

COMPASSION & RELIEF

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# TZU-CHI *USA Journal*



**MEDICAL MISSION**  
SPECIAL EDITION (PART II)



**International Medical Outreach**

Tzu Chi Mobile Clinics

At the Forefront of COVID-19



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**Cover:** A Tzu Chi Academy student in Long Island, New York, receives a prescription for eyeglasses in a Tzu Chi Vision Mobile Clinic on May 22, 2022. *Photo/Huaihsien Huang*

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).



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# Launch the Cycle of Goodness for a Year of Peace and Blessings

**T**ime flies, it's already 2024. A few days ago, when I was traveling, I found out that I had contracted COVID-19. I was worried about spreading the disease to others, so I immediately changed my itinerary. It has been four years since this invisible and unstoppable epidemic spread internationally.

I remember that during the pandemic's peak, I had video conferences with several Tzu Chi Hospital presidents and teams every morning, listening to their reports on how they set up screening stations outside hospitals and administered medication and vaccines. The pandemic was like an enemy army set on attacking the city, which had arrived at the gate. The doctors and nurses were like the generals defending the city, who needed to put on their armor to fight. I asked the presidents to take good care of their medical staff, who were responsible for protecting life, health, and love, and also to protect themselves beforehand so they could protect people and the community.

In those days, healthcare workers on the frontline had to wear airtight apparel with their heads, faces, bodies, hands, and feet sealed up. This made them feel extremely hot and stuffy inside the coveralls. When they finished their work and removed the layers of gloves and protective clothing, they would find their inner layer of clothes so soaked with sweat that they were dark, and they even had to wring out the liquid. The public could not see the repercussions of their daily hard labor under such difficult conditions. Seeing the healthcare workers sweating all over saddened me, but my heart was full of gratitude: If not for their dedication, how could we have protected people's health?

Everyone has a duty to do something for the world. The medical system took on a great deal of responsibility, but we, on the outside, also have to do our part. A few years ago, when the pandemic was on the rise, I saw in the news that priests in India didn't have the necessary equipment to protect themselves but still went to the hospitals to serve; I hoped that Tzu Chi could go there and provide support through protection supplies. Over the past two to three years, we often heard about Tzu Chi's international aid: When a particular country, hospital, or organization needed oxygen cylinders and protective clothing, we kept providing them.

It is often said that people living in peace should care about places that are not peaceful or have been struck by disasters, offering support to help anyone in need there with love. Those who can save people are blessed, and those who can do good can be at peace. We are grateful to Tzu Chi volunteers for responding to my appeal to raise love and donations to purchase vaccines and for delivering vegetarian meals to the elderly and helpless who could not cook for themselves during the pandemic.

Indeed, there is much suffering in the world, yet we still wish that this year will be one of peace and that the pandemic can subside. Therefore, we must be more prudent and pious to create more blessings. If we want peace, we must live accordingly. For example, we should maintain a healthy lifestyle. We should not overeat with the understanding that illnesses can arrive through the mouth. We must also refrain from consuming what we should not eat, which includes meat. The wish for the world to be peaceful and





A care recipient at a drive-through food distribution in California in 2020, joyfully accepts to take a vegetarian pledge. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Tzu Chi USA volunteers distributed food, supported the vaccination effort, and promoted vegetarianism. *Photo/Shuli Lo*

disaster-free depends on what humans eat. If there is a large population of meat-eaters, how many animals will they need to consume to satisfy their appetite? Won't these animals retaliate because of their grievances?

I often mention statistics from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on the number of animals slaughtered each year, and that enormous number includes only cows, pigs, goats, chickens, ducks, etc., and not aquatic creatures. From the perspective of Buddhism, all beings in the six realms of life are equal, only with different body forms. Slaughtering and devouring living creatures to satisfy human appetites is utterly irrational, as all living beings share the same karma. Human beings have committed a great deal of killing deeds. Without vigilant awareness of these transgressions, disasters will continue to raid the world.

The Buddha said more than 2,500 years ago that in the Latter Dharma Era, there would be fewer and fewer people who believe in the Dharma and abide by a humanitarian spirit. Yet, I'm very fortunate as the number of human Bodhisattvas has increased in this age. I hope everyone does not slacken in their efforts to promote a plant-based diet, spread the great teaching of vegetarianism that protects all beings' lives, guard health with sincere love, and bring peace to all. If everyone is pious and loving, utilizes their wisdom for the benefit of humanity, and launches the cycle of goodness, I believe 2024 will be a peaceful year of blessings and wisdom. 🌿

*Master Cheng Yen*

Founder  
Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation





## CHAPTER IV

# International Medical Outreach

### Forward

*Written by Jiali Liu*

*Translated by H.B. Qin*

They trekked over mountains and through ravines to go deep into disaster areas. In a rural hospital in **Bolivia**, they worked on dilapidated operating tables with flashlights as the only light source to perform surgery on patients. They examined, listened, inquired, and took pulses, skillfully relieving lingering illnesses. In a makeshift medical tent in **Haiti**, their acupuncture treatment enabled an older man to stand without crutches after years of pain that prevented it. They persevered despite dangers and obstacles, traveling to towns and cities devastated by an earthquake in **Mexico**, making eight trips in three years, and seeing 25,000 patients.

With their steadfast medical outreach efforts, Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) USA chapter doctors traveled across

borders to heal illnesses of the body as well as wounds of the heart. In Canoa, among the areas hardest hit by the 2016 earthquake in **Ecuador**, Tzu Chi rebuilt a beloved Catholic church and offered free clinics for disaster survivors of different faiths. In **Honduras**, Tzu Chi organized in-depth visits to disadvantaged and sick families and set up a local TIMA chapter to provide continued care. In the **Dominican Republic**, Tzu Chi launched a long-term dental free clinic initiative at the Tzu Chi School to make every child's smile brighter.

Through its free clinics provided internationally, the spirit of Tzu Chi continues to spread in people's hearts, taking root and flourishing in many corners of the world.





TIMA USA Dr. Yunshan Huang examines a baby during Tzu Chi's free clinic event in Port-au-Prince following the January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti. *Photo/Yanhuang Lin*



## SECTION 1—Mexico

Written by Audrey Cheng and Scarlett Liu  
Translated by H.B. Qin



Following the earthquake that struck Mexico in September 2017, Tzu Chi volunteers comfort children with sweets during Tzu Chi's first large-scale disaster relief distribution on December 7 in Tláhuac. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters*





At a free clinic on December 7, 2017, Chungchen Kao, a Tzu Chi International Medical Association physician, treats a grandmother over 80 with acupuncture. *Photo/Huizhen Zhuang*

**O**n September 19, 2017, an earthquake measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale hit the state of Puebla in Central Mexico, causing heavy harm. Many buildings were damaged or destroyed, countless people were injured, and over 300 tragically lost their lives. Moreover, as the earthquake disrupted livelihood activities, residents were economically affected, too, which caused even more suffering.

“Ay, ay, ay, ay. Sing out and don’t cry. As singing gladdens our sad hearts...”

For those impacted, Tzu Chi’s assistance in the disaster’s aftermath might have felt as uplifting as the lyrics of the Mexican folk song *Cielito Lindo*. Tzu Chi and local volunteers joined forces to write a heartening page in history by delivering aid to those most in need and bringing the seeds of hope and love into this rich land to take root.



## Embracing the Challenge

“I was on the second floor, and my two children were watching TV in their room. I rushed to their room after hearing a creaking sound. I held them in my arms and protected myself, waiting for the worst to happen. The walls began to collapse, falling piece by piece into ruins.” In city after city, hundreds of Mexicans lost their homes, loved ones, and even their lives as the earth shook without warning, leaving them with no chance of escape.

Learning about the calamity, Tzu Chi volunteers mobilized to launch an aid mission. Stephen Huang, Executive Director of Tzu Chi Global Volunteers, led a disaster assessment team that arrived in Mexico on September 25, 2017, for a two-month-long survey of damages in impacted regions. From Jojutla, near the earthquake’s epicenter, the volunteers traveled around the clock to the five hardest-hit areas of San Gregorio, Atencingo, Cuautla, Raboso, and Xochimilco.

The volunteers went door-to-door, hoping to determine the survivors’ most urgent needs. They found that, apart from the necessity for financial assistance and relief supplies, a shortage of medical resources was equally a pressing issue. Although the local government had deployed medical vehicles to the scene, the shortage of medical supplies and the paralyzed power system put a red light on much of the aid work. Moreover, there wasn’t even any water in some places. In such harsh conditions, public hygiene was difficult to maintain.

**There is no water, no way even to wash your hands, and no way to refrigerate the food and medicine you bring in from outside. We desperately need help, especially medical support.**

**Jose Ricardo Licona**  
*Mexican Physician*



On December 13, 2017, during the opening ceremony for Tzu Chi, which would provide large-scale aid distributions and free clinics, the anthem plays under the nation’s flag. Photo/Xiaoze Huang

## Unhealed Wounds

With the support of Han Huang, then-CEO of Tzu Chi USA, volunteer Martin Kuo led the U.S. aid mission. Over 100 doctors and volunteers from 13 countries and regions launched the first disaster relief distributions and free clinic activities in Tláhuac on December 7. By December 15, Tzu Chi’s footprints had reached the cities of San Gregorio, Xochimilco, Jojutla, Tlaquiltenango, and Zacatepec.

