cathleen Dean. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team

The two-day agenda included panel sessions, three held at the Tzu Center and one at the Baha'i International Community's offices in UN Plaza. The event concluded with an opportunity to practice Blue Mindfulness. All combined, the program's sessions championed the primordial nature of water and why we need to respect and protect it, guaranteeing access to all.

**We are water, and water is our medicine, and when we don't have that relationship with the water, our waterways get polluted, it affects our drinking water, and people are denied access. Water is so important. It connects all of us across the planet, and we need to have that relationship with it.**



**Cathleen Dean**  
Emmy Award-Winning Filmmaker

## Seeking Water Justice

The opening session at the Tzu Chi Center on Friday, March 24, "Water Justice – Decolonizing and Restoring Intergenerational Relationships to Water for Access, Safety, and Post-Traumatic Healing," explored the history of water relations in the United States and the role that colonization played in the disruption of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) access and connection to water as a source of survival, recreation, and cultural tradition.

The session incorporated the screening of *Wade in the Water: Drowning in Racism*, a 15-minute Emmy Award-winning film by one of the panelists, Cathleen Dean. "It's a documentary film about a protest that took place in South Florida to desegregate the beaches and the swimming pools, and it's also about the historical spiritual and cultural connection people of African



descent have always had with the water," she shared.

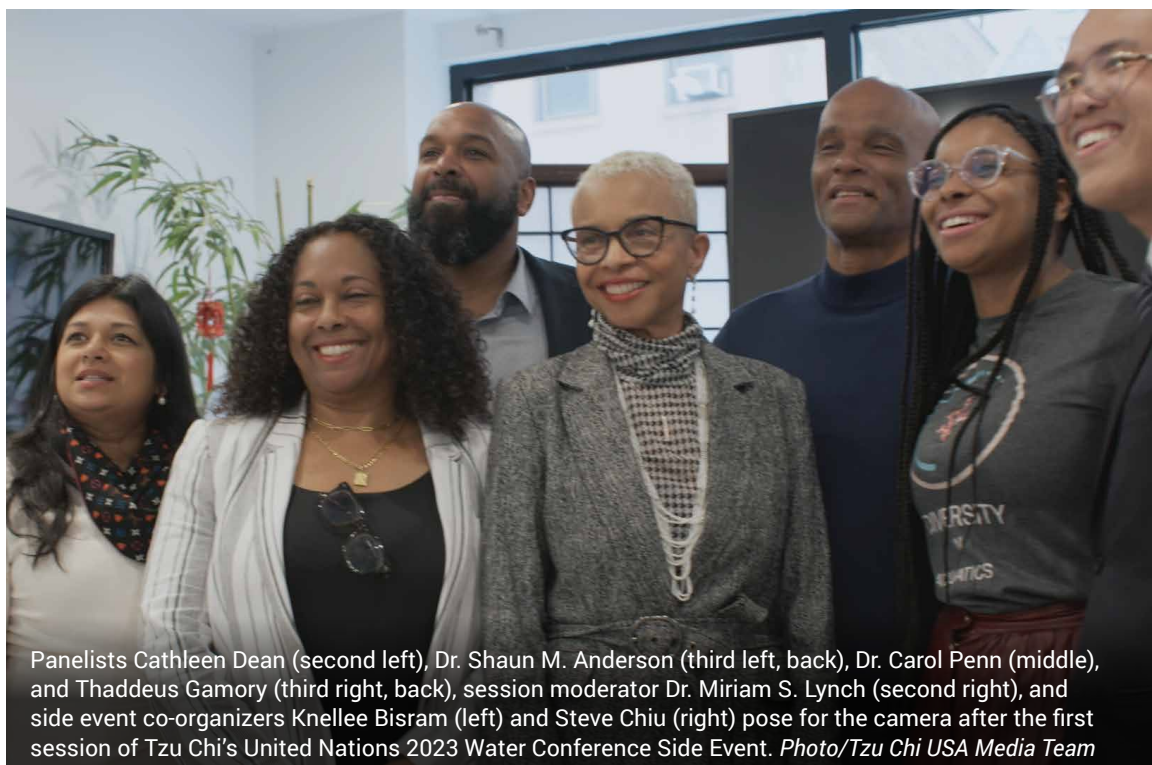
**As water became something in the late 1800s and early 1900s, where people saw it as a healing benefit, they gravitated to other bodies of water and they started to create resort settings around them. But as they developed those spaces, they wanted to restrict them and create spaces which are exclusively white. And when they did that, it had an impact. It had an impact on black and brown communities and their continued relationship and traditions and customs and access to water.**



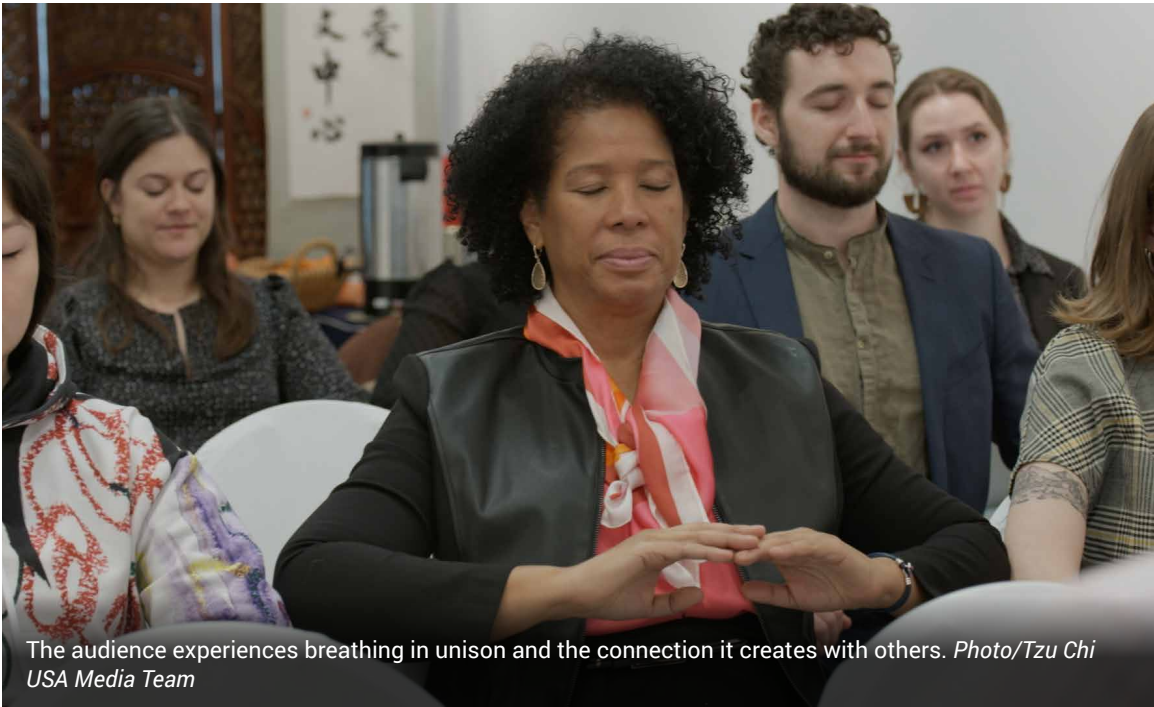
**Thaddeus Gamory**  
*Director of Community Engagement  
Diversity in Aquatics*

Among the consequences, as panelist Dr. Shaun Anderson from Virginia's Norfolk University, a global spokesperson on diversity in swimming and aquatics, pointed out, African Americans in the United States are 4-5 times more likely to drown. While there are plenty of myths about why black people can't swim, she urged us to consider how "If the only place where you can swim is the worst beach with bad currents," it will have an impact. The four panelists presented ongoing efforts in the Black community to restore BIPOC relationships to water and water culture through education on water history, historically black beaches, water safety, and learn to swim and lifeguard training programs.

Filmmaker Cathleen Dean explained how she has been using her documentary to help dispel the myths that black people can't swim. Alas, "as I've shared this film with people around the country, I've heard trauma experiences," she recounted. Thaddeus



Panelists Cathleen Dean (second left), Dr. Shaun M. Anderson (third left, back), Dr. Carol Penn (middle), and Thaddeus Gamory (third right, back), session moderator Dr. Miriam S. Lynch (second right), and side event co-organizers Knellee Bislam (left) and Steve Chiu (right) pose for the camera after the first session of Tzu Chi's United Nations 2023 Water Conference Side Event. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*



The audience experiences breathing in unison and the connection it creates with others. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team

Gamory, the founder of Mind Body Aquatics and Blue-Mindfulness Training, described how blue mindfulness trauma-sensitive and restorative healing practices near pools and waterways are empowering people of color to heal, become water healers, and lead in aquatic industries. “Whether you are in the water, on water, or near water, you can have healing effects,” he said.

Gamory added that awareness of the breath amplifies the experience, which panelist Dr. Carol Penn, a board-certified physician, and Mind-Body Medicine expert, echoed, stating, “One of the ways of healing, it’s so beautiful and powerful, is that we can teach people to use their breath again.” Moreover, breathing practices help heal the nervous system while fostering a sense of community when done in a group. “It creates a connection, and we’re designed that way, to do things that are cooperative, in harmony with, and have a feeling and a sensation of that, it bonds us even if it’s just for the moment,” Gamory explained. Indeed, as the au-

dience joined together to breathe in unison, in, then out, they felt the effects firsthand.

## Elevating Indigenous Perspectives

Friday’s second session, “Elevating Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge and Action for Water and Nature Conservation in the Americas,” was held at the Baha’i International Community’s offices in UN Plaza. It started with a screening of *The Shemelca Serpent*, a documentary short about the biosphere of the Rio Platano region in Honduras, and the story of how conservation efforts by indigenous biologist Wildres Wood are integrating indigenous wisdom.

The panel then explored how indigenous nations have cared for waterways for thousands of years and now struggle to protect ancestral and unceded territories from further decline. Session participants could

gain some experiential insight into indigenous principles and practices that can guide us as advocates of respecting indigenous land and reducing water contamination.

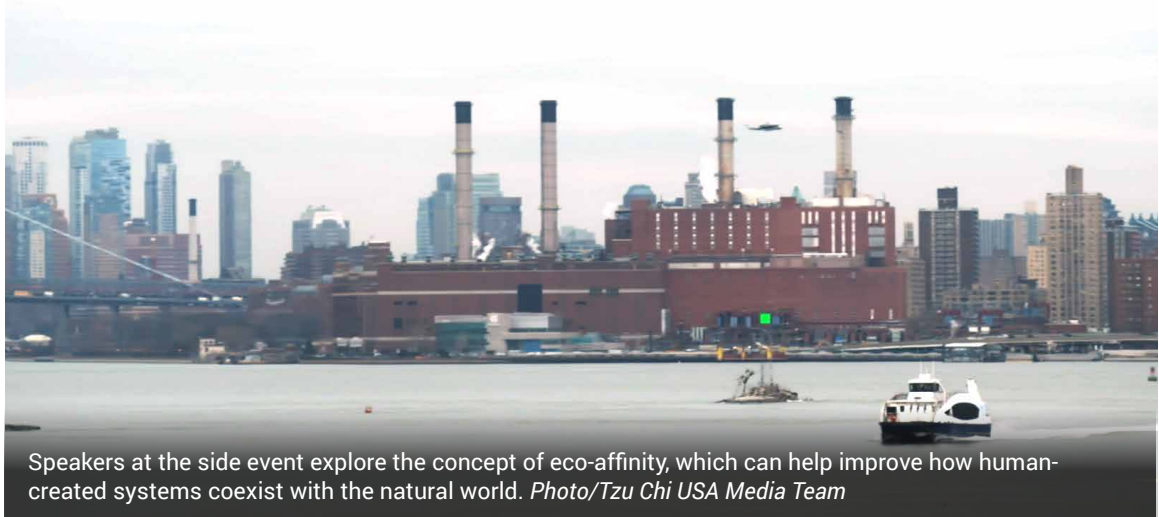
Industrialization, colonization, pollution, and privatization continue to play a role in degrading our limited water supply. As countries worldwide continue to put profit over people, we have seen an increase in tainted water supplies. This backward prioritization doesn't end at the national level. The UN, too, is guilty of it; as one panelist, Jason Crazy Bear Keck, co-founder of 7 Directions of Service, an Indigenous-led environmental justice and community organizing collective based on Occaneechi-Saponi homelands in rural North Carolina, noted, "It's give them five minutes while Coca-Cola has an hour."

