



THE HUMANITARIAN FIREFIGHTERS REVIEW OF THE GSCF

Groupe de Secours Catastrophe Français

FLOODS IN VALENCE
WE WERE ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE DISASTER



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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



As 2024 comes to an end, we look ahead to 2025, a year we hope will be filled with opportunities and success. Together, let us continue our commitment to building a future where every life can be saved.

This new year will mark a key milestone in the development of our organization. We are continuing our efforts to strengthen our foundations while honoring the financial commitments that have allowed the GSCF to grow. These repayments, essential to ensuring the sustainability of our structure and that of our partners, such as Urgence SDF and our endowment fund, will be completed in three years.

However, we cannot overlook the challenges that have also defined this year's end. Among them, one of the most significant has been recruitment. The lack of qualified personnel in sufficient numbers has slowed some of our actions, increasing the workload on our already reduced teams.

To continue saving lives and intervening effectively, we must adopt a long-term vision: developing modern tools, recruiting and training new teams, providing them with fair compensation, and ensuring we have suitable facilities. In addition, investments in marketing and research are essential to expanding the reach of our missions. While volunteering remains a core value of our association, it must now be complemented by salaried teams to address the growing complexity and demands of our operations. Like many organizations and businesses in France, we face similar challenges. But we remain determined to overcome them.

Despite these challenges, 2024 has also been a year filled with impactful actions. Among them, the strengthening of our operational reserve, mobilized during the floods in Pas-de-Calais, stands out as particularly significant. This development remains a priority, and we will continue to dedicate our efforts to it with faith and determination.

The past three years have been demanding. However, in the face of adversity, we have demonstrated our ability to act swiftly, effectively, and transparently. Every day, we are building a strong, responsive organization, ready to meet the needs of people in distress, both here and abroad.

This magazine is an essential tool for maintaining our connection with you, our donors, and for reaching those who may join us tomorrow. Published quarterly, it alternates between print and digital formats. While some consider print to be costly, we believe it remains vital for many donors who, sometimes distanced from digital technologies, prefer traditional reading.

For this reason, we have decided to release two print editions and two digital versions each year. This choice, guided by practicality, reflects our commitment to making our actions accessible to all.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks for your support—whether moral, financial, or human. Thanks to you, the GSCF continues to act and save lives.

"Together, let us make 2025 a year of progress and hope."

With all my gratitude,

Thierry VELU

President and Founder of the GSCF



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SAINT BARBARA : A TRADITION AND A TRIBUTE TO RESCUE HEROES



Every year, on December 4th, Saint Barbara's Day is celebrated—a day rich in symbolism and gratitude for those who dedicate their lives to protecting others from danger.

As a firefighter NGO devoted to assistance and rescue, the French Disaster Relief Group (GSCF) joins this tradition to honor the values of courage, solidarity, and dedication.

Saint Barbara's Day is more than just a tradition. It is a time for reflection and tribute to our injured or fallen colleagues and their families. It is also an opportunity to consider our mission, our challenges, and the essence of our commitment.

Being a firefighter, rescuer, or member of a humanitarian organization like the GSCF is much more than a profession or a role—it is a calling. Each mission, every intervention, even in the most challenging conditions, reaffirms why we have chosen to dedicate our lives to others. Yet, we are also aware that this noble commitment can sometimes grow heavy under the weight of trials.



Saint Barbara's Day is not just a celebration; it is a moment to remember that, in times of danger, men and women stand ready to risk their lives to save others.

The GSCF is proud to share these values and to carry forward this spirit of dedication.



At the GSCF, we deeply believe in the importance of unity and solidarity. Whether during missions, training sessions, or simple gatherings, we cultivate this family spirit, which is essential for overcoming the humanitarian challenges we face. Together, we draw the strength needed to fulfill our vocation, even in the most complex circumstances.



Saint Barbara's Day provides an opportunity to honor our commitment, values, and the impact we have on the lives of others. It is also a time to remember our fallen or injured colleagues, whether they are firefighters in France or elsewhere around the world. Together, let us continue to uphold the spirit of solidarity and courage that unites us all.