While there was much to do to revive Mexico after the earthquake, the already underprivileged population also had difficulty getting medical care, as did the injured, who required timely treatment. The free clinic





ni's disaster relief and medical mission in Jojutla, which Tzu Chi team stands in respect as the Mexican national

team's arrival brought survivors the first opportunity to obtain professional medical attention since the catastrophe. "When we arrived here, we found that most people had injuries to their shoulders or ankles from falling debris, which they had endured for months," Dr. Yingxu Ruan from Taiwan reported.

**The people were already poor before the disaster, and after the earthquake, they didn't even have money to buy food. Today's free clinic is very important. The survivors' headaches and muscle pains, and their psychological sufferings can finally be relieved.**



**Francisco Salinas Sánchez**  
*Delegated Chief of Zacatepec*

Tzu Chi provided Western medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and dental services, with hundreds of local survivors attended to daily. The healthcare team treated 4,491 patients over eight consecutive free clinics.

At that time, Tzu Chi, a charitable organization from the East, was still unfamiliar to many care recipients in Mexico. However, upon receiving Tzu Chi's professional healthcare treatments and patient services, the disaster survivors, who were physically and mentally traumatized by what they had experienced and its aftermath, were touched and impressed.

Alma Rosa Calderon, who lost her son and mother in the earthquake, was in deep sorrow and psychological distress. She had suffered physically as well, sharing, "My whole body is covered in scars, and my eyesight and hearing have been affected." Still, Calderon found solace and relief after gathering the courage to come to a Tzu Chi free clinic, saying, "Tzu Chi truly helped me a lot. I was indeed too afraid to come before, but now I'm not afraid at all."

In addition to the doctors attending to people's medical needs, Tzu Chi volunteers took on the tasks of clinic preparations, giving directions, assistance at various service stations, and more. Considering patients' possible anxiety while awaiting medical treatment, the volunteers prepared songs, dances, and sign language performances to entertain and calm them. They also shared the Tzu Chi bamboo bank story to encourage people to open their hearts and help others, motivating them to move from post-disaster suffering to renewed hope for the future.



Tzu Chi and Tzu Chi International Medical Association volunteers provide medical services at free clinics held from August 31 to September 6, 2018, in areas impacted by the 2017 earthquake in Mexico. Photo/Shuli Lo

**I've participated in many free clinics. The most satisfying moment is to see patients leave with a smile on their faces. That means we did it, we accomplished our mission and merited it.**

**Steven Voon**

*Executive Vice President*

*Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation*



## Taking Root

“What else can we do for you?” Upon the conclusion of the first wave of large-scale distributions and free clinics in December 2017, Tzu Chi began to focus on mid and long-term care for Mexico, which signified that the voices of countless local people had reached the ears and hearts of Tzu Chi volunteers, expressing that what they needed the most after the earthquake was continuous, effective, and professional medical attention.

The U.S. medical team presented the Mexican people's needs to Master Cheng Yen. Through the joint efforts of Han Huang, then-CEO of Tzu Chi USA, and William Keh, then-CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, the Tzu Chi Foundation resolved to hold quarterly free clinics in Mexico. Subsequently, Tzu Chi USA's medical team traveled to the Coyoacan community of Mexico City on January 13, 2018, to host a two-day aid distribution and free clinic that treated 513 patients.

Tzu Chi has since been fulfilling its commitment to the Mexican people with solid steps. The team traveled to Mexico six times after January 2018, in April, September, and November that year, plus April, August, and November 2019, organizing several free clinics in Jojutla, Xochimilco, Mexico City, and Tlaquiltenango. By the end of 2019, Tzu Chi's medical team



had organized 36 medical outreach events during its eight cross-country trips, and the number of patients served was as high as 24,415.

“These people need far more help than we can provide in the short term. How I wish I could stay here forever, but I know that’s not possible,” Tzu Chi USA volunteer Paul Sanquesa said at the end of this phase in the Mexico medical mission, saddened to say goodbye after seeing the massive and long-term medical needs of the population in the areas Tzu Chi had served. And yet, this would not be the end of Tzu Chi’s medical relief activities in the country.

Rooted in the maxim that “It’s better to teach people how to fish than to give them fish,” while Tzu Chi continued to input financial support and medical resources in Mexico, it vigorously built and developed local medical teams simultaneously. The evolving mission organized several medical volunteer training sessions over two years and recruited healthcare workers to ensure that they could meet the daily medical needs of the local people.

**It doesn’t matter how many free clinics the U.S. team can organize; the volunteer team must invite local healthcare workers and encourage local doctors by setting an example. If moved, they will naturally be willing to take on free clinics and gradually attain self-sufficiency.**

**William Keh**  
Then CEO

*Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation*

Its unceasing care and dedication made the name Tzu Chi take root in Mexico, with the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation becoming the local people’s most trusted charity

organization, with their consensus about its volunteers being: “They keep their word and do what they say they will do.”

The trust and touching feeling associated with Tzu Chi connects it to people’s hearts, creating ripples of love and goodness. Many local volunteers and medical professionals joined Tzu Chi’s aid efforts in Mexico, marking another highlight in the history of Tzu Chi’s medical mission in this country. Cheers and tears were always present at each free clinic venue, revealing how Tzu Chi’s spirit had moved the local healthcare staff and people, motivating them to participate in Tzu Chi’s charity efforts.

**They did a great job at that time. The local volunteers were extremely enthusiastic, and everyone did their best to streamline all the processes so that Tzu Chi doctors could work with peace of mind when they arrived. The mission deeply moved even the local government, which cooperated fully with Tzu Chi’s work. Those were glorious days.**

**Martin Kuo**  
*Tzu Chi Volunteer*

Alejandra Rodriguez Cuevas, one of the Mexicans glad to help in Tzu Chi’s mission, explained, “I’m so glad to be able to make my contribution here, to be one of you, and to help you so that you can help more people in need. Why? Because this is my country, and they’re my fellow countrymen; we’re not separate.” Rodriguez Cuevas, who harvested her positive energy by helping others, truly has love deeply imprinted at heart. “Seeing all the help you bring to us, it’s really surprising and touching, and the goodness that I realize in giving fulfills my soul,” she said.

## Guarding Health in Tijuana

In early 2020, the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted Tzu Chi's free clinic outreach in Mexico, but the path of goodness never stopped. In Tijuana, a group of guardians of the disadvantaged and sick have been passing on Tzu Chi's love and care for 28 years, healing and aiding the local population.

In 1995, Ah Mui Manguy, a Spanish-speaking volunteer who had settled in Tijuana, accepted the invitation of Stephen Huang, then Executive Director of the U.S. Branch of Tzu Chi (now Tzu Chi USA), to learn more about the local situation, and was shocked by the backwardness of health-care resources. Beginning in December of that year, a medical team from the Tzu Chi

Free Clinic in Alhambra, California, began traveling to Tijuana regularly to provide free clinics on a long-term basis, bringing valuable medical opportunities to the city's residents.

In April 1997, Tzu Chi provided a free clinic offering Western medicine and dental care at Escuela Primaria Tijuana Tzu Chi (Tzu Chi Tijuana Elementary School, established in November 1996). The school, located in Tijuana's La Morita neighborhood, also serves as a community center for nearly 500 children and residents.

Beginning from that first outreach in 1997, Tzu Chi USA volunteers traveled across the U.S.-Mexico border to conduct aid dis-



Tzu Chi attracts the participation of Martha Lucero (left), a compassionate Mexican-American dentist who leads her own medical team to conduct free clinics at Tzu Chi's medical campus in Tijuana every Saturday.  
*Photo/Shuli Lo*



tributions and free clinics at the school until 2015. Then, Teresa, a generous Mexican touched by the good deeds of Ah Mui Manguy and Joe Wang, a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) doctor, donated a piece of land in Tijuana, hoping Tzu Chi would use it for the benefit of the local people.

Manguy and Wang did not fail to meet Teresa's expectations and oversaw the construction of a Tzu Chi medical campus that reached completion in 2018. Subsequently, Tzu Chi USA volunteers and caring local healthcare professionals began to provide medical treatment, medication, and regular food distributions to help Tijuana residents in need near the campus.

In 2011, after retiring from his job as a TCM doctor, Wang, who had been living in Los Angeles, joined forces with Manguy to provide medical, financial, and food assistance to the underprivileged in Tijuana. He traveled over six hours weekly between Los Angeles and Tijuana for many years. Wang also lived in Tijuana three to four days a week to provide free TCM treatments to those in need and train local volunteers to work with Tzu Chi and serve the community.

**I was born with a natural love of seeing others happy and helping to relieve their pain. After coming into contact with Tzu Chi, I was inspired to go to Mexico a few times and felt that the people there were suffering too much, so I intended to continue going there to do good deeds and spread compassion.**

**Joe Wang**

*TIMA Physician*



For more than a decade, Joe Wang and Ah Mui Manguy have been working hard in Tijuana, providing: Care in homes for elderly residents, shelters for those experiencing homelessness, and villages for people with AIDS; Scholarships to help students complete their studies; and medical grants enabling patients to receive proper treatment and recover as soon as possible.

