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PRESS RELEASE

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Senator Loren Legarda appointed First “champion” for disaster risk reduction

(Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) Senator Loren Legarda of the Philippine Senate is the first “champion” for disaster risk reduction for the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) in Asia Pacific. She will help UNISDR promote the benefits of disaster risk reduction policies in countries and communities of the region that are most vulnerable to disasters.

The Asia Pacific Regional Champion for Disaster Risk Reduction is an honorary title bestowed by UNISDR on a person of integrity who embodies its mission and ideals in advocating for disaster risk reduction.

Senator Legarda, who comes from a country often affected by typhoons, floods, landslides and volcanic eruptions, accepted her new official engagement during the Third Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction which opened today in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

This is the first time UNISDR is engaging a high level parliamentarian to “champion” and support its advocacy work. Senator Legarda has shown a strong commitment to advancing disaster risk reduction policies and her recent efforts with UNISDR have proved to be very successful and fruitful. Last October in Manila, she convened the first consultative meeting with parliamentarians on making disaster risk reduction the primary tool for climate change adaptation. She steered the meeting towards a consensus on making the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) legally binding and establishing regional hubs of parliamentarians for disaster risk reduction.

By articulating the importance of mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and climate change, with a gender perspective, into development processes, Senator Legarda has encouraged more parliamentarians as well as women in politics and governance from all over the world to support the implementation of the HFA. The HFA is a ten-year plan, adopted in 2005 by 168 governments in Kobe, Japan, to reduce human and economic losses due to disasters.

As the regional champion, Senator Legarda will now lead many UNISDR activities throughout The Asia Pacific region and will work closely with the UNISDR Bangkok office to advocate for disaster risk reduction among Governments and the public at large.

“People do not yet realize that prevention policies are our first line of defense against disasters and, in particular, against climate-induced disasters. We need to take our increasing vulnerability to disasters very seriously as many more people will be affected in the future. Disaster risk reduction is not an option but a compelling way to prevent, mitigate and confront the disasters likely to happen,” said Senator Legarda in Kuala Lumpur.

Since the beginning of her career, Senator Legarda has been involved in many environmental activities with the United Nations Environment Programme. In 1998, she established *Luntiang Pilipinas*, a nationwide urban forestry program and planted more than two million trees in about 500 hectares of land across the Philippines. The World Economic Forum named her as one of the *Global Leaders for Tomorrow* in 2000 and she became the Environment Awardee of the Priyadarshni Academy in Mumbai, India in 2004.

She has also been very active on the legislative front having authored the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2001, the Clean Air Act and the Philippine Climate Change bill, which seeks to create the Climate Change Commission and to mainstream climate change in policy formulation, development planning, and poverty reduction programs, among other development processes undertaken by the Government. She filed also the resolution that seeks the creation of the Oversight Committee on Climate Change, and another that called for the adoption of the *Albay Declaration on Climate Change Adaptation* which the Philippine Senate passed in February 2008.

Senator Legarda is very much involved in climate change issues and strongly recommends using disaster risk reduction policies as an effective tool for Governments to use for addressing climate change risk and reducing poverty.

“The experience and motivation of Senator Legarda will contribute significantly to advancing disaster risk reduction at all levels and within Governments and civil society. We are very much honored that she has accepted the task of acting as champion, considering disaster risk reduction is not an easy policy to promote. But, I am confident that with her charismatic leadership, many other leaders will listen to her, emulate her and commit to making the world a safer and better place for all,” said Salvano Briceño, Director of the UNISDR secretariat.

Senator Legarda has been the only woman who topped the national election for the Senate twice: first in 1998 and again in 2007. She also became the first woman majority floor leader of the Philippine Senate.