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PRESS RELEASE

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Philippines Reconfirms Commitment to Safe schools, Hospitals

Eight Mayors Sign up for UNISDR Campaign - Making Cities Resilient: My City Is Getting Ready

Manila – In the wake of recent floods and landslides in the Philippines, which have affected some 600,000 people, the Philippine Government today reconfirmed their commitment to make schools and hospitals in the country’s cities disaster resilient.

The commitment, led by the Secretary of Education and Health, follows the pledge by the previous Government in 2009 to make more than 60,000 schools and health facilities in the Philippines safer from disasters. Both Departments of Education and Health committed to inspect all schools and hospitals for disaster vulnerability and to assist in identifying interventions to make them safer within the 2012 government budget.

At a ceremony at East Rembo Elementary School in Makati City, the Philippine Government commitment was supported by eight Metro Manila Mayors who also signed up to make their local government units safer from disasters during the Manila launch of the UNISDR “Making Cities Resilient: My City Is Getting Ready!” Campaign.

The organizer of the event, Senator Loren Legarda said she will commit a significant portion of her P200-million (US\$4.6 million) Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) under the 2011 budget bill for the construction of “green and safe schools.”

Legarda, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Climate Change, said she wants to prioritize the long-standing problem of lack of classrooms and school buildings. “We want to build not just schools, but green buildings that are disaster-resilient. Aside from being structurally safe and organizationally prepared for disasters, we want these schools to be innovative and environment-friendly by putting up rainwater catchment systems, growing vegetable gardens, using renewable energy and setting up a recycling programme, among others,” she said.

“With 20 typhoons visiting the Philippines every year, even though we have ongoing programmes to improve school safety already in place, it is good to engage the students, teachers, the community, and Mayors as this work is a shared responsibility of all,” said Brother Armin Luisitro, Cabinet Secretary of the Department of Education of the Philippines.

The 2009 tropical storm “Ondoy” (international name Ketsana) caused P73.87 million (US\$1.69 million) in damages to schools, with Metro Manila absorbing more than P35 (about US\$800,000) worth of damages to 42 primary and secondary schools.

Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, praised the country’s efforts to take responsibility for keeping critical public facilities safe during disasters.

“Governments are stewards over a vast number of public assets, including schools and hospitals, which house the most vulnerable people such as children, the elderly and the sick,” said Ms. Wahlström. “Efforts by the Philippines to inspect these facilities and invest in their safety and preparedness are worth following. Both during an emergency and in the aftermath of disaster, well functioning schools and hospitals are crucial for cities to bounce back quickly and resume critical sustainable development programmes.”

The One Million Safe Schools and Hospitals Campaign encourages an individual, a family, a community, an organization, a government, a business or any other entity to make a pledge for a school or hospital to make them disaster resilient. Since its launch in April 2010 in the Philippines, more than 80,000 schools and hospitals have received pledges for safety worldwide. (<http://www.safe-schools-hospitals.net/>).

This initiative is part of the Resilient Cities Global Campaign of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) for 2010 and 2011, and builds upon the 2006-2007 Global Campaign on Safe Schools, and the 2008-2009 Global Campaign on Safe Hospitals. Since its launch in May 2010, more than 580 cities have already joined the UNISDR World Disaster Reduction 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).

More information can be obtained from the website: <http://www.unisdr.org/campaign>

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