As far as the eye can see, there is still a long way to go for Mexico to break free from poverty. May this vast land be filled with blessings as Tzu Chi continues to plow deeper and work harder to turn suffering around and bring hope. 🌱



## SECTION 2—Bolivia

Written by Gina Shih

Translated by H.B. Qin

In January 2007, due to the El Niño phenomenon, Bolivia in South America was hit by torrential rains, with over 60% of the country flooded and none of its nine departments (primary subdivisions) spared. The floods destroyed roads and bridges, leading to food shortages and goods supply interruptions. As rivers backed up, the waters inundated good land, demolished buildings, and left more than 76,000 families without homes.



On August 13, 2007, Dr. Mathew Y.C. Lin communicates with orthopedic surgeons at the Hospital Municipal Francés in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. *Photo/Peter Chen*



## Getting Out of the Morass

What happened in early 2007 in this land that Tzu Chi had not yet set foot in concerned our volunteers. On April 26 of that year, Tzu Chi USA decided to provide cross-country support to Bolivia in its time of need. A team of volunteers promptly set off to assess the disaster and bring swift aid. Thus began Tzu Chi's 64th international relief mission.

On May 23, an international disaster relief team with 37 members from Paraguay, Argentina, and the United States arrived in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. After several consecutive days of gathering materials, packing, site surveying, and planning, Tzu Chi and the City of Trinidad in Beni Province officially started aid activities on May 29, and by the 30th, had distributed more than 4,000 blankets, about 12,000 sweaters, over 16,000 cans of powdered milk, and about 2,000 plastic wash basins and buckets each. The supplies were valued at \$150,000 and benefited about 2,020 households in 16 affected communities.

As the volunteers conducted disaster aid distributions that month, they learned that many people couldn't get any medical care.

"People can't gain an income due to illnesses, and can't gain an education because of poverty, and a lack of health education aggravates illnesses, which becomes an inescapable spell," senior Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) nurse Wendy Kang said, noting that many local people had been sick for a long time. Moreover, with the impact of the flooding, healthcare conditions further deteriorated at an accelerated rate, with diseases such as dengue fever and malaria spreading rapidly. Under these conditions, the need for free clinics was evident, and plans were soon underway.

On August 9, TIMA members and Tzu Chi volunteers assembled in the department of Santa Cruz, with 61 from the U.S., 17 from Argentina, and ten from Paraguay arriving one after another. The team undertook to provide free clinics and distributions a distance away, working in collaboration with the local Chinese community. "We took an over-ten-hour flight and then a four-hour bus ride," Kang recalled as the team arrived at a hospital in the small town of Mairana on August 10 after a long and bumpy ride over the mountains to reach it. What they discovered at the healthcare facility were appalling working conditions.



On April 26, 2007, the Tzu Chi disaster assessment team surveys flood damage in Bolivia.  
Photo/Xinhua Zhuang



**The conditions were about 20 to 30 years behind Taiwan. The equipment and facilities were all primitive, and there was only one worn-out delivery table while the operating room was also very shabby. There was a power outage on the day of surgery, so the nurse had to hold a flashlight in one hand and pass instruments to the doctor with the other; the operation was completed with great difficulty.**



**Wendy Kang**  
*Senior TIMA Nurse*

Despite such challenging conditions, the Tzu Chi medical team conducted a large-scale free clinic over three consecutive days, providing dental, ophthalmology, surgery, acupuncture, family medicine, orthopedic, pediatric, and pharmacy services to more than 5,000 people.

Sonia Vincenti, wife of the then Santa Cruz Department Governor, strongly supported the free clinic and encouraged local doctors to exchange ideas and learn from the group of medical professionals that had come there from different countries. Fifty doctors participated in the event. “We’re grateful to the Tzu Chi volunteers who came from all over the world to organize free clinics for the disaster survivors and to teach local doctors how to care for the local population in ways that give people access to medical services they can rely on.”

## **Thirty-Three Surgeries**

Later that year, in November 2007, heavy rain across months once again hit Bolivia, a disaster that would affect over 123,000 households by mid-April 2008. Considering that the situation was grave and prolonged, 35 Tzu Chi volunteers from the United States, Paraguay, and Argentina

formed a disaster survey team, which arrived in Santa Cruz de la Sierra on February 24. After they assessed needs, the team collaborated with local volunteers and jointly held free clinics and aid distributions.

Tzu Chi partnered with Hospital Municipal Francés in Santa Cruz de la Sierra for the free clinics. The hospital, constructed with funding from the French government, had opened in October 2006, yet it had a shortage of medical equipment and health-care professionals due to insufficient financing. Tzu Chi’s professional medical team brought sophisticated experience and expertise that would benefit the local community.

“At the time, the hospital director told me that there were many local gallbladder patients who didn’t have access to treatment, and he hoped that we could work together to provide them with the required surgery,” Dr. Peter Chen, a TIMA physician, recounted. Chen and the hospital’s doctors operated on 33 hernia and gallbladder patients in three days, solving a problem that had plagued them for years.

**Every one of them had a gallbladder that was an adhesive mess. The patients had been sick for a long time without any treatment, and the illness kept recurring, which would cause adhesion, so they were stuck in a vicious cycle.**



**Peter Chen**  
*TIMA Physician*

During the free clinic, the doctors encountered complex cases. Jastina, a 50-year-old woman, had a hernia caused by her intestines penetrating her abdominal muscles, and there was a massive lipoma on her belly, which made her almost incapable of taking care of herself. Fortunately, Dr. Chen was capable and ready to tackle the surgical treatment required.



"I operated with the hospital's chief of surgery. We peeled away the intestinal adhesion slowly. If we had not been careful in doing so, and if the small intestine had ruptured the surgery would have failed," said Dr. Chen. Fortunately, he had brought his own artificial peritoneal belt from the United States. After a two-and-a-half-hour operation, Chen successfully returned Jastina to health. "This was an exceptional surgery, seldom done in the U.S.; it was the second time I'd done it, and it was a big gamble," he shared.

## Building a Medical Force Together

Tzu Chi's collaboration with Hospital Municipal Francés (HMF) allowed its doctors to recognize senior TIMA physicians' excellent medical skills and heartfelt patient care, which motivated them to learn. On September 10, 2008, Tzu Chi University in Taiwan officially inaugurated its Medical Simulation Center. Subsequently, Dr. Chen took an HMF team comprising Director Fernando Lacoa Mendoza, four surgeons, and an anesthesiologist to Taiwan to participate in a six-day simulation surgery training program.

In addition to refining their medical skills, the Bolivian doctors also experienced a baptism of compassionate humanity during the practicum since whole-body donations to the medical school for use in anatomy classes and surgery training made this program possible. At the end of the session, the Bolivian team gathered in the wind and rain with the families of the body donors and TIMA members to pay their respects in a final ceremony for the noble donors.

Looking back at the experience, Jerjes Torrico Azurduy, then Chief Physician of HMF's Surgical Department, said, "Through Tzu Chi, I've learned not only medical skills, but also the respect for body donors, and I'm deeply touched by the Tzu Chi volunteers' treatment of them as if they were family members."

During the trip, the Bolivian doctors also participated in TIMA's 10th Anniversary Annual Meeting and felt the Association's love. HMF Director Mendoza expressed his wish to establish TIMA in Bolivia: "We will do our best to help those in need in our workplace. We will also combine our efforts with those of TIMA in Argentina and Paraguay to reach out and help those suffering."



On September 14, 2008, Bolivian doctors practice endoscopic minimally invasive surgery at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, as Dr. Peter Chen (left), from the U.S., carefully demonstrates minimally invasive gastrointestinal surgery. Photo/Yizhong Ruan

## South American Countries Support Each Other

As Tzu Chi USA volunteers sowed seeds across borders, Tzu Chi's spirit and compassion began to take root in South America. When disaster strikes on this continent, Tzu Chi volunteers from many South American countries will support each other and work together, creating ripples of goodness through the example of their good deeds.

In 2016, when an earthquake struck Ecuador, Mingming Tsai, a Traditional Chinese Medicine doctor from Bolivia, joined efforts to provide medical assistance to disaster survivors in Ecuador. In 2019, when the

Amazon Rainforest fires spread to Bolivia, a group of 16 people, including Dr. Zhongcheng Gao, a TIMA doctor from Argentina, traveled to the city of Concepción and other places in Bolivia for free clinic activities to relieve firefighters' fatigue and pain with acupuncture and other treatments.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the globe in 2020, Tzu Chi volunteers in Bolivia donated medical supplies such as respirators and masks to hospitals in Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Montero. On December 23 that year, Tzu Chi Taiwan donated 40,000 COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test kits, jointly developed by Tzu Chi University, Taipei Tzu





Chi Hospital, and Academia Sinica, to assist Bolivia in controlling the pandemic.

Tzu Chi's love persists in Bolivia as time passes, evidenced by its activities, from emergency relief to medical care to charity. Volunteers will organize aid distributions periodically to provide food and daily necessities and help disadvantaged families overcome their challenges. Collectively, Tzu Chi volunteers strive to be like a giant pair of helping hands, ever ready to provide assistance and support in times of need.

