

Written by Wenley Ho
Sat, 28 May 2011



Rushing and dashing, I put on my blue and white, picked up my luggage, and headed straight to the airport. Melbourne, here I come! United Nations, here I am!

The night sky of Melbourne was illuminated by brilliant stars, the atmosphere was charged with a sense of festivity. It was because the 63rd Annual Conference of United Nations Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organizations was being held here from August 30 to September 1. The focus this year was on Advance Global Health. There were 1717 delegates representing 350 Non-Government Organizations (NGO) from 192 countries at the Melbourne Convention Centre for this event. It was an exciting opportunity to meet such a variety of people from different cultures. There was one dressed all in white with a head of silver hair, looking as if the goddess of liberty had stepped down from the sky. Some were so dark that you might accidentally stare at them because all you could see were their eyeballs moving around in their sockets. One was wearing an array of medals, it was said that he was a royalty from an African country. And more than anything, there were professors, doctors and professionals. It was an eye-opener and a humbling experience to be among these great people who came all the way here to discuss ways of, assisting Pakistan, reducing child mortality and preventing the spread of HIV etc. Among them, I suddenly felt very insignificant, that I was wasting my precious life getting upset with other people because of trivial matters.

In July this year, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation was approved by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), and became NGO in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC. Sister YuRu from Tzu Chi USA's UN team shared her experience with us. Right from the beginning of our application in 2008, she had been going to the U.N. office almost every day, sometimes twice. The degree of complication and difficulty involved might not be easily appreciated by outsiders. For example, Chile requested Tzu Chi to provide proofs of our relief work there. By the time they were compiled, other demands came up. But "there is a way when there is a will". After days, months and years of contact and communication with delegates, the international humanitarian relief work done by Tzu Chi was finally given its rightful recognition. In the future, the Foundation can participate in ECOSOC meetings and provide advice. At the same time, its charity work around the world can receive assistance and necessary protection from the U.N.



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“Water” was the principal theme of Tzu Chi’s stall at the exhibition. Our posters illustrated two main subjects. One was about the Angke River cleaning project in Jakarta, Indonesia, and the construction of DaAi village for resettlement of residents along the river bank. That housing estate covers 1100 residences, with school, hospital and mosque. The other subject was about Tzu Chi’s construction of 20 thousand water cellars in Gansu Province, China, benefiting hundred thousand of locals. At the Tzu Chi stall, there were posters everywhere, the floor was covered with thick paper mats made in Loess Plateau, Gansu, to recreate the feeling of walking on dried earth, and the entire stall was in earthy yellow. Flanking the entrance, looking like bells dancing in the wind, were Tzu Chi’s reusable cups hanging from U.N. ribbons. On the wall, mounted television showed the documentaries on Angke River and water cellars in Gansu.

Our volunteers explained both projects to the visitors. Each visitor was given environmental friendly reusable cup and a 4 minute shower timer. A number of them expressed their appreciation on receiving the handouts, and remarked how wonderful it was that Tzu Chi put environmental protection into action. They were also invited to pledge their support for saving water by signing on Puti leaves and then pasted them on the earthy colour wall, symbolizing the wish to transform the dry earth into green meadow.

There were more than 50 lectures in the three-day event; among them two were given by Tzu Chi members. One was by Zeng Tzu Huei from Tzu Chi USA on “Improving Global Health through Education of Mothers and Grandmothers”. The other lecture was given by the CEO of Tzu Chi Medical Mission, Dr Lin Chin Lon, entitled “An Integrated Approach to Achieving Global Health and Environmental Sustainability”. Both were received warmly. In particular, there was great interest from the audience to Dr Lin’s report on how recycling was put into practice and Tzu Chi’s green hospitals concept. Dr Lin said that conservation and protection should not be delayed; we owed that responsibility to future generations and the environment.

I felt fortunate to be a Tzu Chi delegate to this UN conference. Volunteers like me who manned the stall and recorded the event(photographs, video and documentary) all carried out our tasks with trepidation. With preservation of Tzu Chi’s image constantly in mind, we entered and left the venue in procession. As we visited other stalls and heard people called “Tzu Chi, Tzu Chi”, our tiredness vanished. We couldn’t help but smiled from the bottom of our hearts. An elderly lady told us that our smiles were the most brilliant. This is one of those unforgettable events in my life. My heart was filled with an unexplainable emotion when I watched the attentive audience listening to us when we told the many Tzu Chi stories. We were presenters and also public relation builders. When we were not on duty at our stall we went to lectures and visit other stalls, we chatted with other delegates, learned new things and made a lot of new friends. It was so wonderful!

After a few hectic days, the conference ended, we all went back home. We brought back the cries of the disaster victims from Pakistan, the wailings of the children and women from Africa. Although the events went quickly and the messages were like lead in our hearts, the goodwill and good deeds pledged in the conference would one day, hopefully, one of those days in the future, change everything for the better.

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