"May our flame never be extinguished and may it illuminate every act of rescue and humanity."

SPAIN

AT THE HEART OF THE DISASTER



Context: On October 29 and 30, 2024, the province of Valence, Spain, was struck by unprecedented flooding caused by exceptionally heavy rainfall. This cold-drop phenomenon was exacerbated by the effects of climate change and the increasing urbanization of the affected areas. In response to the scale of the disaster, Thierry VELU, President of the GSCF, made the decision to act by deploying an emergency team.

Deployment of the First Humanitarian Team:

On October 31, a first team of five humanitarian firefighters from the GSCF was dispatched with essential equipment to support local relief efforts. This included pumps, generators, boots, chainsaws, brooms, vacuum cleaners, and pressure washers. Although Spain had not officially requested international assistance, the GSCF took the initiative to notify the Spanish Embassy in France of its commitment to intervene quickly.

First Intervention in Alfafar: On November 1, the team arrived on the outskirts of Valence, in the town of Alfafar—a previously unassisted area. The mission, initially focused on delivering equipment, quickly evolved into reconnaissance and population support. A key priority was to inform residents that emergency response teams, including the military, were actively being deployed.

This rapid and proactive response reflects the GSCF's commitment to providing timely assistance in times of crisis, demonstrating solidarity and a readiness to act even when formal calls for help are absent.





Reinforcement of Team and Equipment:

In response to the needs observed on-site and the shortage of equipment, the GSCF decided to deploy a second team equipped with similar tools to those used in the initial mission. Additional items, such as gloves and masks, were included to enhance the safety of the numerous volunteers who had come to assist. This second team headed directly to Valence.

Mission Report: The GSCF's intervention in Spain once again underscored the importance of the organization's humanitarian commitment. By deploying a limited team, the GSCF aimed to avoid overstepping while addressing the immediate needs of local populations. The involvement of GSCF firefighters provided critical support during the crisis.

This mission was guided by practical decision-making and thoughtful commitment, and with hindsight, we can affirm that our approach was justified. Maintaining independence from state agencies is crucial for the GSCF. This independence allows us to respond swiftly to emergencies, often being the first responders in certain areas, and ultimately saving lives.

For example:

- During Hurricane Irma on the island of Saint-Martin, the GSCF discovered an unvisited sector and provided extensive care and support to the affected population.
- After the earthquake in Nepal, two rescues were successfully carried out.
- Following the earthquake in Turkey, three lives were saved.

These are just a few examples of the GSCF's impactful interventions, highlighting the value of its independent and proactive approach.

Notre indépendance fait notre force.

THE GSCF ON M6



Following our missions in Spain, particularly a video that garnered several million views after our team's intervention in an area that had not yet received aid, Thierry VELU and Gentil DE PASSOS were invited to appear on the program La Grande Semaine, hosted by Ophélie MEUNIER.

Scan the QR code to watch the video of our team's arrival.



LIBAN : REPORTAGE

UN REPORTAGE DE LYAM BOURROUILHOU



As Beirut sinks deeper into the rubble of an unending economic and social crisis, its firefighters remain on the front lines, working under conditions unworthy of any public service. Confronting fires, explosions, and relentless emergencies, these men and women risk their lives daily to protect the city. But what happens when those tasked with saving others become the forgotten victims of a crumbling system?

For a week, I shadowed Captain Michel El Murr from the Karantina fire station in the northern part of the Lebanese capital. His face, etched with the toll of countless hours on the field, reflects the burden of a critically important role that is painfully underfunded.

Juggling visits to the municipal command post, meetings with Beirut's governor, discussions with his lieutenants, and managing his team, Captain El Murr is a man stretched thin. Despite their unwavering dedication, these everyday heroes are running out of resources, and their ability to respond effectively is faltering.

Since 2019, Lebanon's economic collapse has devastated the nation, devaluing wages and driving families into hardship. The decline has been staggering: a captain's salary, once \$3,000 per month, has plummeted to \$600. For a firefighter, a paycheck that once modestly reached \$1,000 now barely scrapes \$300. "Many of my guys juggle two or three jobs just to get by," Captain Michel El Murr admits. "How can you stay focused when you know you can't even feed your kids?" This lack of resources weighs heavily on the morale of teams already stretched thin. To carry out their mission, they must rely on extraordinary resourcefulness.



