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Dubai-based Portuguese humanitarian to swim 32 km in a desperate effort to secure the future of 172 children in the slums of Bangladesh

Maria Conceicao to face her most gruelling challenge yet to save her charity Maria Cristina Foundation from shutting down

Dover, UK: Today, Maria Conceicao, the founder of the Maria Cristina Foundation helping underprivileged children in Bangladesh, announced that she has passed the gruelling 6-hour swim in 15 °C open water, which makes her qualified to embark on her toughest challenge yet: swimming the English Channel on the 27th of August 2016. The Foundation, which Conceicao founded 11 years ago, has struggled to keep going due to lack of funds for the last couple of years, which has driven her to partake in strenuous endurance challenges.

Maria Conceicao said of the recent troubles of the charity: *“The Foundation has been sinking for a while and I am desperate to make sure all the 172 children graduate from high school and have a chance to break the cycle of poverty they were born into. I am not an athlete. I learned to swim last year, but as a mother to these children, there is nothing I wouldn’t do for them.”*

To complete what is considered one of the hardest swimming challenges in the world, Conceicao has been training in Jersey, UK for the past 2 months. The swim will take place in 12-15°C water, without a wetsuit and can take up to 27 hours or more. *“Getting used to the cold water has been the hardest part. I have lived in Dubai for so long and have never had to stay in such cold water for hours.”* Risk of hypothermia, jellyfish stings and fighting with the currents are all factors she will have to grapple with during the challenge.

With the swim Conceicao hopes to raise £140,000, which would secure the future of the 172 schoolchildren. The swim, considered one of the hardest in the world, will test her mental and physical limits and she may end up with life-threatening injuries. However, as Conceicao says: *“My swim is not difficult compared to the hardships my children in Dhaka face daily. I am thankful to Kevin Millerick and Tobias Frenz for planting the thought of a Channel swim in my head and I hope with all my heart that it will yield the results we need to keep the Foundation going.”*

About Maria Cristina Foundation: Maria Cristina Foundation is a registered charity in the UK, USA and Portugal and was established 11 years ago with an aim to break the cycle of poverty in the slums of Bangladesh through good quality education. Over 600 children and adults have attended school and been given ethical employment in the Middle East thanks to the charity.

About Maria Conceicao: a former Emirates Airlines flight attendant, this Portuguese national was so moved when she first visited Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, that she vowed to make a change. She has been raising funds and awareness of the issues in the slum and has in the process become the first Portuguese woman to summit the Everest, she is the holder of 6 Guinness World Records and the winner of various international awards.