While some may believe enough money will be able to buy their way out of dealing with contaminated water, the truth is the water crisis impacts everyone. "If we think that if we are presidents, ministers, we are not affected by water," affirmed panelist Emily

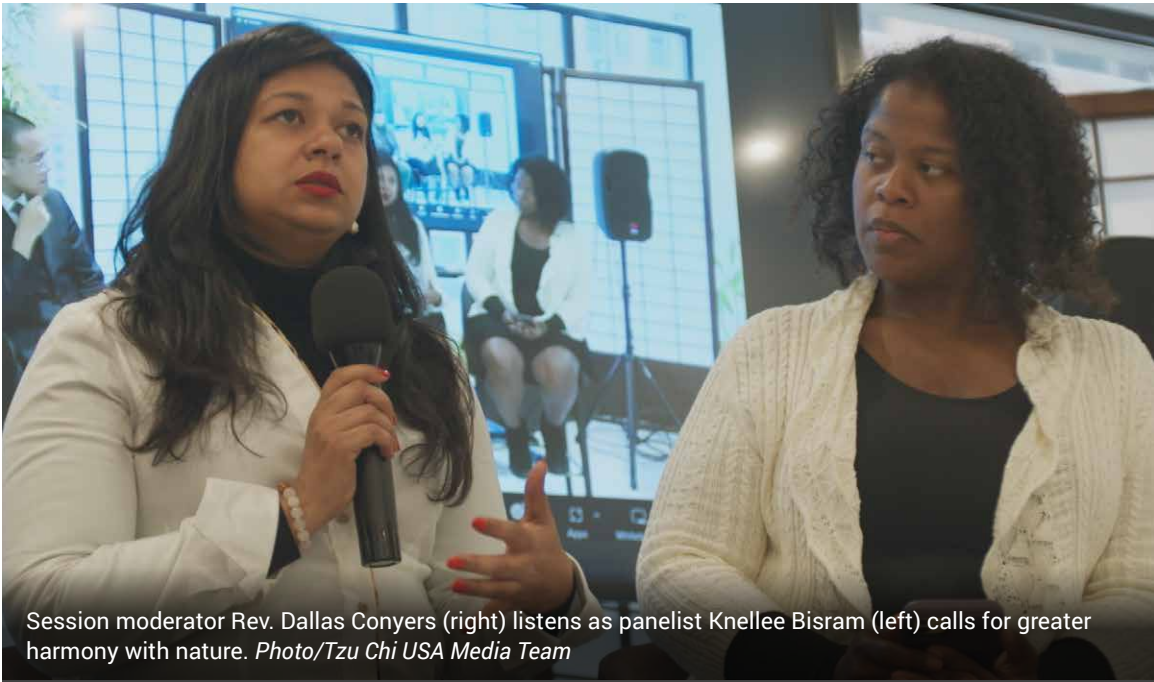
Miki, a Cameroonian activist and Founder/CEO of Denis Miki Foundation, a nonprofit organization working to develop poor and underdeveloped communities through capacity building, education, talent promotion, and wealth creation, "this is foolish."

There is plenty of evidence to back this up. Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances (PFAS), a group of cancer-causing chemicals produced by manufacturing processes, have infiltrated most water sources and the blood of nearly all Americans. At the end of the day, what happens to our water supply happens to all of us. As many pointed out throughout the conference, we are all so dependent on water that humanity and water are virtually inextricable, and it might be time to start recognizing that.

"We think ourselves not apart from nature," said Miskito leader, biologist, and activist Wildres Wood, "We are the same." This perspective, called eco-affinity, has the potential to completely alter many people's relationship with the natural world, from one based on extraction and capitalist profiteering to one of fond mutual respect.



Speakers at the side event explore the concept of eco-affinity, which can help improve how human-created systems coexist with the natural world. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*



Session moderator Rev. Dallas Conyers (right) listens as panelist Knellee Bisram (left) calls for greater harmony with nature. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team

“We ask permission to hunt, to fish, to take plants,” explained Wood. Recognizing the inherent value and personhood of nature is something many indigenous tribes partake in and often leads to a more eco-friendly stance. “[Indigenous peoples] recognize as a whole that we have to reject these things that are killing us,” said Crystal Cavalier-Keck, co-founder of 7 Directions of Service. As if unanimously, the panelists agreed: It is time to decrease production and consumption in favor of a more sustainable, earth and people-friendly existence.

### Cultivating Eco-Affinity

The first session on Saturday, March 25, “Eco-Affinity: Water and Climate Activism through Contemplative and Faith-Based Practice,” held back at the Tzu Chi Center, opened with a trailer for *Healing People Heal the Planet*, an Exposure Labs-funded documentary short by AHAM Education and BlackCat Media showcasing how mindfulness practice or “eco-awareness” can lead to “eco-activism” and climate justice action.

In the panel discussion, the speakers, representing several organizations, unpacked the concept of “eco-affinity.” It essentially translates into a love of nature or a sense of “being nature” that becomes naturally embodied due to deep contemplative and faith-based practice, especially in natural settings.

**Eco-affinity is to have a sense of love, an appreciation for the natural world, right? To say that being in a relationship with the world I live in, I have a more profound appreciation and mindfulness of how I interact with this thing. And in thinking about a better way of living, I think we come back to this relationship with water where as long as we’re honoring the water, we will naturally want to find better ways to live in this world.**

**Steve Chiu**

*Tzu Chi Representative to the UN*

The panelists provided examples of eco-affinity enhancing practices, such as Be Nature retreats or mindful beach clean-ups by AHAM Education and partners, compassionate eco-action through volunteerism and service by the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, or the cultivation of kindness to nature as oneself by the Brahma Kumaris, a worldwide spiritual movement dedicated to personal transformation and world renewal.

Ultimately, the session's call to action was to embrace a new paradigm of activism. Rather than choosing fear-based and anxiety-producing approaches to facing water and climate challenges, we can rebuild affinity with nature and water to catalyze healing and motivate positive eco-transformation for people and the planet.

"We are immersed in this paradigm that we believe growth is good. Growth is good. Growth is acceptable," author and Mindfulness Meditation and Mindful Living educator Piero Falci said in a statement pre-recorded and played during the session. "[But] What exactly is growth? It's the growth of production, the growth of consumption. We need to promote ideas such as 'small is beautiful,' and 'less is more.'"

Reverend Dallas Conyers, Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Manager at SCEN, who was the session moderator, added the insight that "Consumerism and growth are attractive because people are lonely. There's so much more and something greater for us to tap into." Others picked up on the need for a greater sense of being part of nature.

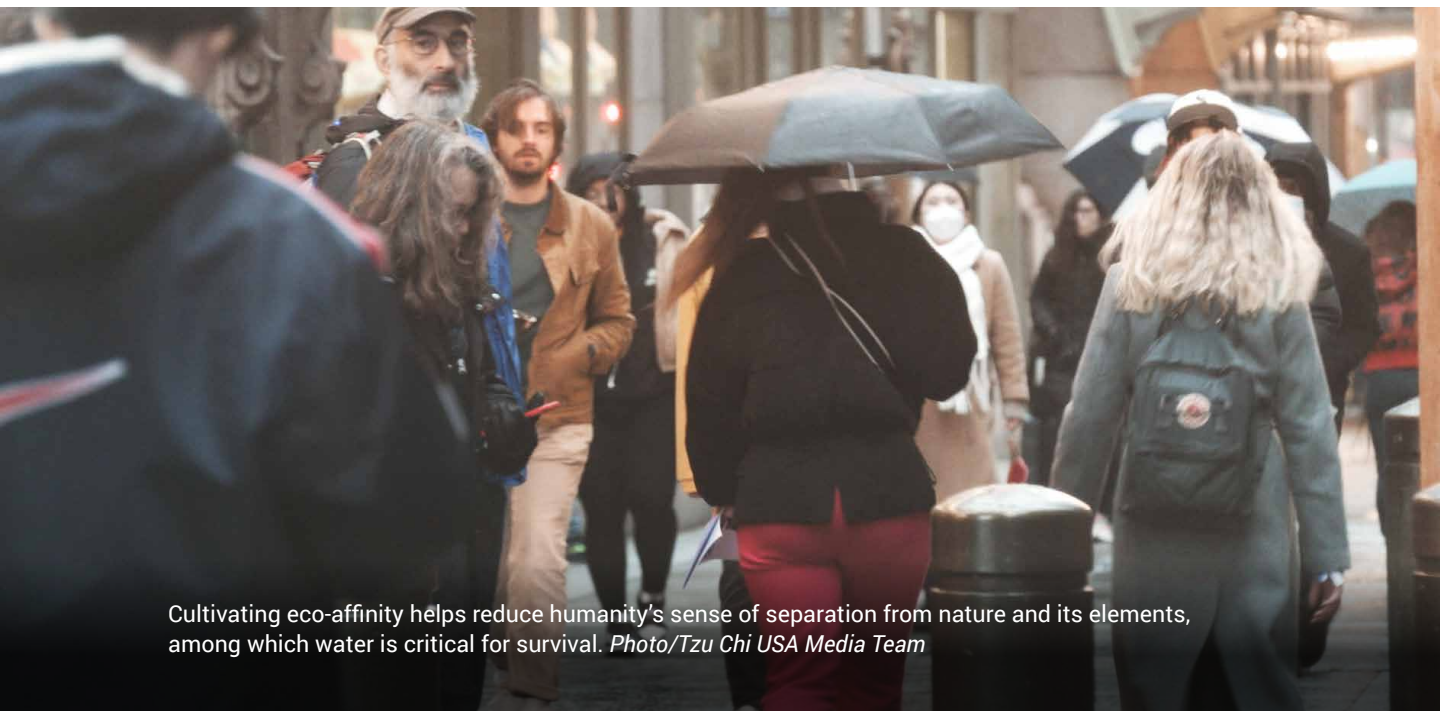
**This separation that we tend to walk around with, of, there's me, and then there's nature, and then there's another person. But if I am walking through the world and I really have a sense of connection, then what happens is I have... I feel like I have no other choice but to take care of it.**

“

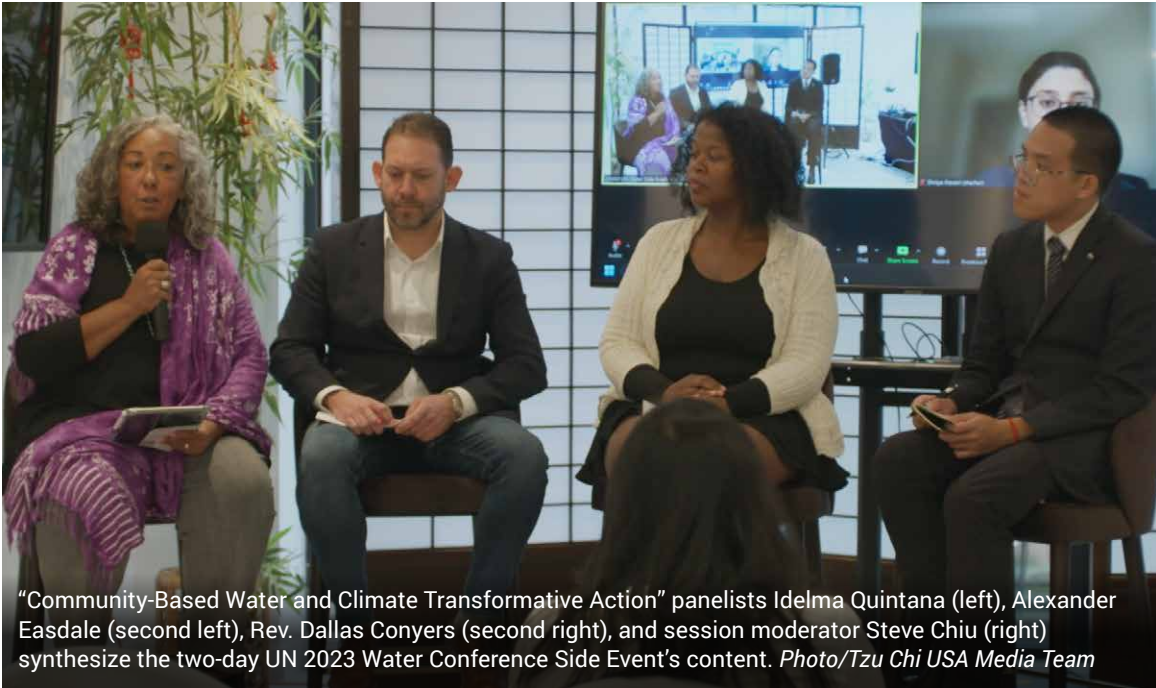
**Knellee Bisram**

*Founder & CEO  
AHAM Education*

Picking up the thread, Juan Vazquez, the Brahma Kumaris' representative at the United Nations, pointed out how water is not just out there, "Water is subtle in our bodies. We don't see it in our bodies," but it's there. Knellee Bisram echoed that by saying, "Taking care of water and the planet is the same as taking care of ourselves."