**We hope that the physical actions of Tzu Chi volunteers will not only provide substantive help to the Bolivian people but also let them come into contact with a warm heart and a pair of warm hands so that they can become their spiritual harbor.**

“

**Wendy Kang**  
Senior TIMA Nurse 🌿



On December 31, 2020, Tzu Chi volunteers distribute relief supplies in Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Bolivia, as the country was in an economic recession due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact. Photo/ Zhenxiang Xie



## SECTION 3—Ecuador

Written by Audrey Cheng, Peter Chu, Scarlett Liu, and Tina Tuan  
Translated by H.B. Qin



Tzu Chi International Medical Association's healthcare professionals and volunteers hold a free clinic in the San Mateo neighborhood of Manta, Ecuador, on July 15, 2019. *Photo/Peter Chu*

Once upon a time, it was calm and tranquil in Canoa, a small coastal town in Manabi Province, Ecuador, where a tropical climate with minimal variation between seasons offered consistently warm temperatures. The town's residents enjoyed picturesque views that seemed to be everlasting, with endless beaches and ocean, large trees in front of every house, and hammocks hanging wherever there was shade.

The people would express their lethargy in the often humid heat by swinging in the hammocks; when thirsty, they would climb the trees to pick coconuts. The orchards

growing on fertile soil always yielded bountiful harvests; gains from fishing were always ample, too. At the same time, continually visiting tourists brought business and profit to hotels and local produce shops. Gradually, the people forgot what sorrow was.

But then, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake on April 16, 2016, shattered their pleasant reverie and destroyed their homes. As they rolled from their hammocks to the ground in a panic, and before they knew it, even La Parroquia San Andrés, Canoa's beloved Catholic church and a landmark in the town, collapsed to the ground in rubble





On April 29, 2016, Tzu Chi USA's disaster relief team assesses damages in Canoa, one of the coastal cities hardest hit by the 7.8-magnitude earthquake that struck Ecuador on April 16. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters*



Tzu Chi volunteers see countless collapsed and severely damaged houses during their disaster assessment following the 2016 earthquake in Ecuador. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters*

amidst the people's cries of horror. The sound of heartbreak seemed to emanate from its broken walls and ruins.

### Rebuilding Homes Amid Ruins

As updates on the situation in Ecuador after the earthquake spread, Tzu Chi USA formed a nine-member disaster assessment team led by Tzu Chi volunteer Martin Kuo. The team traveled to five of Ecuador's hardest-hit cities: Manta, Portoviejo, Pedernales, Canoa, and Jama.

During the assessment, Tzu Chi volunteers met Jenyffer Ruiz, who was born in Ecuador

but had lived in the United States for over 20 years. While away from her homeland, she longed to return to help her people someday and finally did when she returned to Ecuador in 2015 to pursue what she felt would be a more fulfilling life.

Seeing Kuo leading the disaster assessment team, everyone traveling and working tirelessly, moved Ruiz. Thus, she joined the disaster assessment team, and since she is fluent in English and Spanish, she assisted as an interpreter, closely bonding with Tzu Chi during the mission that lasted over a month.



**As an Ecuadorian, it's my duty to help my country and fellow countrymen. But for Tzu Chi to come from afar to help us was so touching that words cannot describe it. Tzu Chi doesn't owe us anything, but they took on the duty and came.**

**Jennyffer Ruiz**

*Tzu Chi Ecuador Volunteer*



Accompanied by Ruiz and aiming to provide practical aid to disaster-stricken Ecuadorians, Tzu Chi volunteers proceeded with courage, determination, and creativity. Tzu Chi launched a Cash-For-Relief program during the earthquake relief mission in 2016 and a flooding relief mission in 2017. The initiative paid the survivors in several cities wages higher than the local average to participate in reconstruction, gathering people's strength while motivating them to take action to overcome their pain. Hundreds of people joined the program. Tzu Chi, a foreign organization that had brought selfless help and support, warmed the disaster survivors' hearts, inspiring their participation in recovery work while providing immediate assistance.

On September 17, 2017, Mexico, 2,400 miles from Ecuador, was hit by a massive earthquake that severely impacted several cities. Tzu Chi Taiwan invited Ruiz to participate in the Foundation's disaster relief efforts there. Seeing that a team of doctors of different specialties was providing free medical care alongside Tzu Chi's aid distributions, offering professional medical treatment to earthquake survivors in Mexico, Ruiz immediately thought of the post-earthquake healthcare needs in her homeland.

Ruiz took the initiative to talk to Kuo, saying, "You know the situation in Ecuador best, and an earthquake struck Ecuador before



Tzu Chi starts a Cash-For-Relief program in Canoa, motivating the earthquake survivors to clean up their homes, streets, and community. Photo by Jennyffer Ruiz



On January 9, 2019, Tzu Chi's medical team sets foot on Ecuadorian soil. Volunteers greet medical volunteers arriving from the United States.

Mexico, so why did Tzu Chi offer free clinics in Mexico but not Ecuador? The people of Ecuador are also in great need!" Agreeing, Kuo and Ruiz approached William Keh, then-CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, to ask for help for Ecuador. Keh and Kuo then discussed the feasibility of a medical mission in Ecuador and the human resources required and began preparations for free clinics there.





those impacted by the  
Photo/Peter Lin



Jennyffer Ruiz (second left) acts as an interpreter and accompanies the Tzu Chi team led by Martin Kuo (right) throughout its relief activities in Ecuador. Photo/Gina Shih



rian soil. Jennyffer Ruiz (third left) and local Ecuadorian  
ates. Photo/Luca Yeh

## Launching a Medical Mission in Ecuador

In January 2019, the Tzu Chi medical team traveled to Ecuador, answering the country's call for free clinics. From January 10 to 16, the team held seven clinics whose services reached Canoa, Portoviejo, Santa Ana, and Guayaquil. With the U.S. team bringing medical resources and Ecuador

providing additional human resources, the free clinics proceeded smoothly and served 3,842 patients.

When Martin Kuo first set foot on Ecuadorian soil with Tzu Chi's medical team, he felt greatly relieved. "We first came here in 2016 after the earthquake and then after the floods. We realized that people really needed medical care, so I started coordinating with all the doctors and then made all the necessary arrangements. Today, free clinics finally came into being," he recounted with gratitude for the outcome.

The journey to this milestone was long and challenging. The dental equipment was difficult to transport due to its size, weight, and the delicacy of precise elements and tools. Despite that, Dr. Shirley Chen, a Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) dentist from Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters, led the team and supervised the transport of the equipment across the ocean to Ecuador.

Meanwhile, Jennyffer Ruiz was responsible for recruiting local dentists and dental students to join the clinics. "Twelve doctors from the U.S. came to work with the local doctors we recruited to provide services to local communities," she recounted.

I see this as a great opportunity to use my dental skills and services to help those in need.



**Gabriela Duchely**  
Ecuadorian Dentist

In addition to dental treatment, the free clinics also spared no effort in promoting oral hygiene education among the local population. Dr. Chen saw that many children had cavities: “Education on oral hygiene of deciduous teeth is critical. We tried to bring knowledge in this field to the people.” This opinion was in line with Dr. Tungping Cheung’s thinking. “Prevention is more important than treatment, and our long-term assistance to local health care should focus on healthcare education,” he explained.

The team’s consensus was that if Tzu Chi could popularize healthcare knowledge and encourage the adoption of a healthy lifestyle, Ecuadorians could become increasingly free from pain and suffering, which is also the ultimate goal of Tzu Chi’s international medical missions.

## Bringing Heavenly Dew to a Parched Healthcare Desert

A team of Tzu Chi volunteers went to Canoa in 2017 to start a long-term charity program involving the reconstruction of La Parroquia San Andrés, the Catholic church of the order of Hermanas Franciscanas Misioneras de Maria Auxiliadora (Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians), which was a cherished gathering point in town. Two years later, on July 13, 2019, La Parroquia San Andrés was already bustling with joyful activity before dawn, as the community had gathered there for a significant event – a reopening ceremony. Tzu Chi had fulfilled its promise



Despite rudimentary conditions, Tzu Chi USA’s medical team collaborates with local healthcare professionals to attend to patients during a free clinic in Portoviejo on January 12, 2019. Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation



Tzu Chi volunteers start the free clinic in Santa Ana on January 14, 2019, by leading care recipients and local healthcare volunteers in song to spread Tzu Chi’s humanistic spirit rooted in love and care for all. Photo/Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation





The Canoa community attends a re-opening ceremony on July 13, 2019, for La Parroquia San Andrés, a Catholic church damaged by the 2016 earthquake, which Tzu Chi rebuilt as part of its short- to long-term aid.  
*Photo/Peter Chu*

to rebuild the church and also offered a second free clinic service as part of the special occasion, benefiting Canoa residents with medical care yet again.

TIMA doctors and volunteers from the United States and other places, together with local doctors and volunteers, organized this large-scale free clinic event that lasted two consecutive days, July 13 and 14. After the free clinic in Canoa, the team went to the city of Manta and served the residents of the San Mateo neighborhood on July 15 and 16.

