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International Group of Students Build an Orphanage in Mae Sot, Thailand

Twenty students from Taiwan, Indonesia and Singapore spend their holidays serving orphans.

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A group of over 20 students from Taiwan, Indonesia and Singapore have spent two weeks in Mae Sot, Thailand, to improve and expand the facilities of the Holy Infant Orphanage. The orphanage, which is

run by the National Catholic Commission on Migration of Thailand, is located in the outskirts of Mae Sot, near the Thai-Myanmar border. Currently, it accommodates around 30 Burmese children whose families have been destroyed by the civil unrest in Myanmar.

Prior to the dates of the work camp, the participants, who are students from the National University of Singapore, the National Chengchi University of Taiwan and residents of Heshan, an Opus Dei affiliated student residence in Taipei, secured enough funding from individual donors and former work camp participants in Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia to cover expenses related to the trip and the construction needs.

Mr. Kuhn Piko, a Burmese volunteer that provided his expertise in the construction efforts, remarked about

the children *"they have no mother, no father, no family, no hope"*. But this became a source of encouragement for the participants: the opportunity to help those who have nothing, to give them a home.

Under the sun or the rain or the heat of the day, the participants of the work camp pursued the construction of a three-room building, made of brick and bamboo walls with a tin roof, to accommodate a kitchen, a dining or study room and the dormitory for the little girls. *"It is very meaningful"* was the summary comment of Nick, a NUS student.

Along the construction work, there were daily opportunities to play games and sports with the kids in the late afternoon. The Taiwanese students with Prof. Herbert led the way to a baseball "training camp" while other students simulated a world-cup football competition. A

volleyball court was also set up next to the rice fields.

The participants also had the opportunity to visit projects that Ravenahl Study Program, an Opus Dei initiative for the formation of the youth in Singapore, had sponsored over the past years: the expansion of facilities in the St. Vincent orphanage, the improvement of sanitary facilities of two schools in impoverished neighborhoods and the construction of a classroom building in New Blood school for Karen migrants.

“It is very rewarding to see the Burmese volunteers teaching the migrant children in the new building”, said Dr. Segarra, Team Leader of this work camp who also led the previous one, after visiting New Blood with some of the current participants to give to the Principal of the school English teaching

materials provided by former work camp students.

Hans, who came from Taipei, was moved by the *"simplicity of their lives, how little they have and how happy the children are"*. Without doubt, the poverty and lack of material means and its contrast with today's affluent society, the efforts to provide them with a home and the new friendships will make these days in Mae Sot an unforgettable experience.

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For more information about the work camps or how to contribute to social projects, please contact Dr. Segarra at segarra100@gmail.com or Prof. Herbert at heshan.residence@cecea.org

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