Their equipment? A patchwork of relics that no longer belongs on the front lines. Fire suits dating back to 2005 should have been replaced every two to three years. Vehicles, worn to the brink, frequently break down and require repairs beyond the reach of the public budget. "Working with this feels like stepping into a fight blindfolded," one firefighter laments bitterly. Helmets are outdated, and breathing apparatuses are nearing the end of their lifespan. Every major fire response becomes an act of sheer recklessness. In critical moments, firefighters lack the most basic protective gear, turning each intervention into a game of Russian roulette.



Captain Michel is blunt about the crisis: his team desperately needs updated training, support, and equipment to ensure their safety and that of the city. Without these reinforcements, their ability to respond effectively—and safely—is gravely endangered.

"We lack everything, from gear to training," he sighs. Michel appeals to France, a historical partner with deep ties to Lebanon. Could the land of human rights extend a helping hand to these unsung heroes?

"France has the experience and expertise. Training with French firefighters could be a game-changer for us," Michel explains, his voice a mixture of hope and resignation.

The question remains: will the world's attention turn to the forgotten firefighters of Beirut, before it's too late?



Despite the hardships, Beirut's firefighters answer the call every day, tirelessly. Lacking resources, struggling with wages that can no longer feed their families, and hampered by outdated equipment, they remain steadfast. At the latest crises, they were there, as always, amid the ruins—where many would hesitate to tread—surrounded by dazed and frightened civilians. They distributed food and essential supplies to traumatized residents and the hundreds of thousands displaced, forced to flee their homes.



For countless Lebanese, war has shattered daily life into fragments. Those who lost their homes now find themselves in makeshift camps or crowded into the homes of relatives, living in precarious conditions, stripped of the stability every human being longs for. These men, women, and children have become refugees in their own country. Many have nothing left, and often it is Beirut's firefighters who bring them the essentials: water, food, blankets to endure freezing nights, and the moral support needed to face the unimaginable. This humanitarian role has become a heartfelt mission for Beirut's firefighters. Their commitment extends far beyond extinguishing fires—they are a beacon of hope in a country weighed down by suffering. Despite their own dire needs, despite devalued wages and dwindling teams, they continue to give selflessly, expecting nothing in return.

Their dedication has not wavered; they fight for their community with a dignity that commands admiration. Yet, as the economic crisis deepens and external support remains scarce, this fervor risks eroding. Without equipment and aid, how can they continue fulfilling this critical mission? How long before the weight of unfulfilled needs breaks their resolve? Behind every firefighter serving others is a family, children, and lives to protect—just like the countless Lebanese they strive to save. Beirut's firefighters embody resilience, but resilience alone cannot sustain them indefinitely.

This article is part of a mission led by the French Disaster Relief Group (GSCF), which sent photojournalist Lyam Bourrouilhhou to the field to assess and document the dire situation faced by Beirut's firefighters.

Now is the Time to Act.

The GSCF urgently calls for international solidarity to restore dignified working conditions for Beirut's firefighters. Donations collected will go towards purchasing fire-resistant gear, protective equipment, and repairing essential vehicles for their operations. This is not about luxury—it is about survival. It's the bare minimum needed to safeguard the lives of these brave men and women who risk their own safety to protect the population.

As Lebanon falters under the weight of crisis, Beirut's firefighters remain steadfast. But they cannot hold the line alone forever. The international community has the power to support their mission, to provide the tools they need to save lives without endangering their own.

For those who stand in the face of danger every day, Beirut is calling. Will you answer?

PORTRAIT : MICHEL EL MURR, LE DERNIER REMPART D'UNE VILLE QUI PEINE À PANSER SES BLESSURES



Michel El Murr, captain of the Karantina fire station, embodies the resilience and hardship of Beirut. Joining the fire brigade at just 18 in 1996, he climbed the ranks through sheer determination, becoming a lieutenant in 2015 and later donning the captain's uniform. His journey stems not from ambition but an unwavering sense of duty, no matter the cost.

