

**SENATOR LOREN LEGARDA**  
**Opening Remarks**  
**Launch of “How Safe Is Your School?” Program**  
**21 November 2013 – Senate of the Philippines**

It is difficult to describe the challenges our nation faces today. Immense challenges would be an understatement.

This year, we have already experienced 25 typhoons, the strongest of which, Typhoon Yolanda, mercilessly pounded the Philippines so close to the heels of the powerful 7.2 magnitude earthquake that rocked Central Visayas.

Much has been said about the resilience of the Filipino people to immediately rise up disaster after every disaster. However, the threat of natural hazards and extreme

weather events to the survival of our communities, as evidenced by the impact of Yolanda to as many as 11 million of our people, requires us to match this strong spirit with the ability to act fast and act resolutely not only after disasters strike, but even in anticipation of natural hazards and extreme weather events. It is no longer an issue of how we are able to respond to calamities, but rather, how do we try to deter or minimize disasters from happening?

Among the most vulnerable to disasters are children. It is estimated that annually, they affect 66.5 million children. It is therefore important to make our communities, including our schools, disaster-resilient to put our children out of harm's way and keep their development

unhampered. When disasters strike, children become collateral damage because their schools are used as evacuation centers, assuming these schools survive the onslaught of extreme weather events at all.

The 7.2 magnitude earthquake in Bohol damaged at least 85 schools in Regions VI and VII; while Typhoon Yolanda caused damage to school infrastructure worth 174 Million pesos.

In 2010, the Department of Education inspected the safety of 685 schools in different parts in the country; 588 or 86% of these schools have structural defects. It is important to ask, “What has been done since?”

Today we are launching the UNISDR's "How Safe Is Your School?" Program to encourage everyone, especially students and teachers, to assess the safety of their schools not only in terms of ensuring the structural integrity of school buildings but also in making sure that programs are in place to prepare students and school staff in the event a natural hazard occurs.

We are greatly honored that we are joined today by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction, Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom, and Mr. Tohishiro Tanaka, the UNDP Country Director, in the launching of this urgent initiative.

We are also joined today by the Department of Education represented by Undersecretary Dina Ocampo and by student leaders from the Pasay City West High School led by their adviser, Ms. Arlene Joy Jacob.

Building the resilience of the education sector to disasters is a worthy investment. It brings the double benefit of saving lives and achieving our development goals. I therefore enjoin everyone to work with us in ensuring that our children's second homes are safe and secure.

Thank you.