Cultivating eco-affinity helps reduce humanity's sense of separation from nature and its elements, among which water is critical for survival. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*



“Community-Based Water and Climate Transformative Action” panelists Idelma Quintana (left), Alexander Easdale (second left), Rev. Dallas Conyers (second right), and session moderator Steve Chiu (right) synthesize the two-day UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event’s content. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*

## Championing Transformative Action

The fourth and final session at the Tzu Chi Center, “Community-Based Water and Climate Transformative Action,” presented a culmination of learning about BIPOC history, Indigenous perspectives and actions, and eco-affinity. Together, attendees synthesized the conversations co-created in each session and their learning from participation in the UN Water Conference.

They explored the convergence of solutions that can be applied “globally” through personal transformation as citizens, community-building and mobilizing through education, and legislative action that honors history and ancestry. Transformative action also means that water resiliency activism draws from wisdom and healing to make it sustainable for the people and the planet. The panel and audience aimed to co-create recommendations and feasible action steps that will

take us forward based on best practices in the field.

Looking back on the experience, panelist Idelma Quintana, a City of Hollywood Commissioner from Florida, remarked, “One of the reflections I had was just how much agency we have in creating public spaces that honor the nature that’s already there.” And yet, she saw room for improvement, adding, “If, for example, city planners could plan a city with eco-affinity as one of the values, it would look really different from what we’re currently living with.”

Above all, they called for action, personal, collective, and leadership. Session moderator and Tzu Chi representative to the UN, Steve Chiu, proposed, “If we truly want to reform systems, we need to rethink who is at the helm. We are in this fight together, and we need to share our networks and our resources and amplify that message.”

Panelist Rev. Dallas Conyers, from SCEN, brought up obstacles to public participation. “It’s not that people don’t have the

political will. It means that multiple people have been systemically stripped from power,” she explained, “What we need is a systemic overhaul of what is oppressing people not to be able to engage in a meaningful or substantive way.”

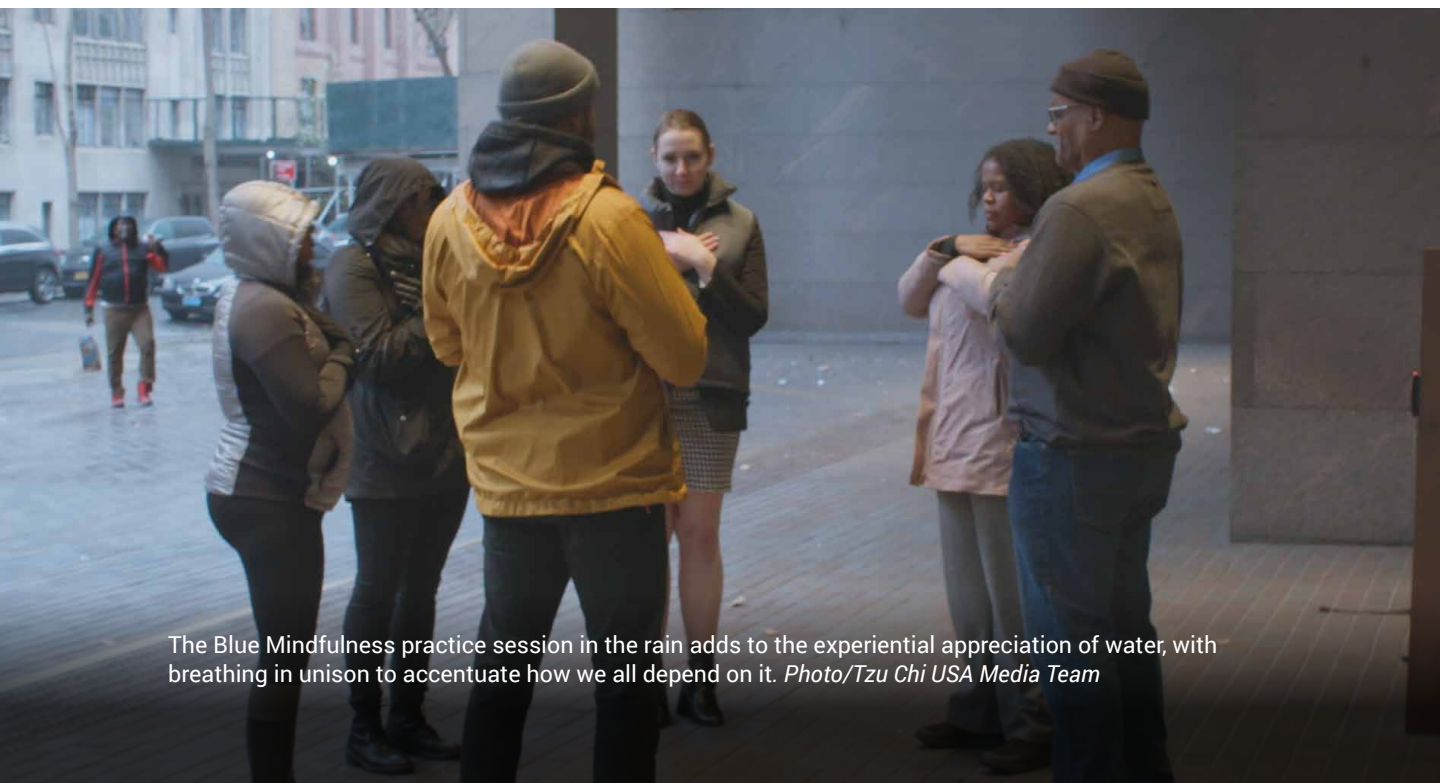
Alexander Easdale, SCEN Executive Director, brought up lags in motivation, “I think right now so many people don’t see the benefits of participating.” And yet, “If we actively participate, we can actually make it work to our benefit,” he said, and made a plea for “Doing this work with love.” Idelma Quintana reminded all about the importance of the work and the impact of not undertaking it, “We’re all on this planet, and we’re all going to suffer the consequences.” Steve Chiu summarized the call to action succinctly, “Our choices matter. Our participation matters.”

After many long discussions, joyful meals, and meditative gatherings at the Tzu Chi Center, the panelists, organizers, and activists gathered one last time in the rain to celebrate water and connection. Once more they breathed in, and out, another wave crashing on the beach.

## Water Was Equally an Honored Participant

The final session of the Water for Healing, Justice and Action: Building Blocks of a New Resiliency Paradigm UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event, presented an opportunity to try Blue Mindfulness. Hosted by Diversity in Aquatics, participants experienced trauma-sensitive healing facilitated by Thaddeus Gamory, who was a panelist during the side event’s first session.

This concluding session, held in the rain, in concert with the presence of the East River adjacent to UN Headquarters and just a short walk from the Tzu Chi Center, had brought the sensual experience of water to the fore, elevated it from simply being a topic of discussion. Indeed, water was also an active presence and participant, with its myriad of sounds and soft or powerful touch – primordial, healing, and a force to be reckoned with, protected, and respected. 🌿



The Blue Mindfulness practice session in the rain adds to the experiential appreciation of water, with breathing in unison to accentuate how we all depend on it. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*

# AN INSIDE LOOK AT UPROOTED: Compassion After Displacement

*Written by Dilber Shatursun*

**F**rom December 13-15, 2023, the UNHCR, the United Nations' Refugee Agency, is hosting its second-ever Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, Switzerland. In the run up to this important event, Tzu Chi USA is hosting a multimedia exhibition at the Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief in New York City.

Spanning two floors, *Uprooted: Compassion After Displacement* is filled with compelling photos, videos, timelines, and stories that highlight the plight of those seeking refuge in other countries and how Tzu Chi's philosophy of compassion in action (also known as engaged Buddhism) has had a positive impact. To gain more insight into the exhibit, I sat down for a virtual chat with Tzu Chi USA Chief Executive Officer (and long-time representative to the UN) Debra Boudreaux.

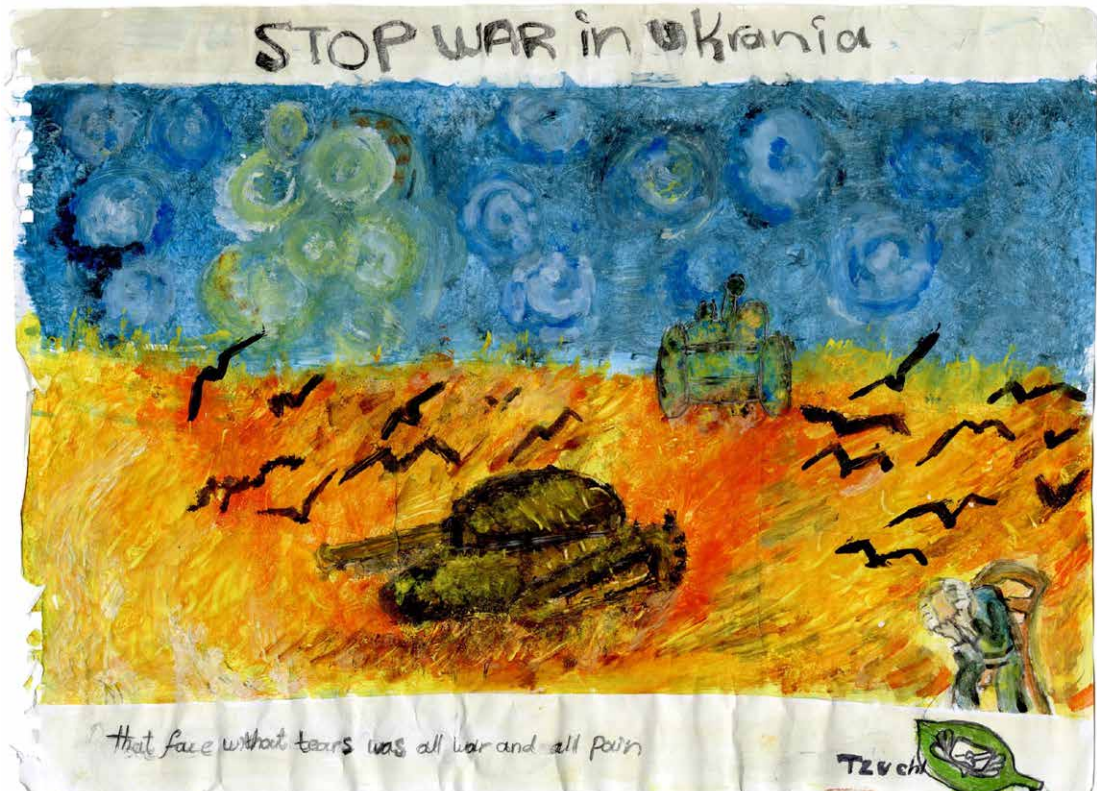




Vivid illustrations, on view at *Uprooted: Compassion After Displacement*, depict the brutality of Syria's civil war, but also hope for a new life in neighboring Türkiye. They are hand-drawn by child refugees from Syria who are now students at Tzu Chi's El Menahil International School in Istanbul. *Illustration/Rayan Alhamo*



Illustration/Ahmed Burhan Antabi



Illustration/Sidra Haji Salameh

### First things first: How did Tzu Chi USA get started in refugee affairs?

After the Kosovo War [in 1999], we provided medical and dental care for those who had arrived in Los Angeles. Then, we only saw them as our medical patients. Over the years, we began to provide support to people who were seeking refuge in the United States, but still we never used the term 'refugee' and instead referred to them as individual charity cases. We've just kept going.