There is only one pharmacy and hospital in San Mateo, which only treats minor illnesses. Due to the many people seeking care, patients often fail to get an appointment when they try to register. Those suffering from colds resort to buying medication at their discretion. In the case of major issues,

they must take a bus to the big city to seek medical treatment, where the charge is \$20 for each visit. More complicated health problems can only be addressed in bigger cities even farther away, while the quickest wait for a referral can take two to three months. Essentially, limited access to proper and timely medical care is another disaster here.

Understandably, over 500 people from San Mateo, which has a population of only 5,500, had already lined up before 7:00 AM to wait for Tzu Chi's free clinic to begin. In this small community, where just having enough to eat can be difficult, most residents are hard-working fishers with meager incomes. The free clinic services provided by Tzu Chi were like a refreshing dew from heaven in a healthcare desert.



When Tzu Chi's medical team holds a free clinic in Manta's San Mateo neighborhood on July 15, 2019, people pack the entrance area to the venue, waiting to get in. *Photo/Peter Chu*



Many young mothers come to the free clinic with their sick babies, breastfeeding them as they wait to be seen by a doctor. *Photo/Peter Chu*



A child eats a meager lunch at the free clinic, which reveals San Mateo's underdeveloped economy and its impact on families. *Photo/Peter Chu*

## Oriental Medicine That Saves Lives

The free clinic in San Mateo aimed to treat local people without medical insurance to relieve their physical ailments. Residents who had worked hard for too many years without access to medical care wanted to take advantage of this opportunity.

Domingo Quagga, a 69-year-old fisherman, had been fishing for 50 years until he became ill and quit. During his fishing career, Quagga supported his family of four with a meager average income of \$5 a day. Moreover, there were times when there was no gain, as the family's livelihood depended

on the weather. "My meager income is only enough to buy rice, and fish is the constant dish on the dinner table," Quagga bemoaned.

The now-retired fisherman suffered from chronic illnesses. Due to long hours of soaking his hands in cold seawater and carrying heavy gear and catches on his shoulders, Quagga had endured physical pain for years. When he heard that Tzu Chi was to provide free acupuncture, a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) treatment from the East, he hoped that a single needle would be effective and improve his ailments. And the TCM treatment did help, indeed.



**My knee has been in pain for years, so the Chinese medicine practitioner stuck a needle in my knee, and the pain was relieved right away.**

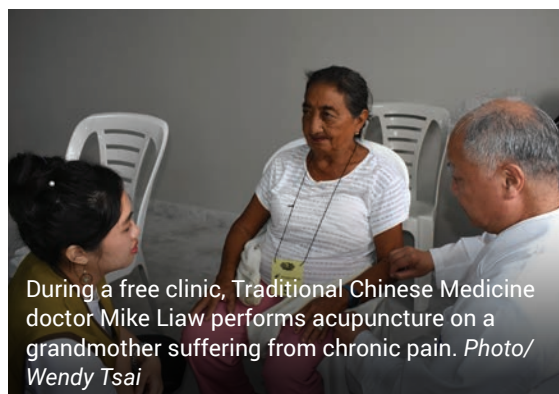


**Domingo Quagga**  
*Free Clinic Patient*

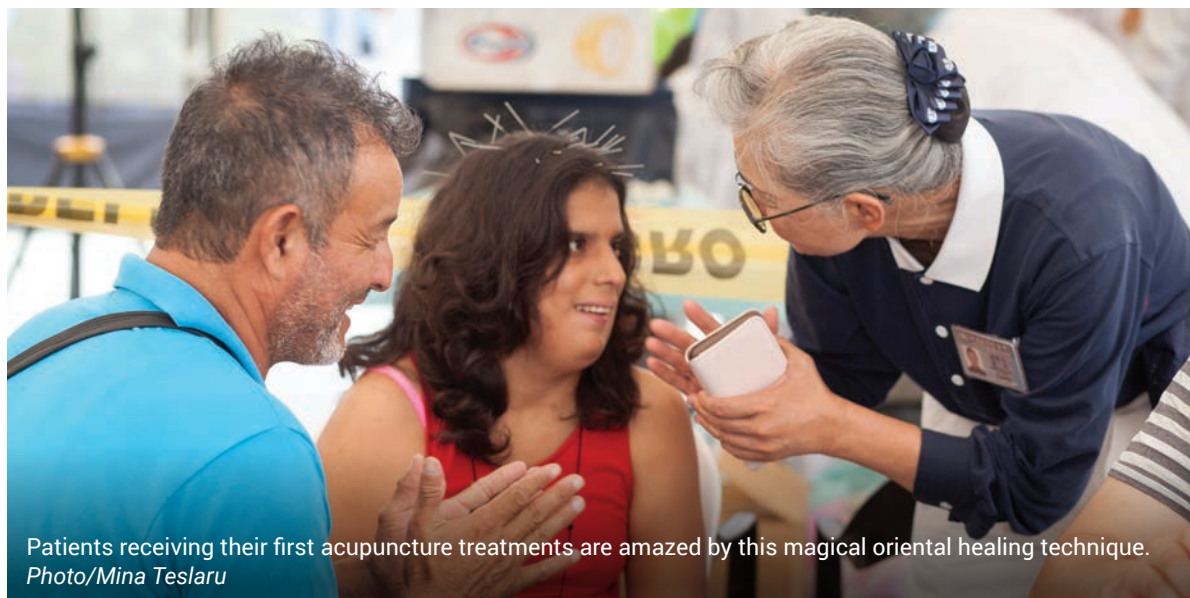
The TCM doctor who treated him was also warmed and touched when seeing Domingo Quagga's smile as his pain subsided. The San Mateo free clinic reached a successful conclusion with the cooperation of a team of about 60 Tzu Chi volunteers and hundreds of local Ecuadorian volunteers. A total of 5,410 patients benefited from the four-day free clinic event.

During the free clinics in Ecuador in 2019, William Keh called on local healthcare professionals to establish a TIMA chapter, encouraging them to care for the local population's health and share medical knowledge with the public. As for the people who had benefited and received medical attention, some clasped the hands of Tzu Chi volunteers with tears in their eyes, repeatedly thanking them for their care and company along the way.

Ecuadorians had witnessed and felt Tzu Chi's love, which motivated many to join Tzu Chi's activities as community volunteers in their cities of residence. They supported rebuilding efforts after disasters and helped ease their fellows' suffering with caring hearts. When returning to Ecuador next time, Tzu Chi hopes to see more beautiful fruits of kindness from sowing the seeds of good deeds through free clinics, with everyone spreading care and compassion together. 🌱



During a free clinic, Traditional Chinese Medicine doctor Mike Liaw performs acupuncture on a grandmother suffering from chronic pain. Photo/Wendy Tsai



Patients receiving their first acupuncture treatments are amazed by this magical oriental healing technique. Photo/Mina Teslaru



## SECTION 4—Dominican Republic

Written by Mariana Ju

Edited by Shuli Lo

Translated by Ariel Chan



In the aftermath of a hurricane, Tzu Chi travels to the Dominican Republic, bringing medical care, educational services, and hope to the children of La Romana. *Photo/Mariana Ju*

**L**ocated on the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the north. With a population of approximately 11.4 million people in 2024, the country is the second-largest nation in the Antilles.

With its vibrant coastal vista and direct flights from many European and American

regions to the vacation hub in the east, it's no surprise the Dominican Republic is a favored destination for holidaymakers. Nonetheless, Tzu Chi volunteers and Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) members visited the country not for its scenic beauty but to provide essential aid to disadvantaged communities.



Although the local tourism industry is thriving, the wealth gap is severe. Nearly half of the population lives below the poverty line, and long-term hardships, such as crime and drug-related concerns, affect economic growth in the Dominican Republic.

On September 20, 1998, Hurricane Georges wreaked havoc on the Dominican Republic. After receiving the news, Tzu Chi mobilized volunteers from Taiwan and the United States to conduct disaster assessments in October and November. Accompanied by compassionate Taiwanese businessmen and embassy secretaries, they visited San Juan de la Maguana, Polo, La Romana, and other areas to understand the situation. Soon after, Tzu Chi launched assistance for Polo and La Romana residents. Since there were no other relief organizations in these areas at the time, and due to their border location and limited resources, the disaster survivors urgently needed help.

From December 1998 to February 1999, Tzu Chi's Argentinian volunteers carried out two large-scale relief and medical service events in the Dominican Republic,

delivering supplies to over 2,500 affected households, and providing more than 2,100 medical services. During this period, many Taiwanese business people and Chinese volunteers from overseas joined the relief efforts. On February 26, 1999, Tzu Chi established its first home in the Caribbean as the Tzu Chi Dominican Republic Service Center.

## Joining Hands After Disaster Strikes

Tzu Chi's long-term care commenced with emergency relief. With the aid of Taiwanese businesswoman Susana Yang, a disaster assessment team composed of New Jersey volunteers, including Debbie Chen, entered Villa Hermosa, a town in the Dominican Republic's La Romana Province. At that time, much of the community consisted of Haitian immigrants living under extreme poverty. A "rubbish mountain" in the community became an essential source of life for nearby residents, who scavenged for food in the heap.