When Beirut's port exploded in August 2020, Michel was among the first responders. For 18 harrowing days, he and his team braved what he describes as "hell," tirelessly searching through rubble in hopes of finding their comrades—fellow firefighters and brothers in arms.

In a Lebanon crippled by crisis and where the state neglects its public servants, Michel El Murr is a steadfast symbol of resilience, defying exhaustion and scarcity. Beyond leading emergency operations, he has taken on the role of mentor, training nearly 360 recruits—whom he affectionately calls his "family." To him, the fire station is more than a workplace; it is home.

Today, Michel El Murr is more than just a captain; he is one of the last strongholds in a city struggling to heal. His unwavering commitment is a testament to the quiet strength of a man who refuses to give up on "his Lebanon."

SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN FIREFIGHTERS



Since the beginning of the conflict, the GSCF has remained steadfast in supporting Ukrainian firefighters, assisting them as they face unprecedented challenges.

In September and October 2024, two missions were conducted to deliver essential rescue equipment. Special focus was given to providing personal protective equipment (PPE), crucial for ensuring their safety amidst the daily risks they encounter.

We fervently hope for a diplomatic resolution that will swiftly bring an end to this conflict and restore peace.

In the meantime, we stand in solidarity with these men and women who, with unwavering courage, dedicate themselves to protecting their communities.

Thierry VELU

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Groupe Secours Catastrophe Français

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MOROCCO: GSCF MISSION IN EARTHQUAKE-AFFECTED VILLAGES



On October 31, 2024, a mission was organized in collaboration with our representative in Morocco, Rabie EZZAKI, targeting several villages severely impacted by the earthquake in the Taroudant region, including Tizi N'Test, Adebdi, and Tenkrite.

Since the GSCF's initial emergency interventions, followed by a mission focused on material support, significant progress has been observed in these villages. Although some scars of the disaster remain visible, rehabilitation efforts are advancing rapidly, enabling a gradual return to pre-earthquake daily activities. This recovery, while still fragile, reflects the resilience of the local populations.

In response to the needs expressed by these communities, the latest mission also delivered essential sanitary and logistical equipment to the affected populations. This support proved invaluable for villagers, schoolchildren, and local representatives, contributing to improved living conditions for everyone in the region.

The mission also provided GSCF teams an opportunity to engage with villagers and local leaders to reassess additional assistance needs. Our objective remains to ensure continuous support and address the specific requirements of these communities while respecting their dignity and autonomy.



We extend our deepest gratitude to the governmental actors who accompany and support us in our endeavors. Our mission would not be possible without this valuable collaboration and the strong partnership we have built with Morocco over the years. This cooperation is vital for ensuring the success of our interventions and delivering sustainable aid to the affected populations.

SUPPORT FOR CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE: A TANGIBLE COMMITMENT TO A SAFER FUTURE

Since the delivery of our equipment donation in August 2024 to Congo-Brazzaville, significant progress has been made to strengthen local capacities.

The equipment, particularly PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), was carefully selected to meet the needs of firefighters and emergency response structures and has been distributed progressively until October.

This initiative has enhanced the efficiency of interventions by providing field teams with resources tailored to their daily missions.

Building on the success of this action, a new phase is now underway.

A mission is currently being planned to deliver additional equipment, with particular attention to the specific needs of firefighters, who are the true pillars of safety in their communities.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the country's firefighters for their collaboration, as well as the AHP SIDA/MST association, which plays a crucial role in monitoring the use of this equipment on-site.

Their dedication and commitment ensure that the equipment is quickly and effectively distributed to the teams and structures that need it most.



INTERNSHIP AT THE GSCF: A KEY STEP FOR THE INTEGRATION AND TRAINING OF NEW MEMBERS

From November 14 to 16, the GSCF organized a critical training program for its new members. This internship is part of the membership process and serves several purposes: easing the integration of new participants, enabling them to connect with veteran members, and evaluating their commitment to continuing their journey with the GSCF.