### So, how does Tzu Chi USA engage now at the domestic and international level?

Tzu Chi USA oversees refugee affairs in two different pathways; number one is as a result of migration to the USA and IDP, internally displaced people. These could be by the San Diego border from Tijuana, or in Las Vegas, Denver, Washington DC, or even New York. Our capacity is to provide emergency cash assistance to cover their rent, transport, food, and those kinds of things.

For global refugees, for that migration, it's totally different. We currently work with our global headquarters, which offers support to migrants including in Malaysia, Thailand, from Ukraine, in Serbia, and definitely Türkiye and Jordan. Each one is governed by a different country's authority. And because people from each country face different problems, be it war or a political situation, the perspective is different.

It also depends because Tzu Chi offices in each region of the world have their own strengths [to offer]. For example, in Thailand and Malaysia, Tzu Chi is able to provide safety net services, like medical care, dental care, and more. In Serbia, Tzu Chi provides livelihood support, including job skill training. Those are because Tzu Chi volunteers there are working with the UNHCR. In Türkiye, Tzu Chi volunteers provide Syrian refugees with an educational platform, empowering adults, too.

But, no matter what, there's a certain devotion [with which] Tzu Chi engages.

### *Uprooted: Compassion After Displacement* highlights a lot of this work at the Tzu Chi Center in New York City. Can you tell me about the exhibit?

The concept behind it is that, as a faith-based organization, we've provided this kind of support to refugees and it's going to allow us to reflect on the stories behind the numbers of forced migration. It encourages us to think about what you would do in that situation. It's a pre-mitigation reflection.

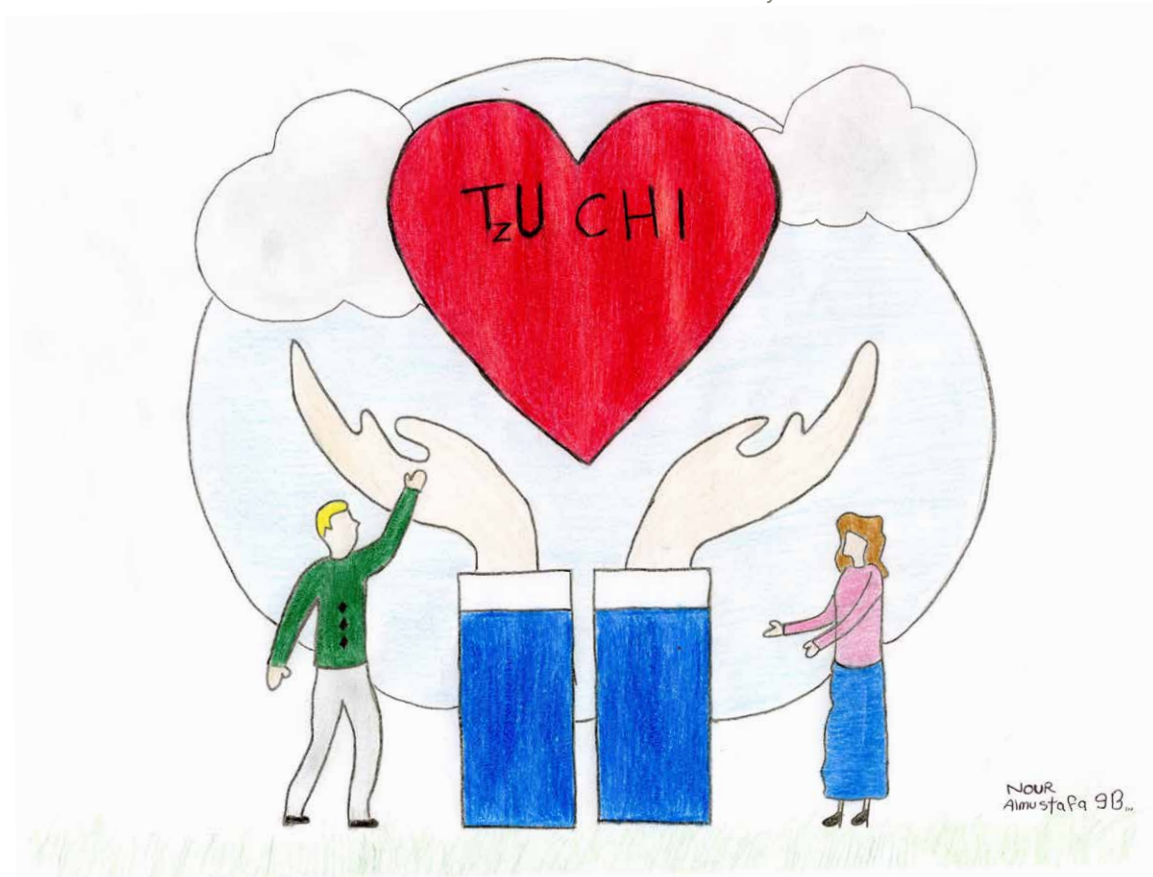
On the other hand, it shows how our unique programs have achieved success and what they need to continue. Even across Tzu Chi USA, many of our volunteers don't know what we do when we engage in refugee programs either — that's the reality! So, I think it's important to learn and take to heart that it could be any of us in the photos, videos, or stories you see



Illustration/Roxsana Wollou



Illustration/Hediye Eburas



Illustration/Nur Al-Mustafa

in the exhibition. Otherwise, you are less compelled to take action when you don't feel the connection.

### Who is Uprooted for?

The location we're showing the exhibition in is on Manhattan's Upper East Side, close to the UN family [near UN Headquarters in New York] and non-governmental organizations that know Tzu Chi. For them, it's a chance to show our process of care; not so much what we provide but how we provide it. But, of course, the majority of the UN family and NGOs already know a lot about refugee issues.

We also want to share a lot with the general public, with people who are concerned, but don't understand who we are, what we do, and how they can help, too. For example, if we show how we provided job skills and training in a certain part of the world, it opens a conversation, and helps them realize that they can donate to programs that change their community dynamics.

### What's something you think guests will be surprised to see there?

It's very simple: Buddhists helping people; Buddhists helping Muslims, helping Christians, other Buddhists, and so forth, that kind of interfaith support. And that Buddhists are really doing so many good things around the world. We also want people to see that, yes, we are a reliable organization and we do what we say we will do.

### What's the biggest misconception people may have about those seeking refuge?

Anyone can suddenly be a refugee; [including] you and me. You can be a climate refugee, an economic refugee, a political refugee; you can be uprooted from one location to another. And you have no choice. It's not just a term. It's a test of your survival skills as a human being. And we have to have empathy [for one another] for this.

### Ultimately, what do you hope Uprooted achieves?

This year, the Global Refugee Forum is a platform for Tzu Chi to inspire greater empathy in others and show how we can provide a more culturally-sensitive environment for people experiencing forced displacement. Through Tzu Chi's achievements – our limited resources and programs – it's a great lesson for everyone to understand that they can make a difference.

*Visit Uprooted: Compassion After Displacement, on display at the Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief (229 E 60th St., New York, NY 10022) 11 am to 4 pm daily from June 17, 2023. Admission is free.* 🌱



[tzuchicenter.org/exhibits/uprooted-compassion-after-displacement](https://tzuchicenter.org/exhibits/uprooted-compassion-after-displacement)



# Seizing the Future Today: Tzu Chi's Ongoing Environmental Youth Initiatives

*Written by Adriana DiBenedetto*

“ To seize the present is to seize the future.  
Dharma Master Cheng Yen



Tzu Chi Young Leaders is a network of compassionate students and young professionals committed to making an impact. Tzu Chi empowers youths with the resources and skills to develop meaningful projects while growing in awareness as responsible global citizens. *Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Young Leaders*

**F**rom rugged cliffs and snowy peaks to verdant fields and azure waters far from land, our world is full of precious natural wonders that sustain our lives, and allow the spectacular creatures that inhabit our seas, land, and skies to thrive. And yet, it is clear now that humanity's extractive patterns are incompatible with the natural world. And the effects are visible worldwide. Launched in 2015 and hosted by Human Impact Lab, the Climate Clock provides a measurement against which society can track humanity's climate change mitigation progress – and demonstrate the speed at which our planet is closing in on the ever-looming 1.5°C

global warming mark. Today, there are a little over six years until the Climate Clock reaches zero.

According to a United Nations report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), temperatures have already risen to 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels as a consequence of burning fossil fuels alongside unequal and unsustainable energy and land use. These reverberations can be felt through more frequent, more intense extreme weather events with increasingly devastating effects on ecosystems, infrastructure, and human life. As such, the UN Environment Programme

(UNEP) and GRID-Arendal reports reveal that on our current path, wildfires are projected to become more frequent and intense, with a global increase of extreme fires of up to 14% by 2030, 30% by the end of 2050, and 50% by 2100. Food and water insecurity are projected to climb, and with this, the disproportionate impacts on people who already face severe and disproportionate rates of food insecurity and exposure to multiple forms of discrimination and disparity. Amidst a confluence of crises, other adverse events, such as pandemics or conflicts, become even more difficult to manage.

Mother Earth is every living thing's one true home, and there's perhaps no bigger picture than a liveable future for all on this planet. Just as we will all feel these effects, we will also share in the benefits of healthy air and resilient food systems, and so we must all care.

## No Planet B: How Tzu Chi Responds

The mounting impacts of our triple planetary crisis, which encompass climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste, are projected to put millions of species at risk of extinction and alter our very lives. Inaction will only lead to the continued erosion of ecosystems and the destruction of Earth's finite resources. However, there's much we can do when we all synchronize our efforts.

The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation is officially an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC). The Global Partnership Affairs Department (GPAD) in the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation is also an advocate for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the United

Nations, and Tzu Chi has created several projects that tackle this head-on. [Learn more about GPAD in our cover story on page 6]

From programs that lift up food security, disaster relief, education, support for refugees, women's empowerment, medical outreach, and beyond, Tzu Chi's missions address climate change in ways that strengthen communities around the nation and across the globe. Tzu Chi's environmental volunteers also reclaim plastic from our environment to be transformed into eco-friendly household items via DA.AI Technology's innovative production process, which holds Global Recycled Standard (GRS) certification from the Netherlands' Peterson Control Union for rigorous quality control. Tzu Chi actively works toward boosting the SDGs in hopes of reaching them as a global community by 2030 and creating a world in which people can not only survive, but thrive, and find the strength to help others in need.

## Youth at the Forefront

**Every achievement grows out of the seed of determination.**

*Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

When envisioning the future you wish to live in, and the world you hope to leave behind for future generations, what emerges in your mind's eye?