On February 27-28, 1999, Tzu Chi volunteers from the United States and Argentina form a relief team to visit disaster-affected households in San Juan de la Maguana, Polo, and La Romana. Photo/Wangqing Xi



“Many people here have never seen a doctor because medications are expensive,” said Chen. Local Haitians in the Dominican Republic were forced to endure sickness due to poverty, did not have government identity or jobs, and struggled to obtain other necessities. “We saw many local residents who needed medical attention, so while providing aid, we also wanted to offer medical services to help alleviate their suffering,” Chen explained. Since then, TIMA’s clinic team has expanded its reach in the Dominican Republic, starting in La Romana and gradually extending to different provinces in the Dominican Republic. Volunteers collaborated with local doctors in various fields to conduct medical outreach in areas with the highest medical needs, averaging hundreds of visitors each time.

In addition to medical care, Tzu Chi also brought academic resources to the local community. In 2000, a Tzu Chi School was completed and inaugurated, reinvigorating the community and empowering its youths. Over the years, whether it’s families in the local community or the parents and students of the Tzu Chi School in La Romana, all are welcome to Tzu Chi’s medical care.

**Tzu Chi built a school in the local area, not only helping the local children attain an education, but also useful skills, turning their difficult lives around and letting them embrace a hopeful future.**

*Debbie Chen*  
Tzu Chi Volunteer



## A Young Girl in Need of Help

Ariana, a student at the Tzu Chi School, is not yet ten years old but was experiencing a great deal of stomach and leg swelling. After a joint consultation by TIMA and a



Ariana, a young Tzu Chi School student experiencing leg and stomach swelling.  
Photo/Mariana Ju

local pediatrician, Dr. Richardson, it was determined that Ariana was experiencing kidney problems. Therefore, they referred her to a public pediatric hospital served by Richardson.

Volunteer Rosa Chang accompanied Ariana, traveling from La Romana in the east to the capital’s pediatric hospital. Ariana, who never had her blood drawn before, was both concerned and nervous. Chang held





tomach swelling, receives a medical examination.



Volunteer Rosa Chang comforts Ariana as she receives her first blood test. *Photo/Mariana Ju*



Ariana's swelling eases following her treatment, and she shares a smile with volunteers. *Photo/Mariana Ju*

her small hand and spoke to her, trying to keep the little girl's spirit high and ease her dread of needles.

During the days Ariana stayed in the hospital, in addition to receiving attentive care from medical staff, Tzu Chi volunteers took turns visiting her to understand and stay updated on her situation. On the day of Ariana's discharge, friends assisted in bringing the mother

and daughter pair home to help relieve their fatigue from traveling.

After treatment, Ariana's health had finally improved; she completed her elementary school education, and although she eventually moved away from La Romana, the love she felt from Tzu Chi remained deep in her heart.



## Healing Every Tooth

Taiwanese dentist Dr. Silverio Hsu has been a steadfast presence in the Dominican Republic since the beginning of Tzu Chi's care locally. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tzu Chi's large-scale dental care missions here came to a halt. Yet, with the help of dental equipment brought by TIMA, Dr. Hsu has regularly offered dental services at the La Romana Tzu Chi School since 2019, taking care of the oral hygiene of Tzu Chi School students.

**The children at the Tzu Chi School in La Romana didn't dare to laugh in front of us; it turned out they'd all lost their teeth.**



**Debbie Chen**  
*Tzu Chi Volunteer*

Ruth, a 12-year-old student, had never seen a dentist. Debbie Chen considers the Dominican Republic her second home and is deeply aware of local needs. She explained that this is a common situation for children like Ruth from more remote areas of the country.

On September 29, 2019, Ruth came with her mother to seek dental treatment. Dr. Hsu and Dr. Angela Sun examined and treated her as a team. "Her teeth couldn't be extracted because effective anesthesia wouldn't have been able to be achieved. She had already received three injections of anesthesia," said Dr. Hsu, who'd found that Ruth's tooth decay was severe. One tooth also couldn't be pulled out because the root was broken. During the treatment, Ruth shouted in distress in the examination room, and her parents' hearts were



Dr. Angela Sun explains the examination and treatment process to a young patient named Ruth, and endeavors to assuage her worries. *Photo/Mariana Ju*



all but shattered. Her mother could only raise her hands in prayer outside the classroom, hoping God would help ease her daughter's pain.

After the exam, the dentists invited a teacher to accompany them to a dental clinic in La Romana with more comprehensive facilities for oral surgery. With the support of Tzu Chi, Ruth finally revealed her smile and healthy teeth free of pain, and the weight in the hearts of the doctors and volunteers finally lifted. "Now, when they smile, the feeling is truly different," shared Debbie Chen. Seeing the smiles on the children's faces, Chen also beamed brightly, saying, "Being able to participate in this activity and take care of patients, I feel very proud and honored. I hope that besides caring for Tzu Chi's children, we can also take care of their families."

With time, the global health crisis slowly eased due to the availability of COVID-19 vaccinations. As the situation became more stable, Tzu Chi's dental treatments resumed in March 2023, and these footprints of relief reached even further. Today, dental outreach is no longer limited to students at the La Romana Tzu Chi School, but has expanded to serve surrounding communities. Volunteers also promote environmental protection programs in Los Ríos and Santo Domingo, distribute supplies in Monte Plata, and spread Tzu Chi's kindness in other disadvantaged communities.

From 1998 to 2023, Tzu Chi's love has never diminished. The seeds of great love have been cultivated widely across the Dominican Republic. Indeed, once seeds of compassion are nourished into trees, they will provide a protective canopy for all to seek comfort. 🌿



Ruth's mother raises her hands in prayer outside the classroom, hoping God will help ease her daughter's pain. *Photo/Mariana Ju*



## SECTION 5—Honduras

Written by Audrey Cheng and Shuli Lo  
Translated by Ariel Chan

Longstanding structural issues in the spheres of education, health care, wealth inequality, and more pose significant challenges for the people of Honduras. Political upheavals, including a 2009 coup, weakened human rights protections, and as indicated by data from the World Bank Group, the population of Hondurans living in poverty reached a staggering 57.7% in 2020.

“Between 2001 and 2005, Tzu Chi volunteers visited several times, and while I hosted them, I felt their sincerity,” said Jorge Chang, a local water resources expert with a calm, open-minded demeanor. Moved once more by Tzu Chi volunteers’ compassion after the Foundation’s 2011 flood relief in Tegucigalpa, the nation’s capital, Chang

began collaborating with Tzu Chi’s support team led by Martin Kuo. Together, they handled transportation, distribution, and long-term care — eventually planting the first seed of Tzu Chi’s relief in Tegucigalpa.

### Recognizing the Needs of the People

As charity work expanded in the region, Tzu Chi volunteers discovered that Tegucigalpa’s hygienic conditions and a shortage of daily necessities must be addressed. Most rural areas in the region lacked clean tap water, and people stored water in various containers. With inadequate sanitary essentials, mosquitoes and diseases thrived, leading to annual outbreaks of infectious



In 2017, Tzu Chi International Medical Association members from the United States conduct medical consultations in Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras. Photo/Audrey Cheng



diseases such as dengue fever. Following the devastation brought by Hurricane Mitch in 1998, additional natural disasters struck. In 2020, Honduras underwent its most active hurricane season in recorded history, battered by 30 storms, and hit by hurricanes Eta and Iota within a two-week span. This cascade of challenges has hindered efforts for growth and recovery in Honduras, allowing little opportunity to recover fully.

While residents in Tegucigalpa may have government health insurance, not everyone can afford the premiums. Uninsured patients visiting public hospitals must pay a consultation fee of \$35. However, this cost is a significant amount for people who are medically uninsured and financially disadvantaged.

“I found that the disadvantaged people here don’t have the privilege to seek medical treatment, so Tzu Chi should hold medical consultations here,” explained Chang, who resides in Tegucigalpa. “I proposed this idea to Tzu Chi International Medical Association, hoping to collaborate and organize medical consultations in Tegucigalpa.”

Through the introduction of Martin Kuo, Chang met William Keh, the Executive Director of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation at the time. The two became fast friends, and Tzu Chi’s medical resources were brought in. With support from Tzu Chi’s global headquarters in Hualien, Taiwan, from 2012 to 2013, a Tzu Chi community medical center was established in Marcovia. On March 15, 2015, Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) physicians and volunteers came to Marcovia for Tzu Chi’s first medical consultations, providing fundamental medical services to community members alongside 29 local doctors.

The overwhelming medical demand exceeded expectations, and physicians had to adapt to unexpected cases during the event. “It was a bit chaotic on-site. Even though it was our first medical consultation service in Tegucigalpa – not only for us but also for the local doctors and all our volunteers – I think we did quite well,” shared Dr. Stephen Deng, who oversaw the distribution of necessary medications.

