UN Valentine’s thanks to donors and aid workers who show ‘What It Takes’

(New York, 12 February 2020): This Valentine’s Day, the UN launches ‘What It Takes’, a global campaign to recognize the generosity, hard work, heart and hope that go into the humanitarian response – from the donors who contribute essential funding, to the women and men who put themselves on the front line to deliver aid.

Global humanitarian needs are huge. This year, 168 million people will need humanitarian assistance – 1 in every 45 people in the world. Last year saw record levels of humanitarian funding, enabling medicine, food and shelter to reach the majority of those in need. But needs are growing faster than funding. The campaign launched today will encourage the continued contributions and support that will allow the UN and the organizations it works with to keep delivering life-saving aid to women, men and children in desperate need.

The centrepiece of the campaign is a film featuring Claudine Joseph, a UN humanitarian working in Baga Sola, Chad. Her teenage son, Michael, lives with relatives in New York City to continue his studies. Claudine is one of thousands of ordinary people doing extraordinary work in difficult, and at times dangerous settings.

The film is a creative play on a teenager’s description of his mother. The words he uses – such as stubborn, overbearing and know-it-all – initially appear negative, but turn out to be some of the characteristics that help humanitarian workers get their work done in the midst of floods, rubble, conflict and earth-cracking drought. It is these traits – along with compassion and heart – that allow the UN to:

- get food and assistance to 90 million people in 83 countries around the world;
- supply vaccines to 45% of the world’s children, helping to save 3 million lives each year;
- provide shelter support to 3.4 million refugees; and
- keep 5,600 World Food Programme trucks, 20 ships and 92 planes on the move, on any given day, delivering food and other life-saving assistance.

Three quarters of the funding for the global humanitarian response is now coordinated through the UN to help save and improve more lives. The UN works with partners on the ground, including NGOs and local community groups, which are often the first responders.

UN Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock said: “The outlook for 2020 is bleak. We expect climatic shocks, the spread of infectious disease, and the impact of protracted conflicts to make this a difficult year for millions of people.

“But there is every reason to be hopeful. The humanitarian system is more effective today than it has ever been. Donors remain generous, funding goes further, faster, and we are getting ahead of more crises. Every day, we are reducing suffering, saving lives and giving people hope for the future.
“All of this is possible only because of the funding and support we receive and because of the committed and courageous people who work at every level of the humanitarian response to turn that funding into life-saving aid and protection. Continuing to build a strong humanitarian system that can swiftly and effectively respond to the world’s needs is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do.”

Claudine is just one of thousands of women humanitarian workers on the front line. Overall, more than 40 per cent of aid workers worldwide are women. They are active in every aspect of the humanitarian response, from search and rescue, to delivering emergency supplies, to fighting deadly diseases such as Ebola, to vaccinating children, to negotiating the release of child soldiers.

Aid workers are increasingly coming under attack. Since 2003, more than 4,000 humanitarians have been killed, injured, detained, kidnapped or otherwise prevented from carrying out their work. That is an average of 300 cases a year, or almost one every day. In 2018, there were 369 attacks on aid workers, including kidnappings, detentions and assaults. In the same year, 120 were killed.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The ‘What It Takes’ campaign will be activated online, with activity on Reddit, Instagram, Twitter and Wattpad (the ‘YouTube of books’). ALL CONTENT IS AVAILABLE HERE: https://trello.com/b/oZyRl29u

2. Many agencies of the UN contribute to the global humanitarian response, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO); International Organization for Migration (IOM); UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR); United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); World Food Programme (WFP); World Health Organization (WHO); UN Women; and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

3. Claudine Joseph began her humanitarian career at home, in Haiti. When the devastating earthquake hit in 2010, she joined the humanitarian response. She now works in Chad, in north-central Africa, where she helps coordinate the humanitarian response to a series of crises there. She faces the constant threat of attack from insurgents who operate around the region. “Living here requires strength, personal resilience, passion, empathy and an ability to lead in difficult circumstances,” says Claudine. Claudine is available for interviews.

4. The United Nations’ Central Emergency Fund (CERF) is one of the fastest and most effective ways to ensure that people caught up in crises get help. It gathers contributions from donors around the world – governments, international organizations, the private sector and individuals – into a single fund that’s ready to go whenever a crisis hits and people need our help. Since its creation, CERF has provided more than $6 billion in life-saving assistance in more than 100 countries and territories. In 2019 alone, CERF raised $800 million.

For more information, contact:
Conor O’Loughlin, Head of Campaigns & Digital: conor.oloughlin@un.org / +1 917-328-8316
Zoe Paxton, Head of Media/Spokesperson: zoe.paxton@un.org / +1 917-297-1542