According to a 2021 NextGen Climate Survey released by Blue Shield of California, more than 83% of Gen Z youths are concerned about the health of our planet. Moreover, in a 2021 survey of 10,000 children and young people aged 16–25 years published by The Lancet, data from youths across ten countries (Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, India, Nigeria,



# Tzu Chi Youth Innovation Prize Challenge

Building towards a Better Planet



The 2023 Tzu Chi Youth Innovation Prize Challenge offers a chance for youths to earn funding for innovative solutions, and work toward a more sustainable future for our planet. *Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Young Leaders*

Philippines, Portugal, the UK, and the USA; 1,000 participants per country), was collected regarding participants' thoughts and feelings about climate change, and government responses to climate change. Results revealed that 59% of respondents were very or extremely worried, and 84% were at least moderately worried. More than 50% reported feeling sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty, and over 45% said their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily life. For example, 75% expressed that they believe the future is frightening, and 83% shared that they think people have failed to take care of the planet. Governmental responses also fared poorly, with participants reporting greater feelings of betrayal than reassurance.

Experiencing situations exacerbated by climate change, such as natural disasters and droughts, paired with an inability to see positive change on a meaningful level, can lead to a pervasive sense of

dread, or climate anxiety. For Tzu Chi youth volunteers, this trajectory invites contemplation of the situation, and how to respond. As such, Tzu Chi volunteers of all ages are taking action to address the multi-layered needs of communities amid our changing climate and reverse this course to create a better, more resilient future together.

Tzu Chi Young Leaders know that young people today are the future movers and leaders of the world, and change can start from wherever we are. The 2023 Tzu Chi Youth Innovation Prize Challenge is one example of how they're empowering climate action, and shifting the narrative toward solutions that can support mental health and community well-being. These youth-proposed ideas and innovations tackle climate change and promote low-carbon, sustainable lifestyle alternatives. Through events like these, youths brainstorm innovative solutions with a clear representation of their ecological benefit and blueprint for implementation.

Phase one of this rigorous project focuses on ideating and developing proposals while implementing virtual networking sessions and resources. During the process, mentors are also ready to facilitate teaming up and help improve a proposal's impact and feasibility. At the end of this phase, all or selected teams are invited to present their project proposals for a chance to receive up to \$5,000 in seed funding to actualize their sustainable innovations. Some of the winning submissions from phase one this year encompass proposals for green jobs, creative ways of waste reduction, and addressing unsustainable trends in the textile industry.

Phase two of the prize challenge focuses on the implementation of phase one's winning proposals. Teams utilize their seed funding to turn their ideas into reality and are invited to present their progress, achievements, and impact in late Summer or early Fall 2023. Finally, one winning

team will be selected for a chance to win a scholarship and additional funding.

## Compassion and Innovation Go Hand-In-Hand

The importance of saving space for non-human life is critical for our global community to pursue an equitable, just, and stable future. And, Tzu Chi youths know that local acts often have resonant themes in the international space. In fact, Tzu Chi youths have even attended UN affairs, such as the United Nations Conference of Parties on Climate Change (COP27) in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

Alongside challenges for sustainable innovation, Tzu Chi youths organize coast-to-coast for meaningful volunteer opportunities locally, such as nature cleanups, tree planting events, and friendly cooking competitions while promoting the health and environmental benefits of a vegetarian



Young Leaders from California join hands with Tree Davis to help plant, monitor, and care for trees in their local community. Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Young Leaders



Nature cleanups organized by Tzu Chi youths help keep our planet beautiful – and healthy. *Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Young Leaders*

diet. Last year, in 2022, Tzu Chi Annual Community Weekend activities across the country inspired 19 chapters to organize 16 events, with New York's region holding a joint event with four different chapters. Altogether, Tzu Chi Collegiate Association (TCCA) members logged a total of over 600 service hours as they worked in their respective communities.

This year, on April 8, 2023, Tzu Chi USA kicked off its youth environmental initiatives with its first-ever Earth Day Carnival in San Dimas, California, offering a 100% vegetarian farmer's market featuring organic and locally grown foods, eco-conscious arts and crafts, games, cooking demonstrations, and hands-on workshops on composting and urban farming. The event was a wonderful way to share both the importance and joy of environmental protection, becoming stewards for our planet, and raising awareness for the choices we face now.



Tzu Chi Collegiate Association members from the University of Illinois aid one another during a community cleanup project. *Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Young Leaders*



The t-shirts worn by Tzu Chi youths display a core message of Tzu Chi Young Leaders' service missions: To "Unite & Serve Together." Photo/Courtesy of Tzu Chi Young Leaders

This year's Annual Community Weekend also saw young volunteers in Irvine, California, collaborate with the Second Harvest Food Bank. Tzu Chi's young leaders set out wearing their signature "Unite & Serve Together" t-shirts to harvest broccolini and cabbages in support of their local communities during Easter weekend. Together, they harvested over 2,500 pounds of cabbages to be delivered to homeless shelters and food pantries.

**When I volunteer I feel good inside. And I feel like I accomplished something. So, helping other people also helps me to become a better person.**

**Anthony Rodriguez**

*Community Volunteer*

*Tzu Chi Collegiate Association Event Attendee*

Youths also conducted community cleanup events at Mt. Rubidoux Trail in Riverside, California, the green space along Muddy River in Boston, Massachusetts, and cleared invasive plant species in Atlanta,

Georgia. They held vegetarian cooking classes in Texas and Ohio, helped a community garden in Texas flourish, and also volunteered with the Central Texas Food Bank.

On April 8, nine TCCA members and two counselors from the University of California, Davis, participated in the Annual Community Weekend by cleaning up the River Park along the American River in Sacramento, California.

**Earlier in the day, a jogger walked by and said thank you for cleaning up the trash. It's nice to know that people appreciate the work that we do. Two other women asked what we were doing. I told them about Tzu Chi and how we adopted this mile of the American River Bike Trail, and how we would come to clean up a couple of times a year. They were very grateful.**

**Roger Ku**

*Community Volunteer*

*Tzu Chi Collegiate Association Event Attendee*

The American River Parkway Foundation in Sacramento County has invited local residents and groups to adopt parks along the river to keep the river and its surroundings clean. This initiative promotes collaborative efforts for environmental protection and discourages pollutants from entering the water. Tzu Chi adopted the ninth mile of the river's north bank, and is committed to quarterly cleanups such as this one.

## Seizing the Future, Seizing Today

As a global community, we have a clear goal that requires ambitious acts of compassion and equity. Care and understanding are important ingredients in mobilizing engagement and transformation, and raising awareness for the actions and solutions that are available, accessible, and ready to deploy.

The youth voice in decision-making processes in response to the triple planetary crisis is more important than ever, and their message is clear: we cannot continue to live unsustainably and must scale up game-changing solutions. This includes doing more to ensure that youth, as key stakeholders of the future, are engaged so that no one gets left behind. We must truly care about the collective.

Bringing solutions to the table can be achieved by ensuring accessibility, so more people have the opportunity to become informed and can connect and engage with the issues at hand. With this, Tzu Chi and its environmental initiatives uplift diverse youth perspectives on the frontlines of creating change within their communities, and ushering in solutions for key climate, biodiversity, and pollution challenges.

Wherever we restore environmental health, we restore balance to our planet and our future. Let's do it! 🌱



Tzu Chi Collegiate Association members from the University of California, Davis, participate in 2023's Annual Tzu Chi Weekend by hosting a river cleanup of part of the American River that Tzu Chi Sacramento adopted. *Photo/Courtesy of TCCA at UC Davis*



Ashley Yong (fourth left) takes a group photo with Tzu Chi Collegiate Association members in Melaka she mentored to join the 2019 UN SDG 14 Life Below Water Forum in Malaysia. *Photo/Chia Chia Loo*

# Commitment Blossoms: One Tzu Chi Youth's Story

*Written by Ida Eva Zielinska*

Fully aware of the honor of the circumstance, which could have felt intimidating, Ashley Yong focused on the importance of the message she was there to deliver as she addressed the international audience at what was dubbed “A super-session for nature” at the United Nations.

**We are confident that young people must be at the heart of the investment in climate ambition. We need not only behavioral and lifestyle transformation toward sustainability by the youth but also meaningful participation for young people throughout the decision-making and implementation process to achieve the common climate goal.**



**Ashley Yong**  
*Excerpt of Moment for Nature Address*

It was Tuesday, July 19, 2022, and this was a High-level Thematic Debate entitled “Moment for Nature.” The gathering was convened by Abdulla Shahid, the President of the 76th UN General Assembly, and took place in the hallowed General Assembly Hall of UN Headquarters in New York City.



Ashley prepares to speak in the UN General Assembly Hall on July 19, 2022. Photo/Ashley Yong

Moment for Nature aimed at “achieving the level of cohesion needed among the global environmental work streams to keep the 1.5 degrees target alive, and rapidly accelerating the implementation of the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] and resilient COVID-19 recoveries.”

**I would like to conclude by mentioning that we must ensure that innovative solutions from young people in response to the triple planetary crisis [climate change, nature loss, pollution] are amplified at national and regional levels coherently; and the older generations need to ensure these solutions are heard.**



**Ashley Yong**

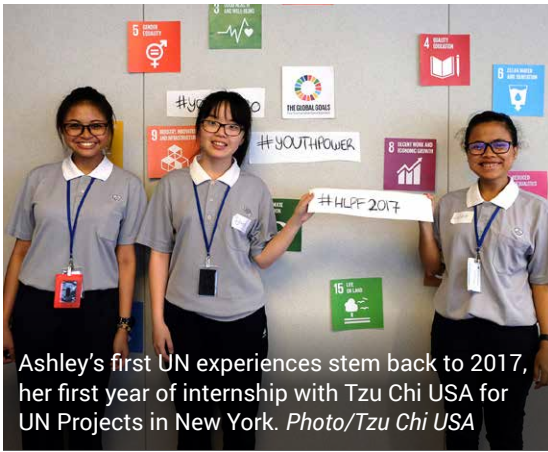
*Excerpt of Moment for Nature Address*

## A Memorable Moment

It was the first time anyone from Tzu Chi was delivering an intervention in the UN General Assembly Hall, a space revered as it is where the UN’s main policy-making organ provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the UN Charter. Before then, members of the Tzu Chi team only came here as the audience.



Ashley visits the United Nations General Assembly Hall for the first time in 2017, hardly expecting she would have the opportunity to speak there five years later. Photo/Steve Chiu



Ashley's first UN experiences stem back to 2017, her first year of internship with Tzu Chi USA for UN Projects in New York. Photo/Tzu Chi USA

When the moderator introduced me that day, she said I'm from the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation. It was quite emotional, hearing that at the General Assembly.

Ashley Yong

Ashley Yong's address was part of the High-level Thematic Debate's "Cultivating coherent system-wide responses to tackle interlinked planetary crises" segment. As Youth Representative of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation to the UN Department of Global Communications (DGC), she had been invited to speak on behalf of the DGC's Civil Society Youth Representatives Programme, composed of young people affiliated with the 1,600 NGOs accredited to the Department, including Tzu Chi.

She highlighted that "the programme has been serving as an advocacy platform for young people across the globe, ages 18 to 32, working within or leading organizations that are in association with the DGC and focusing on the global issues discussed at the UN," adding, "These youth representatives have been crucial in mobilizing local communities to take action for the planet and inspire other young people to speak up in international spaces."

The UN Department of Global Communication picked our young representative, Ashley, based on her brilliant achievements. She has reorganized the youth team in the Asia-Pacific region, and she has invested a lot of time in mobilizing these young people to work together.

Debra Boudreaux  
Chief Executive Officer  
Tzu Chi USA

The United Nations praises and favors us a lot. They like the young people at Tzu Chi because we tend to, 'say what we do and do what we say,' so they often invite us to share on behalf of youth at in-person and online meetings.

Ashley Yong



Ashley (third right) accompanies Tzu Chi USA Chief Executive Office Debra Boudreaux (middle) and a Tzu Chi USA team to a conference in 2022. Photo/Tzu Chi USA



## Every Story Has a Start

Ashley Yong has been a Tzu Chi Global Partnership Affairs Department (GPAD) staff member since joining the team in October 2018. She is GPAD's Youth Representative and the Project Manager for Tzu Chi's activities in Sierra Leone. Yet her involvement with Tzu Chi began years before, her first contact stretching back to age three when her mother had her little girl participate in a dance performance at a Tzu Chi Malaysia Service Center in Melaka, where Ashley was born and grew up.



