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PRESS RELEASE

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New Legislation in the Philippines places Disaster Risk Reduction as the first line of defense against climate change risks

A new climate change law that fully integrates the priorities of the Hyogo Framework for Action – a ten-year blueprint for reducing risks to disasters worldwide - has been passed today by the Philippine Government to address increasing climatic risks.

The Philippines is among the most disaster-prone countries in the world and the most vulnerable to cyclones, storms and climatic events. A recently released Mortality Risk Index (MRI) by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) ranked the Philippines 12th among the 200 countries that were analysed with respect to tropical cyclone, flood, earthquake and landslide risk.

Recent tropical storms Ketsana and Parma caused severe flooding in the country, killing 1,000 people and damaging hundreds of homes and critical infrastructure such as hospitals and schools.

The new "Climate Change Act of 2009" is intended to integrate disaster risk reduction measures into climate change adaptation plans, development and poverty reduction programs. "Disaster risk reduction policies such as the implementation of early warning systems and urban planning measures that integrate disaster risks into critical infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, offer solutions to better protect people and their communities against the negative impacts of climate change. They are essential tools to reduce the vulnerability of the poor who are also most exposed to disasters," says Margareta Wahlström, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. "It is essential that disaster risk reduction policies be factored into legislation to obtain more political commitment."

Under the new Act, a Climate Change Commission headed by the President of the Philippines will be created as the sole governmental policy-making body to coordinate, monitor and evaluate climate change programs and action plans. The Philippine Climate Change Act of 2009 also gives local governments the primary responsibility of including disaster risk reduction measures into their climate action plans.

"Integrating disaster risk reduction into climate change and development policies is now a local government imperative that will benefit millions of people. Empowering local authorities is the best way to address such an important issue as local governments are the ones who can take real

action, ” said Senator Loren Legarda, the author of the legislation and the UNISDR Regional Champion for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The new Philippines legislation is already inspiring other countries. Samoa and Bhutan, two other countries most at risk from climate change, are already reviewing their legislation to integrate disaster risk reduction into their policies.