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PRESS RELEASE

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Mayors and children lead fight against climate change in the Philippines

Cebu, Philippines – Just as climate negotiations were wrapping up in Cancún, Mexico, government officials from vulnerable islands in the Philippines took action to reduce the damaging effects of climate change on their communities by joining UNISDR's world disaster reduction campaign.

In a ceremony on Saturday, 11 December -- on the beaches of the Camotes Islands in the Philippines' province of Cebu -- four mayors signed on to the *Making Cities Resilient: My City is Getting Ready* campaign, bringing the number of mayors committed to the two-year international campaign to 156.

The mayors are Aly Arquillano of San Francisco Municipality; Luciano D. Rama, Jr of Poro Municipality; Erwin P. Yu of Tudela Municipality; and Jesus A. Fernandez, Jr of Pilar Municipality.

By joining the campaign, the mayors commit to a number of activities, including relocating communities and key infrastructure that are prone to storm surges, regular clean-up drives along coastal areas, tree planting, establishment of early warning systems, strengthening the Camotes Islands emergency response teams, developing community-based ecotourism and livelihood initiatives, and training teachers and youth organizations on climate change and disaster risk reduction.

“While the world negotiates on what to do with climate change in Mexico, we local officials are already facing the effects of the changing weather patterns,” said Mayor Aly Arquillano. “Climate change is not something abstract for us; it is real. It is about the threats to our shorelines, our corals, our forests and our towns. We are taking action because it is the right thing to do for our people. We are the first line of defense against climate change.”

The Camotes Islands are facing increasing threats to its coastal mangrove forests, seagrass and corals as a result of increasing storm surges, sea-level rise, coral bleaching, overfishing and coastal development. To combat these threats, the local government, in partnership with Plan Philippines, is promoting a climate risk management project in the island group that incorporates disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation practices through better governance, knowledge management, reduction of underlying risks and small-scale mitigation activities. The project has a child-centred focus.

“It is encouraging to see proactive action by the local governments in the Camotes Islands,” said Baltz Tribunalo, Program Advisor for disaster risk reduction at Plan Philippines. “We are very proud to be a partner supporting their activities on child-centred disaster resilience building, where children participate in projects, including in disaster and climate risk assessments, planning and implementation.”

Sharmaine Bebanco, the 16-year-old president of the Teguis Children’s Association for Active Participation (TECAAP), illustrated how children are doing their part in reducing the impacts of natural hazards and climate change: “We plant mangroves because it can increase fish catches for our parents. We also understand that trees and mangroves can protect us from typhoon and storm surges. While we can contribute, we need our local and international leaders to be united to protect our future.”

UNISDR launched the worldwide disaster reduction campaign last May, enlisting local government leaders to commit to ten essential actions to reduce disaster risks. These actions include investing more in disaster risk reduction, preparing and sharing risk assessments, ensuring early warning systems are in place, and protecting ecosystems to reduce floods, cyclones and storm surge impacts.

Cities and municipalities the world over have joined the campaign and are committed to complying with one or more of the Ten Essentials. Among them are Mexico City (Mexico), Durban (South Africa), Bogota (Colombia), Port-au-Prince (Haiti), Amman, (Jordan), Albay (the Philippines), Cairns (Australia), Chennai City (India), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Kathmandu (Nepal) and Saint Louis (Senegal).

For more information about the campaign, visit: www.unisdr.org/campaign and www.preventionweb.net

For information on child-centred climate and disaster resilience activities in the Camotes Islands, contact: Roy Soledad (roy.soledad@plan-international.org) or John Diviva (john.diviva@plan-international.org) of Plan International, or Vice-Mayor Al Arquillano (Al_Arquillano@yahoo.com).

NOTE TO EDITORS:

- Located in the northeastern part of Cebu, the Philippines, the Camotes Group of Islands (CGI) are part of the province of Cebu, consists of three main islands and four municipalities: Poro, Tudela, San Francisco and Pilar. The island group’s population is 89,324; 40% of the population are children.
- The poverty rate on the islands is 38.41% of the total population.
- The islands are in middle of the Camotes Sea, which is one of the major fishing grounds in the Central Visayas region and plays a vital role in the livelihood of many fishing communities living along the coast of at least three surrounding island provinces – Leyte, Bohol and Cebu. The three islands of the CGI were declared a mangrove swamp forest reserve under Presidential Proclamation No. 2152 issued on 29 December 1981.

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