Ashley Yong enters the world of Tzu Chi for the first time at age three, performing during a dance recital at the Tzu Chi Melaka Service Center in Malaysia in 1998. *Photo/Chia Chia Loo*

Her mother's curiosity about Tzu Chi only deepened with time. "Mom was a kindergarten teacher, so she started to join Tzu Chi as the educational team volunteer in 2007," Ashley recounts. Three years later, in 2010, her mother became a certified Tzu Chi volunteer, and, wanting to bring her daughter into this new world, she insisted that Ashley, then 15, join a Tzu Chi Youth Group (Tzu Shao) in Melaka, where the family lived.

"I love community work," the teenager discovered as she visited care centers for seniors, participated in plant-based cooking activities, and more. She also confides that the Tzu Shao programs in Malaysia "helped improve the relationship between my mother and me – she was busy with Tzu Chi, I started to understand better why she was busy, and what she was busy with after I joined Tzu Shao." While Ashley felt more empathy toward her mother, they now had "more topics to talk about together," too, she adds.



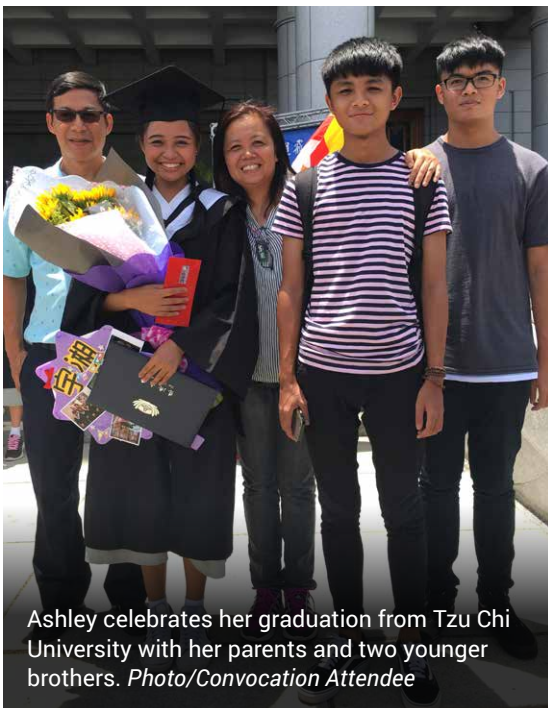
When Ashley, then a Tzu Chi Youth Group member, visits Taiwan in 2011, her mother comes to see her. *Photo/Tzu Chi Volunteer*

In fact, by 2011, Tzu Chi was central for the entire family, as both of Ashley's parents were certified Tzu Chi volunteers actively engaged in the work. That year, Ashley traveled to Taiwan for the first time and stayed at the dormitory of Tzu Chi University in Hualien. She also visited the Jing Si Abode in Hualien – the heart of the global Tzu Chi community and where Master Cheng Yen resides.

Ashley remembers being "mesmerized by the environment and ambiance of Tzu Chi" and decided to attend Tzu Chi University, where she studied from 2015 till officially receiving a Bachelor's Degree in Life Sciences, majoring in Biomedical Science, in



As a valedictorian of Tzu Chi University's graduation convocation on June 6, 2018, Ashley accompanies Master Cheng Yen on stage. Photo/Chia Chia Loo



Ashley celebrates her graduation from Tzu Chi University with her parents and two younger brothers. Photo/Convocation Attendee

2019. During the graduation ceremony on June 6, 2018, Ashley became the valedictorian of the convocation, gave a speech, and held Master Cheng Yen's hand at one point, which she values as the most memorable event of her time at Tzu Chi University.

By then, Ashley Yong's commitment to Tzu Chi had blossomed into one for life: Tzu Chi's role as a charity and humanitarian organization aligned with her pursuit of

contributing her life's efforts in that direction. And soon, like her Tzu Chi volunteer parents, she would be quite busy.

## Opportunities and Challenges

Ashley Yong felt excited upon joining GPAD, "That was the beginning of my journey towards global issues, sustainable development, and humanitarian affairs." She also felt inspired to pursue a Master's Degree at Malaysia's Sunway University Jeffrey Sachs Center on Sustainable Development during the process, explaining, "I'm going to commit my time and effort to sustainable development and am grateful for the learning opportunities that Tzu Chi provides."

To support her GPAD role, apart from membership on the UN DGC's Civil Society Youth Steering Committee (for youth engagement at the UN), Ashley is part of the Asian Region Steering Committee for the Women Deliver 2023 Conference, Sunway University Masters in Sustainable Development Management Network, the Movers Programme and others related to UN ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission

for Asia and the Pacific) annual Forums on Sustainable Development (Main, People's, and Youth).

Being on the GPAD team is a full-time commitment. Ashley's days encompass meetings with external partners across different time zones (New York, Malaysia, Africa, Thailand); Planning Tzu Chi's engagement at the UN, which encompasses applying for side events, exhibitions, and speaking opportunities; Developing content and materials for sustainability awareness workshops/programs; Studying about different global issues, especially those related to

upcoming conferences/forums; External group/committee meetings, and; Project management, as she is one of the project managers for Tzu Chi's programs in Sierra Leone.

Doing the work is not without challenges. Ashley confides that, at times, she must confront her lack of knowledge on sustainable development and global issues, as concerns are constantly emerging, "therefore I continue to learn every day by studying, listening to podcasts, reading, and learning about other organizations' work." She also continually strives to improve her project management, writing, and public speaking skills.

To surmount any self-perceived shortcomings, Ashley says she gladly welcomes advice from experienced Tzu Chi volunteers with corporate jobs and professional backgrounds "to help guide and mentor me, to ensure my work is effective and impactful, and aligns to Tzu Chi's values." She also credits advice from pioneers in the field (UN/SDG experts) as helpful and inspirational.



Ashley and fellow UN DGC youth representatives at an international event in 2022. *Photo/Cashley Yong*



Ashley and the Tzu Chi team travel locally to visit communities in need in Sierra Leone in 2019 during her second trip there. *Photo/Hsiao Yiu Hwa*



Ashley represents Tzu Chi during a side event at COP26, the UN Climate Change Conference in the UK, in 2021. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA*



Ashley and her team launch an International Youth Leadership Program in 2022, which she designed and planned among her many other activities. *Photo/Ashley Yong*

Among other possible difficulties, she cites a lack of human resources in doing the work, so she seeks to “identify volunteers (especially young people) and invite them to participate and contribute in the projects, also empowering them to lead some roles.” And if any interpersonal relationship issues arise, Ashley applies Buddhist teachings, and by heeding Master Cheng Yen’s guidance, she’s learning to endure and let go. Overall, though, “I love new challenges, so I feel motivated to address challenges even though sometimes it is frustrating,” she concludes.

## Fulfillment and Frustration

Active on the international stage, one can wonder how Ashley Yong feels about her GPAD role and work:

**I think I’m only contributing tiny bits, but I believe any actions, regardless small or huge, are meaningful. I also make sure I practice what I preach by adopting a sustainable lifestyle, including adopting a plant-based diet and zero-waste lifestyle, among other things.**

*Ashley Yong*

Sometimes, she admits she feels frustrated, even helpless, as “time is so limited (as we have only a few years left before the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold is reached), while what I can do is also limited,” she explains. Ashley also points out that there are “many systemic barriers that we could not overcome, causing disappointment and frustration.” Nonetheless, Ashley is optimistic.



In 2022, Ashley is in charge of a Sustainable Development Goals Awareness Exhibition in Melaka, Malaysia, with young people she trained. *Photo/Jia Jiann Foo*

When I feel like giving up, I try to change my point of view or just move forward to something else to contribute to. I understand how important sustainable development is; therefore, I never give up, even though sometimes I need rest for my mind and for all the challenges I have to face. But I'm determined and glad that I'm on this path.

*Ashley Yong*

Ashley sees “many uncharted territories to be discovered and developed, especially in SDG localizations and globalization,” and feels “grateful to have the ability to develop and spearhead some programs.” She credits the support afforded to youth at Tzu Chi for much of her progress, saying that the opportunities offered “are vast, providing huge spaces and trust to the young people to engage in UN platforms and develop programs and events for SDG implementation. Even though I'm young,

many volunteers and decision-makers believe in me and allow me to be innovative and creative.”

Tzu Chi youth around the world are given the chance to participate in international, mainstream platforms to present the Tzu Chi culture established by Master Cheng Yen of shared knowledge, awareness and action, and taking real action.

*Debra Boudreaux*  
Chief Executive Officer  
Tzu Chi USA

## A Growing List of Milestones

The July 19, 2022, address during the Moment for Nature High-level Thematic Debate of the 76th UN General Assembly was undoubtedly a milestone for Ashley Yong. Still, this Tzu Chi youth has had other memorable experiences along her journey.



Ashley's 2019 trip to Sierra Leone is deeply impactful as she discovers the resilience of people enduring hardship, which leaves a lasting impression. Photo/Debra Boudreaux



Ashley's development of sincere friendships with Tzu Chi's local partners and volunteers now facilitate her Sierra Leone project management role at GPAD. *Photo/Hsiao Yiu Hwa*

She cherishes a trip to Sierra Leone in 2019, her first time on the African continent. It was also the first time, then 24, Ashley had traveled solo on a 35-hour voyage flying from Malaysia with three layovers before arriving in Sierra Leone.

"I fell in love with that country after the trip; the people are so kind and generous," she recounts, noting that although materially impoverished, "they are rich mentally." "I became good friends with several of our local partners and volunteers," Ashley adds, whom she now sees "as my African family over there." She had the opportunity to visit disadvantaged and marginalized communities, and the impact remains, "the memory of the trip always appears in my mind to remind me how blessed I am and also to encourage me and keep me motivated."

Ashley also fondly recalls her involvement in SDG programs in Melaka, Malaysia, in 2021, when she could apply knowledge and

experience gained from her UN engagement and SDGs learning in the field. "I always liked community-based programs, especially awareness and training programs on SDGs, as those are most impactful." She guided over 20 young people to lead that year's programs. "We worked together to carry out cleanup events, exhibitions, and workshops that attracted more than 1,000 people to learn about SDGs and climate change."

Recently, on March 29, Ashley spoke at UN ESCAP's 2023 Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) in Thailand. ESCAP, one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations, is the most inclusive intergovernmental platform in the Asia-Pacific region. This address, part of the 10th APFSD's "Review of Regional Progress and Opportunities for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals" session, was a first for her, too, within the APFSD context and in speaking in the ESCAP Hall.



On March 29, 2023, Ashley makes an address at ESCAP Hall in Bangkok, Thailand, during the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.  
*Photo/Forum Attendee*

Ashley was there as the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation’s Youth Representative and more: The Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) had nominated her to speak on behalf of the APFSD Youth Forum, representing more than 400 young people across 36 countries in the region, and Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) to speak on behalf of the CSO (Civil Society Organizations) Children and Youth Group.

“The clock is ticking,” she declared as she drew towards her conclusion, saying:

**We, the young people, are ready to creatively, innovatively, and effectively address all the crises we are facing together with the governments, UN agencies, private sectors, academia and other stakeholders. We urge you to listen and collaborate with young people and partners now. [...] Through the intergenerational approach, our effort to achieve the Agenda 2030 would be fast-tracked and impactful. The time to act is now, the time to work together to change the system and shift the power is now.**



**Ashley Yong**  
*Excerpt of 10th APFSD Address*



“It was fun and motivating,” she remembers, adding that she received much encouragement from CSO and UN partners afterward.

Speaking and intervention opportunities are like reminders to the decision-makers about the needs of civil society as well as the help we can offer. Young people generally did not get enough decision-making rights and spaces yet.

Ashley Yong

Ashley also attended the APFSD Youth Forum as one of 70 out of 1,400 registrations selected by the organizers to participate in person, and nominated by ARROW, she moderated a panel discussion. She equally contributed in various other ways during the APFSD People’s Forum and Main Forum.