This training is also an essential step for advancing to Level 2 and gaining the ability to respond effectively to natural disasters. At the end of the internship, all participants successfully completed the program.

To enhance its procedures, the GSCF has implemented new validation methods for its members, spread across four distinct training sessions. These Level 1 internships, like this one, will now be offered two to three times a year. A similar training session is planned in the coming months, followed by a Level 2 internship scheduled before April 2025.



In addition to providing the foundational operational skills required, these sessions allow volunteers to meet mission leaders—an essential component before any deployment in the field.

Each training represents an opportunity for personal and collective growth, strengthening the commitment and cohesion of GSCF teams.



Photos @Lyam Bourrouilhou for the GSCF

WHY IS FRANCE FACING INCREASING FLOODING ?



In recent years, France has experienced a surge in flooding, causing significant material damage and disrupting thousands of lives.

But why is flooding becoming more frequent?

Several factors—climatic, environmental, and human—contribute to this phenomenon.

Climate Change: The Main Driver

Climate change is a key factor behind the increasing number of floods. As the Earth's average temperature rises, the water cycle becomes disrupted. A warmer atmosphere can retain more moisture, leading to more frequent and intense rainfall. These sudden and torrential downpours cause significant flooding in areas often ill-prepared to manage such events.

Urbanization: An Aggravating Factor

Rapid urbanization further exacerbates the problem. The proliferation of concrete and asphalt surfaces prevents rainwater from naturally seeping into the ground. Impermeable surfaces accelerate water runoff, quickly overwhelming drainage systems that are often insufficient to handle such volumes of water. Additionally, the destruction of wetlands, which play a critical role in absorbing excess water, worsens the situation.

Watercourse and Land Management

The management of rivers and land also plays a significant role. Rivers and streams have been channeled and altered for economic reasons or to protect urbanized areas. These modifications often disrupt ecosystems and diminish the natural capacity of waterways to handle floods. Furthermore, the lack of preparation and inadequate planning for territories exposed to these risks increases the vulnerability of populations.

The Need for Action

Addressing the causes and consequences of flooding requires a multifaceted approach: mitigating climate change, preserving wetlands, improving urban planning, and adopting more resilient watercourse management strategies. France must adapt its policies to this growing threat to safeguard its population and infrastructure.



The Impact of Agricultural Practices

Modern agricultural practices also contribute to worsening floods. The widespread use of monocultures and intensive chemical applications depletes soil quality, reducing its ability to absorb water. The removal of hedgerows and the decline in biodiversity further decrease natural water retention, heightening the risks of runoff. By adopting more sustainable practices, such as agroecology, it is possible to restore some of the soil's resilience to extreme weather events.

Human Consequences and the Need for Adaptation

Floods have severe human and economic consequences. The cost of damages increases yearly, making it vital to adopt adaptive measures such as enhancing prevention systems and improving infrastructure management. Community initiatives, like establishing local emergency supply reserves, can be crucial in mitigating the effects of these increasingly frequent climate events.

Working Together to Prevent Disasters

Preventing floods and their impacts requires environmentally respectful practices, such as preserving wetlands and promoting rainwater infiltration into the soil. Citizen involvement, municipal efforts, and organizations like the GSCF must collaborate on risk prevention and management initiatives to make a tangible difference. Now is the time for adaptation and cooperation to face this climatic reality.

The Importance of Education and Awareness

Education and awareness are critical in flood prevention. Informing citizens about appropriate behaviors during risks, the importance of environmentally conscious daily actions, and collective measures to improve territorial resilience is essential. Schools, associations, and local authorities must work together to disseminate this knowledge and foster widespread awareness.

Support the GSCF

To continue responding effectively to floods and other disasters, everyone's support is essential. The GSCF (Groupe de Secours Catastrophe Français) tirelessly assists affected populations and strengthens prevention systems. Your help, whether through donations or volunteer involvement, can make a real difference. Support the GSCF and contribute to building a more resilient society in the face of natural disasters.