Thanks to the seamless cooperation of local doctors, volunteers, and the Tzu Chi



In October 2015, the Zika virus grips Honduras, and in March 2016, Tzu Chi volunteers distribute mosquito nets to help prevent insect bites. Photo/Tzu Chi Honduras Service Center



team, the two-day medical event, serving over 1,000 patients, was a wonderful success. "All the volunteers collaborated very well," shared Steven Voon, Executive Vice President of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation. "What I'm most grateful for is the compassion of the Tegucigalpa volunteers. They really want to learn, want to help, and sincerely want to assist their fellow countrymen," he said.

**As a doctor, participating in Tzu Chi's medical consultations is a great opportunity to care for children, adults, and seniors by providing medical advice and treatment for vulnerable groups. Collaborating with Tzu Chi can bring better services to patients.**



*Local Physician  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras*

## More Than Medical Consultations

In Choluteca, Honduras, a worn-down house stands on bare, yellow soil. Alba Luz Antonia Ordonez and her young granddaughter live in this home together, where Alba uses a makeshift stone stove to heat water for her granddaughter in an attempt to alleviate a persistent cough.

Alba's voice was filled with pain as she related her situation to Tzu Chi volunteers, expressing, "My granddaughter has Down syndrome. She is a special girl who needs special care, but our life is already very difficult. Because I have to provide her with nutritious food, I barely make ends meet by selling things outside. It's really not easy for me."

Despite her grandmother's dedication, the little girl was very thin and frail. Alba couldn't help but shed tears as she confided, "I need someone to help for a long time to take care of her."



During the free clinic, volunteer Jorge Chang interacts with visitors, his caring personality helping to meet patients' needs while they await treatment. Photo/Audrey Cheng

**I cry and pray to God, hoping that He can open a door for us, or a window. I often cry. God knows I am waiting for God to show us a way out.**



*Alba Luz Antonia Ordonez  
Choluteca, Honduras*

"When I think about that grandmother and her granddaughter, I feel very sad," said a local doctor in Honduras. "They don't have the ability to buy medicine, and they can't get the medical assistance they need, so their health and situation can't improve," he added. In Honduras, countless people suffer from long-term illnesses and are unable to improve their health due to poverty. Having gained a deeper understanding of the situation, Tzu Chi volunteers realized that one or two medical consultations could not fully meet their medical needs. They needed long-term care and assistance, thus strengthening Tzu Chi's determination to establish a TIMA chapter in Honduras.

## Nourishing Life Like Spring Rain

"For this medical consultation, we had the participation of 29 local doctors, in addition to a fantastic group of volunteers, and, of course, we had medications. With these three indispensable elements, I sincerely hope to establish





In 2018, Tzu Chi's TIMA chapter in Honduras conducts medical consultations and check-ups in Tegucigalpa. Photo/Tzu Chi Honduras Service Center

TIMA in Honduras because the people here really need it,” said Dr. Stephen Denq, whose confidence in establishing a local TIMA chapter grew after this first medical service event. “I hope that after choosing a suitable location, doctors can come back every three months for medical consultations to continue providing services to local residents,” Denq concluded.

**Medical volunteerism can develop in Honduras because they have a group of doctors who are very willing to help. At the same time, they also have a group of local volunteers who are very willing to learn how to assist these doctors in providing medical consultation services. I believe that in the future, we will have more medical consultations in Honduras.**

**Steven Voon**

*Executive Vice President*

*Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation*



William Keh has visited Honduras several times, working tirelessly to lift up local medical care. “The times I have come to Honduras were mainly for interacting with local volunteers, sharing, conducting medical consultations, and evaluating the feasibility of establishing a medical consultation center,” he said. With the assistance of Jorge Chang, Tzu Chi began volunteer training in Honduras in 2011. In 2016, the

long-awaited TIMA chapter in Honduras was established. From then on, Tzu Chi was empowered to lead local medical personnel in organizing more consultations, marking another milestone for Tzu Chi’s medical mission in Honduras.

Over the years, Tzu Chi members in Honduras gradually extended the reach of their local charity work. In addition to supply distributions, they prepared nutritious meals to raise awareness of vegetarian alternatives, encouraged the community to engage in environmental cleanups locally, and initiated medical and charitable home visits. Tzu Chi volunteers also soon discovered more families in need through free medical outreach events. After obtaining approval from physicians, they started small-scale medical consultation events in six communities on a rotating schedule beginning in June 2021, providing medical services regularly and diligently.

Tzu Chi’s team in Honduras is continuously growing and developing, and by working hand-in-hand with the local community, these efforts can go even further for those in need. Whether inside or outside Honduras, Tzu Chi members are dedicated to this nation and its people, and volunteers hope to continue cultivating good health and great love wherever the path leads. 🌿



## SECTION 6—Haiti

Written by Jiali Liu, Gina Shih, and Townen Tseng

Translated by H.B. Qin



On February 9, 2010, Tzu Chi begins offering free clinic services in Croix-des-Missions, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Pictured are TIMA member Dr. Mathew Lin (right) and local community residents at the event. *Photo/Chiali Tsai*

**L**ocated on the western three-eighths of the island of Hispaniola, Haiti is the third largest and most populous country in the Caribbean. The beauty of this nation is often overshadowed, however, by overwhelming gang violence that has created a humanitarian crisis, in addition to worsening socioeconomic conditions that have gripped the people of Haiti for years.

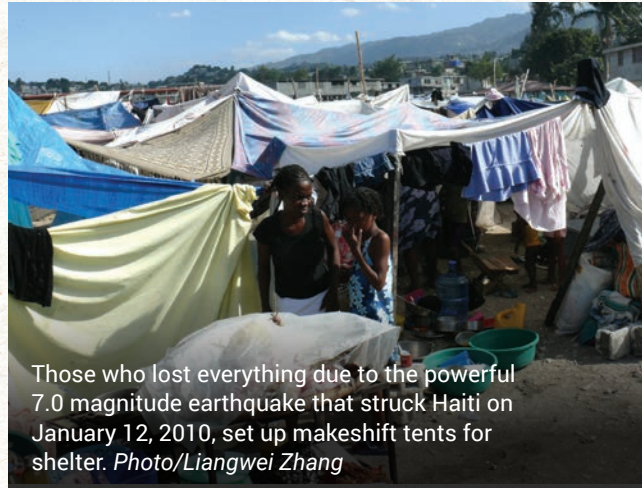
### Launching a Mission for Medical Relief

On January 12, 2010, a powerful magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti, destroying roads and homes. With its epicenter near Léogâne, the earthquake's destruction also impacted Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, where landmark buildings such as the Presidential Palace were severely damaged. An estimated three million people were





On January 18, 2010, a Tzu Chi disaster assessment team travels to the hard-hit area of Port-au-Prince, and the scenes of destruction before them shock the volunteers to their core. Photo/Jiaxiang Li



Those who lost everything due to the powerful 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010, set up makeshift tents for shelter. Photo/Liangwei Zhang



On January 29, 2010, Tzu Chi's disaster assessment mission proceeds to Pernier Orphanage to distribute supplies. Photo/Liangwei Zhang



Volunteer Qihua Chen brings smiles to children's faces despite their frightening disaster experience. Photo/Jiaxiang Li

affected by this tragedy, with an estimated 250,000 residences and 30,000 commercial buildings having collapsed or incurred severe damages, ultimately contributing to an ongoing cholera epidemic.

Under the guidance of William Keh, the then-CEO of Tzu Chi USA, the relief team overcame challenges and entered the hard-hit area of Port-au-Prince on January 18. Here, the scenes before them shocked the

volunteers to their core. Military helicopters circled in the air; soldiers patrolled with visible weapons; the smell of smoke, waste, and those who had passed away permeated the air. Shattered buildings blocked the streets, and survivors set up makeshift tents out of bed sheets to shelter their families. Volunteers from local charitable organizations cooked a pot of black beans sprinkled with green onion to fill the stomachs of 50 people.





Sweet treats soothe children's worries at the medical service events. *Photo/Shujing Wu*



Tzu Chi medical volunteers attend to a little girl with an amputated limb, the child in need of pain relief treatment. *Photo/Zizheng Liu*



TIMA member Dr. Mingzhe Dong examines patients at a medical outreach event in Haiti. *Photo/Yihua Cheng*



Dr. Mathew Lin of TIMA listens to a patient's heartbeat. *Photo/Chiali Tsai*

**Right now, everyone is sleeping on the streets; a lot of the residents in the epicenter have lost everything and have no shelter, so if we don't help, what's going to happen in a few months?**



**Nicole Muller**  
*Local Volunteer*

Tzu Chi mobilized immediately after hearing the news, preparing supplies, and launching a disaster assessment and relief program. The Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters team in Haiti and the Dominican Republic jointly set up a Disaster Relief Coordination Center and prepared 400,000 items of food, daily necessities, medical supplies, and

other relief supplies. Tzu Chi started its first distribution in Haiti on January 29. Over the next 60 days, a total of 84 distributions were held. The supplies included 110 tons of instant cornstarch, 80 tons of instant rice, 6,000 tents, 40,000 tarpaulins, and more, benefiting nearly 200,000 survivors.

### **The Free Clinic That Lasted Eight Weeks**

The continuous emergency relief that Tzu Chi provided to earthquake survivors offered a glimmer of hope amid such a stressful situation. However, millions of survivors injured in the earthquake were



at risk of losing their lives due to the lack of medical resources and difficulties in accessing timely medical treatment.