Go, Ashley Yong, go! – on behalf of Tzu Chi, and even more importantly, on behalf of the sustainable future the world seeks. 🌱



Ashley participates in the Earth Day Carnival at Tzu Chi USA Headquarters in April 2023, promoting UN Sustainable Development Goals and climate change action. Photo/Nina Wu

# BEING ABLE TO GIVE IS A BLESSING

*To willingly undergo hardship for the sake of helping others is compassion.*

*Master Cheng Yen's Teachings | Translated and Compiled by the Dharma as Water Team*

**W**hen we can recognize and cherish our blessings, we will feel a sense of gratitude every day. We will be unafraid of hardship in our work because we would understand that being able to work is actually a blessing. However, we must also invite others to create blessings so that the blessings do not end.

Fifty-seven years ago, Tzu Chi began with thirty donating members saving fifty cents [NT, equivalent to US 2 cents] every day in their bamboo banks. They also went to the market and urged many people to donate. In this way, Tzu Chi went on to establish the Four Missions [Charity, Medicine, Education, Humanistic Culture]. It was an arduous process and quite miraculous, but it is not a myth. It was because everyone had the aspiration, and by gathering these extraordinary "good causes and conditions," we came all this way to the present, paving a path of love to more than a hundred countries and regions.

There are many things on my mind every day. I worry about the imbalance of the four elements, and my heart goes out to those who are sick and suffering in this world. I am grateful for the many kindhearted people and Bodhisattvas around me who are sharing my burden of worry and concern. With so many volunteers around the world working toward a common direction and doing Tzu Chi's work, going among people, and putting our teachings into practice in the world, I am truly content with my life.

Tzu Chi was established in frugal and harsh conditions. Though we monastics live a frugal life, we serve with so much joy. When we started doing charity relief work,


we saw how poverty starts from illness, and illness causes poverty. Is it enough to just provide enough for a poor family to cover their three meals? Offering one-time financial assistance is not the ultimate solution. Charity work must be continuous and sustained, and love must also be accumulated, little by little.

In the early days, we urged everyone to deposit fifty cents in their bamboo banks to help people before going to the market to buy groceries. At the time, some members asked me, "Master, why the hassle? With fifty cents a day, that would be fifteen dollars a month. I will just donate fifteen dollars once a month." I told them I did not want them to form the aspiration and do good deeds just once a month; I wanted them to do good deeds everyday. It is very valuable for everyone to think about doing good deeds and helping others every day. This is creating blessings.

As long as we are willing to give love, whether it is with ten dollars or a hundred dollars, the blessings from our collective giving can be so powerful. Furthermore, we can go on and cultivate both blessings and wisdom. Not only do we create blessings on our own, but we must also have the wisdom to humble ourselves and call on others to create blessings together so that this energy of blessings will never end.

Over the last few decades, severe disasters have struck Taiwan. Be it on the frontline or as support in the background, Tzu Chi volunteers from all regions have





mobilized and mindfully given their Great Love. With the power of our fifty cents, we have accomplished a lot. Following the 921 earthquake in 1999 [a disaster in Taiwan that caused around 2,400 deaths and 10,000 injuries], Tzu Chi has helped rebuild more than fifty schools. At the time, some volunteers were very concerned and asked, “Master, where will the money come from?” I replied, “The money is in everyone’s pockets. I have faith in my own selflessness and in people’s love.”

Recently, Tzu Chi provided aid for survivors of an earthquake in Türkiye, for the Ukrainian refugees, and in the Buddha’s homeland of Nepal. I hope we can have more strength to help. Looking at the world, there are droughts, famines, poverty, and so on. The various natural disasters and manmade calamities cause much suffering. Sometimes, I hear people say, “I am working so hard.” I think about whether their hardships are as severe as what Tzu Chi volunteers witnessed in Lumbini, Nepal. People lived in huts made of a few straws and bamboo sticks, and we could easily see through the huts from front to back. This is how people are living in our current time. The scenes are real, and the suffering is real. Why is life so hard for them? If they cannot improve their own circumstances, we must form aspirations to go to them.

Thanks to advanced technology and prosperous social development, we are able to live in privileged environments, so we must cherish our blessings with gratitude every day. Tzu Chi volunteers who do the work never say that the work is tiresome; instead, we say we are “blessed,” and this is because having the ability to work is a blessing. We are not doing the work for ourselves. Instead, we first consid-

er the needs of society. We must put “benefiting others” before “benefiting ourselves,” for only then can the world progress and our businesses develop further. Therefore, by benefiting others, we also benefit ourselves.

As we are grateful for our blessings, we must also use our wisdom to demonstrate the truth of the Buddha’s teachings. As I no longer have a loud voice, I cannot extensively explain the Buddha’s teachings. However, I thank the staff from the Department of Literature and History who have carefully compiled the history of Tzu Chi. Tzu Chi has developed and provided services according to what the world needs. Every story had a year, month, day, people, and matters associated with it. In addition, it was not just stories we have heard, but rather things we have done. When Tzu Chi volunteers hear these stories, they will realize how they were the ones who created the history, and they can feel how it has enriched their lives.

I am grateful that Tzu Chi volunteers have taken the Buddha Dharma to heart and put it into practice. We must make use of the causes and conditions of our time and use our advanced technology to spread the Buddha Dharma. We must not take the Dharma lightly or disrespect the teachings. When we attain understanding of principles and are able to eloquently speak about them, we must not become arrogant. If we do, then whether we are teaching or listening, it makes no difference because our foremost feeling is self-importance. This is not beneficial to the Buddha Dharma. We must have a heart of reverence as we earnestly put the teachings into practice in our daily living. The Buddha Dharma is a path paved under our feet. So, let us take steadfast steps forward on this path and bring out the value of our lives. Please always be mindful! 🙏

# Infrared Thermal Blanket



**This winter, get comfy with the Infrared Thermal Blanket from DA.AI Technology.**

Experience the ultimate in comfort, with a smooth cotton-blend lining and plush fleece exterior...

and the sophistication of green tech, with yarn made from recycled PET bottles.

What are you waiting for?  
Treat someone special (or yourself!) today.

*Available in multiple sizes.*

Shop at  
[daaitechnology.com](http://daaitechnology.com)





# Illuminations

Dharma Master Cheng Yen responds to questions and comments from visitors, volunteers, staff, and disciples.

## TEARS FOR OTHERS REPRESENT AWAKENED LOVE

**Question:** *Sights of suffering make our hearts ache. Doesn't this add more afflictions?*

**Answer:** *The Buddha still sheds tears upon seeing suffering! However, when we shed tears out of compassion for sentient beings, those are tears of awakened love. If your tears are only for your own desires and worries, those are tears of the delusion of unenlightened beings.*

## TRUE LOVE IS CLEAN AND PURE

**Question:** *What counts as a truly loving heart?*

**Answer:** *The prerequisite for love is wisdom. True love is untainted and free from desires, and it is clean and pure. To truly love others means to have "unconditional loving-kindness and universal compassion" and to "feel the pain and suffering of others as our own."*

## A SOFT TOUCH IS BETTER THAN FORCE

**Question:** *When I come across unfair things that make me angry, I am tempted to use force to resolve them.*

**Answer:** *This is not right. Forceful or violent means would not truly solve the problem and may even worsen it. A soft touch is enough to resolve the problem!*

Excerpts from Pure Wisdom by Shih Cheng Yen (Jing Si Publications, 2022).



# Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation Global Relief Efforts

by Adriana DiBenedetto



 Taiwan

On May 14, 2023, the Tzu Chi community gathers at Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei to celebrate three occasions: Buddha's Birthday (Vesak), Mother's Day, and Global Tzu Chi Day marking its 57th anniversary. The celebration resumed for the first time in three years after being interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. *Photo/You Junhong*




 Nepal



Volunteers from Nepal, Singapore, and Malaysia gather in Lumbini, Nepal, the birthplace of the Buddha, to organize a sports festival for local children. Running from March 24–28, 2023, students from 25 local schools participate in five wonderful days' worth of engaging events. *Photo/Huang Ju-Cheng*



 Nepal



On April 12, 2023, Tzu Chi Foundation donates eco-blankets to students at a school for people with low vision in Nepal, providing warmth and comfort during harsh winter months. *Photo/DA.AI TV*



 Poland

Tzu Chi initiates Polish language classes for Ukrainian refugees in Poland on April 1, 2023, boosting not only vital communication skills, but personal confidence and autonomy. *Photo/Serhii Yezov*



On April 1, 2023, volunteers from Taiwan, Ukraine, the United States, Poland, and other countries successfully complete a care package distribution for older Ukrainian refugees in Lublin. *Photo/Serhii Yezov*



 Dominican Republic

In 2000, Tzu Chi established an elementary school in La Romana, a city on the Dominican Republic's Caribbean coast. With the arrival of Tzu Chi's 24th anniversary, volunteers actively plan an alumni reunion event to be held on the afternoon of March 10, 2023. Volunteer Ramon Martinez (right) is a Tzu Chi alum himself, and both of Juana Garcia's (left) children are also graduates of La Romana Tzu Chi Elementary School. *Photo/Tzu Chi Dominican Republic* 🌿



# Tzu Chi USA Relief Efforts

by Adriana DiBenedetto

## Buddha Day Ceremony



On May 13, 2023, community members of diverse faith traditions join together for Vesak – or Buddha Day. On this auspicious occasion, celebrated at its headquarters in San Dimas, California, Tzu Chi USA holds a triple celebration for Mother’s Day, Buddha Day, and Tzu Chi Day. *Photo/Shuli Luo*



On May 14, 2023, nearly 1,300 Tzu Chi volunteers and guests assemble at the Tzu Chi USA Headquarters in San Dimas, California, for a reverent Buddha Day prayer event. For members of Tzu Chi and the global Tzu Chi family, the celebration is a long-awaited observance that is grounded in awareness of all sentient beings and the planet. *Photo/Wesley Tsai*

## Disaster Relief

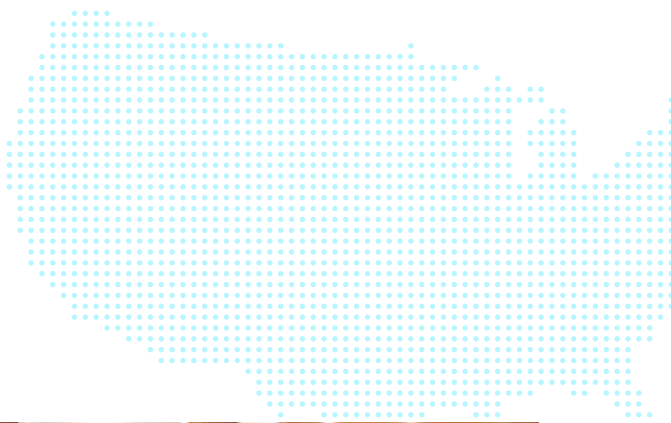


Following destructive tornadoes in Sullivan County, Indiana, at the beginning of April 2023, Tzu Chi USA Midwest Region volunteers bring emergency disaster relief and emotional comfort to impacted residents, with 61 households receiving cash cards loaded with \$800 each to spend on their most pressing needs. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*



On May 9, a team of volunteers from the Tzu Chi USA Headquarters, Northwest, and Midwest Region gather in St Louis, Missouri, for the 2023 National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) Conference to share Tzu Chi’s disaster relief experience. *Photo/Ting Fan*





## Community Service



On April 8, 2023, young leaders from Tzu Chi USA's Headquarters Region in San Dimas, California, host an Earth Day Carnival, featuring interactive activities, educational booths, and eco-friendly workshops to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainable living practices. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*



Recognized for their service to families in San Bernardino since 1996, Tzu Chi USA is honored with an Outstanding Community Partner award by the San Bernardino Unified School District in California on April 18, 2023. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*



