

## Massive Collection from a Little Village

A remarkable effort has been taken by the residents of the world's first garden city to help the victims of the Tsunami disaster. The landmark Buddhist Community Centre in Letchworth Garden City, which is known to be the first and only Buddhist Community Centre in the whole of North Hertfordshire, has been the pioneer in facilitating this great effort.

The Buddhist Community Centre in Letchworth, more commonly known as the 'Letchworth Temple' called for action immediately upon hearing the terrible news of this terrible disaster. It held an emergency meeting at the request of the Chief Incumbent, Reverend Nahale Rahula Thero and decided to act upon immediately.

What started off as a small aid collecting effort, soon triggered off a massive flood of response from the residents of Letchworth and the surrounding villages. Most remarkably, not only did these people respond to donate for this cause but started flocking at the temple volunteering to help in anyway they can. Every room at the temple was taken up by huge loads of goods received. The calm and silent prayer room turned itself into a workshop with people sorting and boxing the donations received. Well before 48 hours of operation, every inch of space had run out and there was a need for more storage.

Recognising the need of the hour and predicting the magnitude of this operation, the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation agreed to lend a huge warehouse completely free of charge. Since then, the operations streamlined.

A local couple, John and Lindy Fleetwood, gathered volunteers to go from door-to-door, covering each and every street, dropping off leaflets calling for essential items. They would subsequently follow with the collections. All the donations are then brought in to the temple where they are sorted, boxed and labelled. They would then be taken to the warehouse for storage.

In less than a week, the first sea cargo shipment, a forty-foot container was sent off. It then took only three days to fill another forty-foot container, which is also on its way. These are packed with medicines, foodstuff, tents, babies items, ladies sanitary ware, cooking utensils, tools, clothes and other essential items. The third container load is now been prepared. As there is an immediate need for medicine, most of the essential items were despatched by air on a daily basis.

The committee of the Buddhist Community Centre, said there are too many people to give our gratitude to and some are even not known. A spokesman said, "once, some one just reversed his car, unloaded a small mountain of brand new tents, and just drove away. We couldn't even thank him. There are so many others that we don't even know to mention. The response from the neighbours and the whole of the British public has been immense. They didn't bother that they are not Buddhists. They simply appreciated what we are doing and came to help regardless of any boundaries. Even the big shipping lines have volunteered to take our cargo with out any charges." The value of medicines alone has exceeded Rs. 2 million.

As there are many huge cash donors from around the world, the Centre decided not to call for money or to put up tills anywhere. Nevertheless, there were many people who came in and donated generously. Even the little school children in the locality joined in their own way to make a contribution. They had a 'no uniform' day where they donated money to come in casuals. Wilbury High School came to the temple with a collection of £650 from their day and other schools are following.

**The BBC, who heard about this remarkable operation, sent a team to do a live telecast on their 6' o'clock news covering the operation. The BBC reporter said that he believed this could probably be the biggest collection he has seen in terms of the actual contents and the number of volunteers.**

Collections are ongoing and the Centre is determined to continue for as long as necessary. Everyone is welcome to take part in packing and sorting. Call the centre on 01462 641 326