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Headline: UN names Senator Legarda as Global Champion for Resilience

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FOR HER “unrelenting and vigorous support in advancing disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation,” Sen. Loren Legarda has been appointed Global Champion for Resilience by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR).

Margareta Wahlstrom, special representative for the UN secretary general for disaster risk reduction, announced Legarda’s appointment on Nov. 30, during the Climate Vulnerable Forum High Level Meeting at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference, or COP21.

The senator, a regional champion for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation for Asia-Pacific since 2008, was cited for being “an outspoken and consistent champion for the need to rethink development and work with all stakeholders and in many sectors to prevent and reduce risk,” Wahlstrom said in a speech delivered at the Paris conference.

Legarda was also recognized for “advancing disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation nationally and internationally through legislation, policy leadership and advocacy at all levels.”

The newly named global champion for resilience expressed her “profound gratitude” to Wahlstrom whom she said had “ably led the UNISDR in empowering nations, business, individuals and the whole of society to build safer communities.”

Hyogo Framework for Action

Legarda joins other leaders and politicians conferred the title, including former Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who was the first to be conferred with the global champion award.

In her UN-appointed role, the senator was expected to advocate and promote the goals and priorities of the Hyogo Framework for Action and its successor plan, the new Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The Hyogo Framework was a 10-year plan adopted by 168 governments during the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Hyogo, Japan, in 2005, while the Sendai Framework was adopted by UN member states in Sendai, Japan, this year.

Legarda was also expected to encourage the highest political leadership in different countries to increase investments in disaster risk reduction and promote the issue to a wider set of decision-makers to influence opinion and sustainable action.

As a senator, Legarda has been a champion of environmental causes. She was the principal author and sponsor of the Climate Change Act of 2009 that created the Climate Change Commission, the lead Philippine agency in negotiations during yearly climate talks.

Laws on environment

The UN document naming her global champion also said Legarda had been chiefly responsible for the enactment of several Philippine laws on environmental governance, among them the Clean Air Act, the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, the Renewable Energy Act, the Environmental Awareness and Education Act, the People's Survival Fund Law, and the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act.

As incumbent chair of the Senate committee on finance, Legarda encouraged and ensured as well the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in the annual budgets of government agencies.

In 2009, Legarda met Maldives' former President Mohamed Nasheed and stressed the need for cooperation and unity among developing countries vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The Philippines is the incumbent president of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, a highly regarded advocacy platform for the group of vulnerable countries.

Global leaders

Legarda also worked with various government agencies to create the Disaster Preparedness Handbook, and produced films that explain disaster risk and climate change, its impact on our everyday lives, and how leaders can strive for a resilient development. These films are: "Ulan sa Tag-Araw: Isang Dokyu-drama Ukol sa Pagbabago ng Klima," "Ligtas Likas," "Buhos," "Now Is the Time" (for the UNISDR) and "Ligtas."

In 2000, the World Economic Forum held in Davos, Switzerland, named Legarda one of the Global Leaders of Tomorrow.

In 2001, the United Nations Environment Programme included her in the Global 500 Roll of Honor.

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Her alma mater, the University of the Philippines, also recognized the senator as its Distinguished Alumna for Environmental Conservation and Climate Change Adaptation in 2013.