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Rachel Shebesh appointed African champion for disaster risk reduction

27 October 2009 - Rachel Shebesh, Member of Parliament of the Republic of Kenya and Chair of the African Parliamentarian Initiative for Climate Risk Reduction, was appointed today as the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction champion for disaster risk reduction in Africa during the launch of the *Black and Green, Ready to Lead* campaign that took place at the Pan-African Parliament in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The champion for disaster risk reduction is an honorary title bestowed by UNISDR on a person of integrity who embodies the organisation's mission and ideals in advocating for disaster risk reduction.

As the regional African champion, Ms Shebesh will promote the synergy between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation throughout Africa and work closely with all African parliamentarians in order to obtain more political commitment to disaster risk reduction policies that will help to protect more communities against climate-related disasters.

Africa is a continent that is highly vulnerable to disasters with millions of people affected every year, by prolonged droughts, water stress and severe floods.

“Rachel Shebesh is already very active in driving the disaster risk reduction agenda forward. Legislators play an important role in bridging the existing gap between national policy and local implementation in disaster risk reduction. She will continue to work closely with all our African partners and bring the African voice to the upcoming climate change negotiations in Copenhagen,” says Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Ms Shebesh also leads the *Black & Green, Ready to Lead* campaign, which was launched today in Johannesburg to sensitize the region to the importance of using prevention measures to reduce the impacts of climatic disasters. The campaign aims to promote the synergy between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation among parliamentarians, high-level government officials and the public at large.

“We parliamentarians need to do more to integrate disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in our development policies,” says Ms Shebesh. “Clearly, disasters have long term

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impacts on people and their livelihoods and we need to do better to protect our people from the growing impact of climate-related disasters. I will continue to speak with African leaders about the need for increased commitment and investment in disaster risk reduction.”

Rachel Shebesh is a Member of Parliament of the Republic of Kenya and a Member of the Pan African Parliament. She is also vice-chair of the African Parliamentarian’s Network against Corruption, a champion for the Kenyan Disability Network and more recently chair of the African Parliamentarian Initiative on Climate Risk Reduction. Ms Shebesh has been actively involved in the mobilization of women at the grassroots level in order to harness their social, political and economic might for more effective engagement in national affairs. Ms Shebesh is also a special adviser to UNIFEM at its Kenya office. Ms Shebesh has a background in design and is currently pursuing a degree in political science.

Rachel Shebesh is the second high-level parliamentarian in the world to champion and support the work of UNISDR. Senator Legarda from the Philippines is the other UNISDR champion who promotes disaster risk reduction in Asia and advocates for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, a ten-year plan for reducing disasters, as a main tool to curb climatic disaster impacts.

The last Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction has identified climate change impacts, together with the degradation of the environment and rapid urbanization, as the three main driving factors that will cause more disasters in the future.