Thierry VELU



"In 2024, we were able to accomplish our missions thanks to you: donors, partners, and all those who stand by our side. Your support has been vital in providing much-needed assistance where it was most required. The road ahead is still long and fraught with challenges, but with your commitment and our determination, we will continue to move forward. Together, we prove that hope and solidarity can prevail against even the greatest adversities."

Thierry VELU

AidEx 2024:

We Attended the World's Largest Humanitarian Aid and Relief Exhibition

The Groupe de Secours Catastrophe Français (GSCF) marked another milestone in its commitment to humanitarian action by participating in AidEx 2024, one of the world's largest events dedicated to humanitarian aid and international development.

This year's edition, held in Geneva on October 23-24, 2024, brought together key players in global solidarity, providing a unique platform for exchange, collaboration, and innovation in serving vulnerable populations.



A Must-Attend Event for Humanitarian Stakeholders

Since its inception, AidEx has been recognized as a hub for humanitarian organizations, international agencies, private companies, and government representatives. As a specialized emergency relief organization, the GSCF views its participation as an opportunity to share its expertise and learn from the initiatives of other key actors.

This year's exhibition placed special emphasis on technological innovations and multi-stakeholder partnerships in humanitarian crisis responses. The GSCF, always striving for effective and sustainable solutions, actively contributed to discussions, showcasing its latest projects, particularly in high-risk zones and disaster management.



For over 25 years, the GSCF has been devoted to providing urgent and lasting aid to victims of natural disasters and conflicts. Its presence at AidEx 2024 reaffirms its commitment to continuous innovation, collaboration, and mobilization to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations.



Winter 2024 : The GSCF Renews Its Support for the Homeless



As winter settles in across France, bringing its share of challenges, Urgence SDF is stepping up its efforts to support vulnerable populations.

In collaboration with the GSCF, Urgence SDF is implementing concrete actions to aid the homeless, who are especially at risk during this harsh season.

Recently, thanks to this strengthened partnership, over 200 survival kits have been assembled. These kits, essential lifelines for those in extreme poverty, include critical items such as:

- A sleeping bag,
- A cold-weather kit to combat freezing temperatures,
- A care kit for basic medical needs,
- A hygiene kit to help maintain a minimum level of dignity,
- And many other survival essentials, including warm clothing, headlamps, and rain protection.
-

These kits are intended for those not covered by shelter programs. They are primarily distributed to CCAS (Communal Centers for Social Action) and partner organizations that request them.

By providing these resources, Urgence SDF and the GSCF aim to bring hope and tangible support to those facing the winter without a roof over their heads.



Essential Help, But Not Enough

The GSCF and Urgence SDF stress that the survival kits, while crucial, are not a long-term solution. They address immediate emergencies but cannot replace the social policies necessary to lift people out of homelessness. Despite their efforts, the needs remain overwhelming. Limited human and financial resources hinder the expansion of this vital assistance.

"We are doing everything we can with the resources available, but the scale of the challenge demands more," emphasizes Thierry Velu, President of both the GSCF and Urgence SDF.

A Goal for 2025: Strengthening Urgence SDF

Faced with the harsh reality of winter homelessness, 2025 is set to be a turning point. The mission is clear: to expand the capacity of Urgence SDF to better address the growing needs of those living on the streets.

This will involve:

- Increasing resources allocated to field actions.
- Advocating more effectively for the rights and needs of those living in the shadows.

"No human being should spend a night outdoors, especially in the dead of winter. Our mission is to continue acting and raising awareness to bring about change."

Learn More

To learn more about Urgence SDF, visit the official website: www.usdf.fr.

Urgence SDF is an association created by the GSCF.

This winter, even the smallest gesture can save a life.

Together, let's unite to bring warmth and hope to those who need it most.



The Humanitarian Firefighters Review by GSCF

The GSCF Humanitarian Firefighters Review is a quarterly publication provided to the organization's members, partners, and donors. The magazine is printed in 15,000 copies, sent to 100,000 recipients by email, and also made available in a digital format on GSCF platforms.

