WELCOME REMARKS SENATOR LOREN LEGARDA

19 October 2008 3rd Global Congress of Women in Politics

Extreme weather shifts and all, Manila remains one of the world's most interesting and historical cities and it is with great pleasure and honor that I welcome you here today on behalf of the Philippine Senate.

The CAPWIP is an extra-ordinary organization of women in politics. Right now, its work and advocacy are not merely focused on breaking glass ceilings and getting involved in most, if not all, aspects of the development process.

It is currently a trailblazer in its effort to make gender a central part of the climate change and disaster risk reduction discussions and debates.

Women leaders from across the globe realize that several milestone moments in global efforts to arrest climate change have not been gender-responsive, or gender-sensitive.

First, the climate change agenda has been male-dominated.

James Hansen testifying before a US Senate panel in 1988, warning a skeptical world on the clear and present danger of climate change. Al Gore, the young US senator who then chaired that panel, turned US vice president, turned presidential candidate ridiculed as the Ozone Man, turned award-winning producer of a epoch-changing documentary on climate change. He is now the considered the public face of our collective effort to fight the scourge of climate change.

In Feb. 2007, it was a male-dominated team of scientists that made public the life-changing IPCC report that found evidence of climate change irrevocable. Plus the recognition that human beings were behind it.

It is outrageous and unfortunate that a leading female politician, Sarah Pallin, US vice presidential candidate said that she was not too sure that human activity was at the root of climate change. And her prescription for energy security was Drill, Drill, Drill, She should have answered with a crisp "Renewable Energy" to inspire and warm the hearts of people and environmental groups who genuinely care about the future of the planet.

We cannot alter these marked moments in history. But we can do the next best thing: lead and persevere in the efforts to curb climate change and help push congresses, parliaments and all policy-making bodies to formulate gender-responsive legislation and programs related to climate change and disaster risk reduction.

This, I believe, is what this Congress wishes to accomplish.

It has become an imperative. And this is my second point: apart from the climate change agenda being driven largely by men, current policies have not recognized the gender-specific effects of climate change. For it is women that bear the brunt of climate change's savagery.

They are the main, and the more prodigious, producers of staple crops. Any extreme weather event that affects agricultural production – whether it is a drought or rampaging floods – gravely affects the women tillers of the land.

A starving mother carrying her ailing child is often the public face of famines and food shortages.

Climate shifts play an important role in the explosions of malaria and cholera outbreaks. Women receive less medical services than men. Worse, they bear the burden of caring for the sick.

Women have distinct nutritional needs that make coping with natural disasters tougher and harsher.

Even disaster rescue efforts discriminate against women. Women made up 90 per cent of the 140,000 people who died in a 1991 hurricane in Bangladesh. African-American women made up the majority of those killed and injured by Hurricane Katrina. In the 2006 tsunami that killed scores in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, male survivors outnumbered the female survivors 3 to 1 or 4 to 1.

In times of disaster and economic stress, women are the primary caregivers. They also carry out much of the household workload after a disaster.

All these realities should lead to a single resolve: the efforts to combat climate change and mitigate the risks and challenges it poses to communities should be gender sensitive and gender responsive. This means: policies should come to terms with the fact that women disproportionately shoulder the brunt of shocks and trends of climate and environment change in the face of continued poverty. They must recognize that this stems from the way people position women in society. They should understand that this is all about power -- and how power works to exclude and marginalize women. It is time to redress the subordinate position of women in all spheres of their lives.

This Congress will hopefully lead the way and set the guideposts.

As we push for gender responsive and gender sensitive responses to climate change problems –, we ought to lift the barriers to information, as rightly pointed out by the CAPWIP.

Women need solid grounding on issues such as climate change politics, climate

protection and preparedness through disaster risk reduction. Education and information are vital part of the effort to make women truly active in mitigation. Programs should explore how they might contribute to enable women and men's autonomous adaptation efforts, since we recognize that people adapt to climate change on their own. We should then lift the social, cultural and institutional barriers that constrain women from effectively adapting to climate change effects in order to seek welfare and well-being for themselves and their families.

As we raise awareness through information and education, we should begin to explore the most relevant and do-able gender-sensitive climate change adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction programs. They should be grounded on local needs and realities and not pose as lip service to the climate change agenda. This Congress will properly identify these and elaborate on them.

At the close of this Congress, we will call on the women of the world to engage with governments and communities to realize mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk programs that are truly attuned to their needs on the ground.

We will call on the parliaments and congresses across the globe to craft gender responsive development policy agendas and reforms that address climate change risks, people's adaptation and programs for mitigation.

Women have been silently and effectively at the frontlines of confronting climate change.

In the Micronesia, women farmers have developed their own useful knowledge of the islands' hydrology, enabling them to find water and dig out water wells during droughts.

A gender sensitive community education in Honduras, one that focused on warning systems and hazard management overseen by women, led to the prompt but orderly evacuation of the communities hard hit by Hurricane Mitch in 2004. This saved hundreds if not thousands of precious lives.

Kenya's Greenbelt Movement, relying on cadres of women engaged in massive reforestation, hopes to capture 350,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide, check soil erosion and revive lost ravaged watershed areas.

In the Philippines, women make up a sizable portion of workers, supporters and volunteers of Luntiang Pilipinas, a tree-planting and seed-donating foundation which I founded. It is now one of the most active organizations in the country's tree planting and reforestation work.

After this landmark effort of the CAPWIP, in partnership with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU),

the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Development Programme, at organizing this Congress, we expect a dramatic shift in the degree and scope of women's involvement in climate change and disaster risk reduction efforts. From the quiet but steady work they perform at their communities, they will move into the frontlines of pushing for good legislation and policy.

Women are powerful agents of change in the overall climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. We know this and we have a track record to prove this.

So much work remains to be done. And work, as this Congress implores us to do, we must.

Thank you and again, welcome to Manila.