Filing tax returns can be a daunting process. Tzu Chi USA's regional chapters across the United States offer free tax preparation services through the annual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, helping individuals and families receive the support they need. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team*



On May 4, 2023, Tzu Chi Vision Mobile Clinic in Fresno, California, celebrates having provided its 5,000th pair of prescription glasses in affiliation with See 2 Succeed, a local nonprofit partner that works with schools in the Central Valley to offer free eye exams and glasses for children in underserved communities. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Media Team* 🌿

State	Tzu Chi USA Offices	Address	Tel / Fax	State	Tzu Chi USA Offices	Address	Tel / Fax
AZ	Phoenix Service Center	2145 W. Elliot Rd. Chandler, AZ 85224	480-838-6556 F: 480-777-7665	KS	Kansas Office	9508 Shannon Way Circle Wichita, KS 67206	316-323-5798
S. CA	Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, US Headquarters Area	1100 S. Valley Center Ave. San Dimas, CA 91773	909-447-7799 F: 909-447-7948	LA	New Orleans Office	52 Driftwood Blvd. Kenner, LA 70065	504-782-5168 F: 504-832-2022
	Jing Si Books & Café, San Dimas		909-447-7799 x 6569	MD	Montgomery County Service Center		703-707-8606 F: 301-339-8872
	Tzu Chi Academy, San Dimas		909-447-7799 x 6551 F: 909-447-7944	MA	Boston Service Center	15 Summer St.	617-762-0569
	Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation	1008 S. Garfield Ave. Alhambra, CA 91801	626-427-9598 F: 626-788-2321		Tzu Chi Academy, Boston	Newton, MA 02464	617-431-4844 F: 617-431-4484
	Tzu Chi Medical Center, Alhambra		626-281-3383 F: 626-281-5303	MI	Lansing Office	3511 West Hiawatha Dr., Okemos, MI 48864	517-505-3388
	Tzu Chi Community Clinic, South El Monte	10414 Vacco St. South El Monte, CA 91733	626-636-8706 F: 626-671-8778		Detroit Service Center	6825 Textile Rd. Ypsilanti, MI 48197	586-795-3491 F: 586-795-3491
	Buddhist Tzu Chi Education Foundation	1920 S. Brea Canyon Cutoff Rd. Walnut, CA 91789	909-895-2125 F: 909-345-7025	MN	Minneapolis Office	1485 Arden View Dr. Arden Hills, MN 55112	617-939-6965
	Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Walnut		909-895-2126 F: 909-927-8336	MO	St. Louis Service Center	8515 Olive Blvd. St. Louis, MO 63132	314-994-1999 F: 314-994-1999
	Tzu Chi Elementary, Walnut		909-895-2125 x 3200 F: 909-345-7025		Reno Office	903 West Moana Lane Reno, NV 89509	775-827-6333 F: 775-770-1148
	Tzu Chi Academy, Walnut		909-895-2280	NV	Las Vegas Service Center/ Academy	2590 Lindell Rd. Las Vegas, NV 89146	702-880-5552 F: 702-880-5552
	Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Monrovia	206 E. Palm Ave. Monrovia, CA 91016	626-305-1188 F: 626-599-8098		Mid-Atlantic Region/Jing Si Books & Café	150 Commerce Rd. Cedar Grove, NJ 07009	973-857-8666 F: 973-857-9555
	Tzu Chi Academy, Monrovia	220 E. Palm Ave. Monrovia, CA 91016	626-775-3675 F: 626-359-8199	NJ	Tzu Chi Academy, Northern New Jersey		
	West Los Angeles Service Center	11701 Wilshire Blvd. #15A Los Angeles, CA 90025	310-473-5188 F: 310-477-9518		Tzu Chi Academy, Central New Jersey	50 Woodrow Wilson Dr., Edison, NJ 08820	973-857-8666
	Torrance Service Center	1355 Broad Ave. Wilmington, CA 90744	310-684-4465 F: 310-684-4460		Central New Jersey Service Center		908-420-5218
Tzu Chi Community Clinic, Wilmington		310-684-4466 F: 855-651-1717		Northeast Region/Academy	137-77 Northern Blvd. Flushing, NY 11354	718-888-0866 F: 718-460-2068	
Orange County Service Center	22911 Mill Creek Dr. Laguna Hills, CA 92653	949-916-4488 F: 949-916-5933		Jing Si Books & Café, New York		718-799-3000	
Tzu Chi Academy, Irvine	4321 Walnut Ave., Irvine, CA 92604	714-624-3026 F: 949-916-5933		Brooklyn Service Center	513 57th Street Brooklyn, NY 11220	917-909-0682	
Cerritos Service Center	14618&14620 Carmenita Rd. Norwalk, CA 90650	562-926-6609 F: 562-926-1603		Long Island Branch/Academy	60 E Williston Ave. East Williston, NY 11596	516-873-6888 F: 516-746-0626	
Northridge Service Center	8963 Reseda Blvd. Northridge, CA 91324	818-727-7689 F: 818-727-9272		Manhattan Service Center	63 Canal Street New York, NY 10002	212-965-1151 F: 212-965-1152	
San Gabriel Valley Service Center	9620 Flair Dr. El Monte, CA 91731	626-416-4527 Warehouse: 626-416-4529		East Long Island Office	4 Milburn Rd. S. Setauket, NY 11720	631-964-3393	
Jing Si Books & Café, El Monte		626-448-1362		Tzu Chi Center, New York	229 E. 60th St. New York, NY 10022	212-660-9229 F: 646-864-0086	
San Diego Service Center	5754 Pacific Center Blvd. #202 San Diego, CA 92121	858-546-0578 F: 858-546-0573	NC	Raleigh Service Center		919-322-8389	
				Charlotte Office	4527 Dwight Evans Rd. Charlotte, NC 28217	704-281-8060 F: 704-943-1031	
Northwest Region	2355 Oakland Rd. San Jose, CA 95131	408-457-6969 F: 408-943-8420		Cincinnati Office	11228 Brookbridge Dr. Cincinnati, OH 45249	513-469-2161 F: 513-469-2161	
Tzu Chi Academy, Tri-Valley		925-785-7413		Columbus Service Center	2200 Henderson Rd. Columbus, OH 43220	614-457-9215 F: 614-457-9217	
Jing Si Books & Café, San Jose		408-457-6981	OH	Dayton Service Center	1459 E Dorothy Lane Dayton, OH 45429	937-701-7111	
San Francisco Branch	2901 Irving St. San Francisco, CA 94122	415-682-0566 F: 415-682-0567		Cleveland Service Center	1076 Ford Rd. Highland Heights, OH 44143	440-646-9292 F: 440-646-9292	
Tzu Chi Academy, San Mateo	2675 Ralston Ave., Belmont, CA 94002	650-888-1582		Portland Service Center	3800 SW Cedar Hills Blvd #194 Beaverton, OR 97005	503-643-2130 F: 503-643-2130	
Tzu Chi Academy, San Francisco	350 Girard St. San Francisco, CA 94134	415-680-5225 F: 415-682-0567	OR	Tzu Chi Academy, Portland	3500 SW 104th Ave. Beaverton, OR 97005	503-643-2130	
Modesto Service Center	1100 Carver Rd. #J Modesto, CA 95350	209-529-2625 F: 209-529-2625		Philadelphia Office	107 North 9th Street Philadelphia, PA 19107	215-627-1915 F: 215-627-1916	
Stockton Office	1212 W Robinhood Dr. #3D Stockton, CA 95207	209-957-7800 F: 209-957-7800	PA	Pittsburgh Service Center/ Academy	1333 Banksville Rd. #201 Pittsburgh, PA 15216	412-531-8343 F: 412-531-8341	
Tzu Chi Academy, Cupertino	1280 Johnson Ave San Jose, CA 95129	408-823-8799		Southern Region/Academy	6200 Corporate Dr. Houston, TX 77036	713-270-9988 F: 713-981-9008	
Santa Rosa Office	2435 Professional Drive, Suite D Santa Rosa 95403	707-546-1945		Jing Si Books & Café, Houston		713-981-8966	
Sacramento Service Center	1820 Tribute Rd. # J Sacramento, CA 95815	916-568-5800		Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Houston		713-395-0303 F: 713-395-0305	
Ukiah Office	527 S State St. #B Ukiah, CA 95482	707-462-2911 F: 707-462-2911		Austin Service Center	7221 Northeast Dr. Austin, TX 78723	512-491-0358 F: 512-926-1373	
Oakland Service Center	620 International Blvd. Oakland, CA 94606	510-879-0971 F: 510-879-0971	TX	San Antonio Office	19179 Blanco Rd. #109-2 San Antonio, TX 78258	909-576-2387 F: 210-566-3970	
Tzu Chi Academy, San Jose	625 Educational Park Dr. San Jose, CA 95133	408-457-6970		Central Region/Academy/ Jing Si Books & Café	534 W. Belt Line Rd. Richardson, TX 75080	972-680-8869 F: 972-680-7732	
Fresno Service Center	7421 N Maple Ave. Fresno, CA 93720	559-298-4894 F: 559-298-4894		Tzu Chi Great Love Preschool & Kindergarten, Dallas		214-446-1776 F: 214-446-1772	
Orlando Service Center	5401 Alhambra Dr. #A Orlando, FL 32808	407-292-1146 F: 407-292-1146		Greater Washington D.C. Region/ Academy	1516 Moorings Dr. Reston, VA 20190	703-707-8606 F: 703-707-8607	
Miami Service Center	8070 Pasadena Blvd. Pembroke Pines, FL 33024	954-538-1172 F: 317-645-9907	VA	Richmond Service Center	1318 Tomahawk Creek Rd. Midlothian, VA 23114	804-306-6037 F: 804-378-3520	
Atlanta Branch/ Tzu Chi Academy, Atlanta	3120 Medlock Bridge Rd. Building E Peachtree Corners, GA 30071	770-458-1000	WA	Seattle Branch/Academy	15800 SE Newport Way Bellevue WA 98006	425-643-9104	
Pacific Islands Region/Academy	1238 Wilhelmina Rise Honolulu, HI 96816	808-737-8885		Milwaukee Office	5356 W. Silverleaf Ln, Brown Deer, WI 53223	414-357-8427	
Midwest Region/Academy/ Jing Si Books & Café	1430 Plainfield Rd. Darien, IL 60561	630-963-6601 F: 630-960-9360	WI	Madison Office	1019 Starlight Ln, Cottage Grove, WI 53527	608-960-1962	
Chicago Chinatown Service Center	215 W 23rd St., Chicago, IL 60616						
Indianapolis Service Center	2929 E. 96th St. #E Indianapolis, IN 46240	317-580-0979					



GLOBAL  
REFUGEE RELIEF  
EXHIBITION

# UPROOTED:

## Compassion After Displacement



According to the UNHCR, 1 in 78 people have been forced to flee their homes due to war, conflict, famine, and more. Through stunning photos and videos, "Uprooted: Compassion After Displacement," seeks to illuminate the positive impact that Global Tzu Chi has had on those seeking comfort and refuge in a new home. Also featuring hand-drawn artwork by child refugees from Syria, each piece tells a story that will inspire the compassion within. Plan your visit to the exhibition today.

OPEN DAILY FROM

**JUNE**  
**17**, 2023

11 AM - 4 PM  
(Last entry at 3:30 PM)

**Tzu Chi Center**  
For Compassionate Relief

229 E 60th Street  
New York, NY 10022



[tzuchicenter.org/exhibits/  
uprooted-compassion-  
after-displacement](https://tzuchicenter.org/exhibits/uprooted-compassion-after-displacement)



**Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation**

1100 S. Valley Center Ave.

San Dimas, CA91773

Tel: 909.447.7799

Fax: 909.447.7948

NonProfit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**

San Dimas, CA

Permit No.36



On May 13, 2023, Tzu Chi volunteers at Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters in San Dimas, California, honor the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, in a triple celebration of Mother's Day, Buddha Day, and Tzu Chi Day. *Photo/Shuli Luo*