At a ceremony October 3 in the ICDF headquarters in Taipei, ROC President Chen Shui-bian honored the first 37 recruits in the ROC Diplomatic Alternative Service program and the 16 new ICDF volunteers who were selected in August. The 53 men and women were on their way to overseas technical and medical missions, having completed their language and technical training in Taiwan. Attending the ceremony were ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Vice Minister Chiou Jong-nan, diplomats from nations allied with the ROC, ICDF personnel including acting Secretary General Yang Tzu-pao, and Taiwanese media members.

“The overseas volunteer program and the Diplomatic Alternative Service are benefiting from the strengths of the Taiwanese people, broadening our nation’s international space, giving back to international society and promoting our international position,” said Chen.

“This is worthy of our encouragement and should be valued.”

During his address, Chen echoed his commitment to volunteerism, definitively stated in his inaugural address on May 20, 2000 when he said, “compared to other advanced countries, our country has space for growth in volunteerism, and I hope we strive toward it together. Although it is important to express the ideal of volunteerism, to continually work to fulfill this ideal is even more important.”

Chen told the assembled group that United Nations statistics indicate that more than 25 percent of citizens in democratic countries have served as volunteers. Such a commitment has “positively promoted the character, cultivation and development of volunteers,” Chen said.

“If the volunteer spirit can widen, becoming the energy in society’s development, driving international...
cooperation and cross-cultural exchange, this will make a great contribution to building an international society of sharing, democracy and human rights,” Chen continued.

Chen also observed that the Diplomatic Alternative Service program (proposed by Chen in August 2000) and the ICDF Volunteers (created in 1993) provide important support and new vigor to ROC technical and medical service missions, thus expanding the positive results of technical cooperation. Providing overseas ICDF technical missions with qualified personnel is always a challenge. Not only must mission members be trained in advanced disciplines, they must also be resilient and resourceful, required as they are to work in difficult situations and environments. Standards are so high and the need for personnel so keen that the potential for shortages in projects and programs is always part of ICDF planning. The ICDF Volunteers and the Diplomatic Alternative Service program alleviate much of the concern about potential personnel shortages while meeting the ICDF’s high standards.

During the ceremony, Chen presented the group flag to the ICDF Volunteers, with ICDF acting Secretary General Yang Tzu-pao accepting on their behalf. “This shows that Taiwan’s international cooperation is flourishing during the United Nations International Year of Volunteers,” said Chen.

Looking out over the group of recruits and ICDF volunteers, Chen looked visibly proud as he encouraged them to “successfully complete your tasks, come back to Taiwan safe and well, with abundant international experience, and continually contribute your efforts to Taiwan’s development in the future.”

Philip Lo, 23, a Diplomatic Alternative Service member who majored in medicine at National Taiwan University, will support doctors in the emergency room and intensive care unit in the ROC Medical Service Mission in Mzuzu, Malawi. Looking toward his upcoming challenges, Lo said, “I want to be a different person in three months. I want to be a different kind of doctor. I want to learn more from different experiences of being in another country and culture.”

Another Diplomatic Alternative Service member, Paul Hsu, 24, majored in water resource management and agricultural engineering at National Taiwan University. He has been assigned to a tourism-related fruit project in Palau. Reflecting on his forthcoming duties, Hsu said, “I want to expand my vision, my world view, improve my language skills. To learn another culture will be a special experience. I want to share
my experience and studies. I don’t so much want to “help” the people of Palau—I want to cooperate with them.”

President Chen concluded by telling the audience, “No matter which direction Taiwan citizens look, we must all walk resolutely into international society, participating in international cooperation and accepting our international responsibilities. These are Taiwan’s rights, obligations, and the correct road toward deeply cultivating Taiwan with global perspectives.”

The ICDF thanks President Chen for his participation in this “rite of passage,” and wishes the safety and success of these dedicated groups of young recruits and volunteers. We look forward to 2002, when the next groups will add yet more skill and vitality to ICDF missions and projects around the world.