**When our medical team arrived there, we set up equipment. We witnessed the suffering of Haitians due to the disaster, and we also saw the destruction caused by the earthquake, which left a big impression on my mind.**



**Roger Tsai**

*TIMA Physical Therapist*

The delivery of medical resources was imminent. Under the guidance of the current Tzu Chi USA CEO and previous Tzu Chi Medical Foundation CEO, Debra Boudreaux, Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) doctors signed up enthusiastically, quickly forming the Tzu Chi Haiti Disaster Relief Free Clinic Mission. The team organized a flight with the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service and flew from the Dominican Republic to Haiti on February 5. Regardless of the fatigue from the flight, the team had their first free clinic on February 6 at the United Nations field hospital. The free medical event treated 118 patients, and offered Western medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), and dentistry services.

The free clinic mission then expanded its footprint to more places to help meet medical care needs. On February 8, Tzu Chi held joint free medical outreach at the United Nations peacekeeping camp, St. Mary's Church, and Overseas Engineering and Construction Company. On February 10, Tzu Chi joined hands with Médecins du Monde for a free dental clinic.

Medical professionals who went to Haiti shared many of the disaster survivors' challenges that stemmed from resource scarcity. Many of what individuals might

consider modern society's conveniences were out of one's grasp in the impacted area. Living in makeshift tents or other temporary housing made of tin, there was no place to sufficiently take cover if it rained or was windy. Securing personal privacy was likewise a concern; the makeshift toilets could only provide a basic covering, and clean water was precious to everyone.

In the medical treatment area, volunteers met women who had suffered miscarriages, children with persisting high fevers, and newborns who were grievously ill. In the face of an increasing number of patients and a shortage of resources, the free clinic mission sought to strengthen Tzu Chi's medical relief efforts by focusing on trauma and pediatrics, bringing medicines for trauma to treat local survivors, and addressing a wide range of injuries and illnesses.

**The U.N.'s medical service camp was like a large field hospital, with thousands of patients crowded into tents waiting to be seen by doctors. There was no such thing as infection control or privacy here, and the large tents filled with stretchers were where the pediatrics department saw children who were suffering from a wide range of infections and injuries.**



**Amy Huang**

*TIMA Physician*

During the free clinic, the medical teams worked from morning until night to treat a wide range of ailments, with real-time consultation by local translators, and more than 200 patients were cared for every day. During the eight-week free medical outreach, TIMA doctors from 13 U.S. states, along with 73 doctors from Canada, the Dominican Republic, and Argentina, came in ten teams from February through April,



providing care to 15,264 patients. At each visit, the doctors placed their hands together and bowed deeply to their patients, grateful to give relief.

Peter Chen and Shirley Chen, then vice presidents of the Medical Foundation, are surgeons and dentists, respectively. They led their teams in providing emergency medical care to the Haitian people, and offered on-site health education. To overcome barriers in language and literacy, the TIMA USA team designed visuals in the medication bag to indicate when each of the medications should be taken, with the rising sun indicating the morning, the full sun indicating high noon, the moon indicating night, and a bed indicating bedtime.

In the face of so much suffering around them – and support from across the globe – medical professional volunteers like Amy Huang always wished they could serve one more patient, communicate with one more volunteer, and take one more photo with those they had met. “Although I can’t describe it all, the free clinic trip to Haiti has cleansed my life,” said Huang. “When I go back to my normal life, I will definitely hold on to the great love that I have realized on this trip.”

## A Solution to Persistent Pain

Tzu Chi’s free clinic mission at the disaster site was to provide Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) treatment; however, cultural and linguistic differences made TCM consultations more challenging than some other disciplines. A TCM doctor with TIMA shared notes that described some of these challenges so that other TCM doctors who provided care in the

future could proceed smoothly. These included guidance for drawing blood and how language or cultural differences may impact how pain is described. For example: “Often, chest pain is described as a stomach ache, and patients with lower back pain often describe the condition as hip pain. Grasping these differences in descriptions, one knows they should not be taken lightly. A diagnosis should only be made after palpation.”

In the tumult of the disaster area, TIMA doctors and nurses frequently adjusted the temporary medical tents to ensure patients could feel as comfortable as possible. And indeed, many survivors left with bright smiles after receiving treatment.

One patient who left a lasting impression on Tzu Chi’s team was 39-year-old Clarelson, who limped into the Tzu Chi free clinic area on crutches, seeking hope to return to everyday life.

Fourteen years of pain and tremors forced Clarelson to give up his job as a trumpet player in a band, and he lost his ability to make a living. Unable to receive help locally, Clarelson entrusted his hope for recovery to TIMA doctors.

As Clarelson stepped into the exam area, he was shivering and sweating from the pain; his clothes were soaked from his exertions. Dr. Mike Liaw, a TCM physician from Northern California, performed the visual, auditory, and olfactory examination and consultation, followed by an acupuncture session. Clarelson’s body calmed down soon after, and his pain eased.

Clarelson visited Tzu Chi’s doctors for the following three days. After the treatment,



he put down his crutches and tentatively stood up straight, walking gingerly at first, then tried trotting and hopping when he didn't experience the pain he had become so accustomed to. Those who saw him and knew his situation cheered and applauded him. He was so delighted to be relieved of the pain he had suffered for so many years that he burst into tears, saying, "I really hope I can return to my normal life." Dr. Liaw patted him on the back, trying to keep his own tears at bay.

**If you have the opportunity to give, seize it in time. Although it is inevitably tiring when you do it, so long as you can grasp the moment and put your heart and soul into it, you can leave an everlasting impact.**



**Mike Liaw**  
*TIMA Physician*

TIMA's TCM practitioners additionally provided treatments to serve frontline relief workers and peacekeeping teams so that they could continue to rescue and care for local survivors.



By the end of the treatment process, Claessom is able to lift his leg up, with others applauding his progress. *Photo/Yanhuang Lin*



Claessom expresses his gratitude to TCM doctor Mike Liaw after acupuncture sessions help relieve his long-endured pain. *Photo/Yanhuang Lin*



## Standing on One's Own

Robinson, a driver for the Tzu Chi relief team, tragically lost his wife in the earthquake. His father lived in the United States. After the disaster, he could have taken his children to the U.S. to take comfort with his family, but he didn't desire sympathy or alms; he wanted to rebuild his life in the place where he lived with his beloved spouse.

Even though long-term upheavals are bound to foster cynicism, many Haitians still hope to regain their footing and earn food and clothing with their own hands.

Therefore, Tzu Chi's Cash-For-Relief program helped the Haitian people stand independently in the aftermath of the disaster, creating jobs that enabled locals to earn the funds they desperately needed to care for their families. Volunteers held discussions with local community leaders and asked them to call upon more people, inspiring local community members to work together to clear streets and homes of rubble. Tzu Chi provided both food and wages, and lifted up optimism for the future.

During the free clinic, TIMA also promoted the Cash-For-Relief program and recruited local doctors to join the free clinic. When Tzu Chi's short-term relief operation ended, these local doctors continued to serve the people at Tzu Chi's free clinic stations. A local medical team organized the first large-scale free medical event in Haiti in March 2013, providing medical services to 600 patients.

In November 2013, a team of 33 local medical professionals and volunteers provided free medical services to 120 students and their parents at the Roussan Camille School in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, offering



After the earthquake, Tzu Chi's Cash-For-Relief approach helps survivors become self-sufficient. Local residents actively participate in the program by taking up tools and preparing to clean their homes.  
*Photo/Lijun Tsai*



Volunteer Bai Zhou (left) leads participants in prayer.  
*Photo/Judy Liao*

Western medicine, dentistry, and psychological counseling. After the free clinic, the medical team found that many patients with serious conditions needed long-term





Tzu Chi's efforts move residents participating in the Cash-For-Relief program to place donations in a bamboo bank. *Photo/Judy Liao*



medical assistance. The team subsequently visited the patients' homes several times from February to March 2014, doing their best to help them regain their health. Since then, Tzu Chi volunteers from the U.S. and Haiti, as well as medical professionals from Port-au-Prince, worked together to hold multiple free clinics until the fall of 2017.

Due to the disruption of social security by local gangs, subsequent medical free clinic services could not be organized out of consideration for the safety of the Tzu Chi medical volunteers. Still, the international disaster relief and free clinic mission touched many locals, who set their hearts on becoming volunteers to pass their love forward. Not only was a Tzu Chi chapter established in Haiti later on, but volunteers also held recurring rice distributions and

organized women's vocational training in disadvantaged areas, activities that continue to this day. In 2021, when a major earthquake occurred in western Haiti, Tzu Chi's relief supplies and family medical kits were delivered to those in need at the disaster's epicenter, and hot food distributions were carried out through local Tzu Chi volunteers in Haiti.

Stayde, a university student who served as a translator during Tzu Chi's 2010 free medical outreach, witnessed the pain and suffering, realized his own life's blessings, and thus shared his thoughts. "I have a healthy body and mind; I must do more for the traumatized people," he told volunteers. "In this way, the spirit of Tzu Chi has spread from one living soul to another, taking root and growing in this land." 🌱