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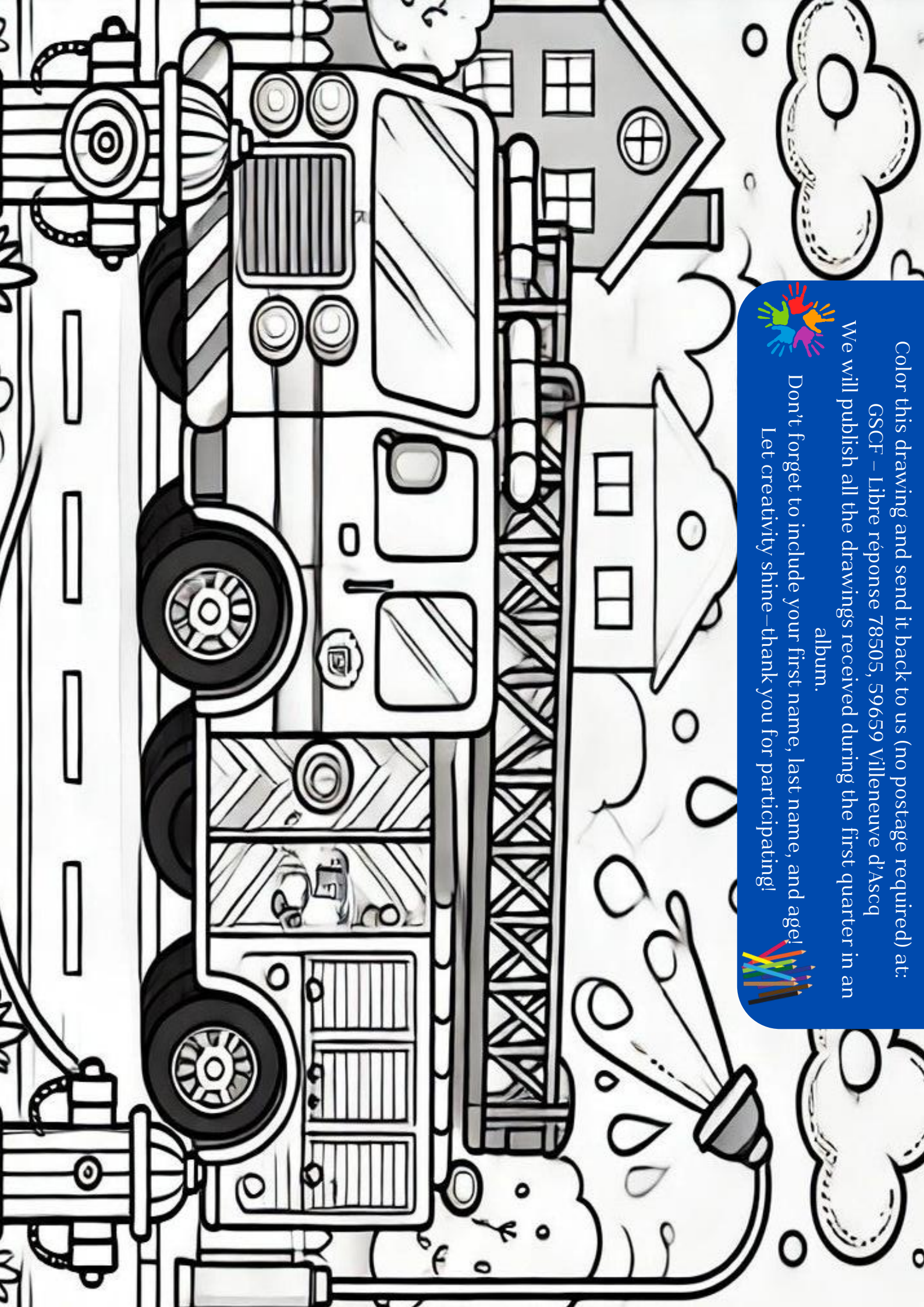




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Thank you all immensely.

Today, our ability to respond anywhere in the world and provide help where it is needed relies entirely on you.

Your generosity and commitment are the solid foundations of our actions.

I want to express my deepest gratitude for your trust and solidarity. Thanks to your invaluable support, we will continue our mission with unwavering determination.

Thank you, Thierry VEZU



2025

*Happy
New Year!*