Asian women peace advocates receive awards for their leadership, discuss women’s role in building peace and security through N-PEACE network

Bangkok, 19 October – Four women peace advocates from some of the most conflict affected countries in Asia received the first N-PEACE Awards established to acknowledge the leadership of women in building peace, empowering their communities and in preventing conflicts. Purna Shova Chitrakar, Electronita Duan, Shreen Abdul Saroor, Filomena Barros dos Reis- four women working at the grassroots and national levels remain at the frontlines of dealing with conflict and reconciling for peace. They were honored for their remarkable contributions to building peace and creating cohesion in their communities. The four awardees are part of a multi-country network known as N-PEACE www.n-peace.net --Engage for Peace, Equality, Access, Community and Empowerment.

“There are three women Nobel Peace Laureates and four women N-PEACE laureates, this is a great year”, said Irene Santiago, an active proponent of the Mindanao peace process in the Philippines, who joined the award ceremony and the meeting of women peace advocates in Bangkok this week. Some three dozen peace activists, all members of the N-PEACE Network from Nepal, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste, gathered to take stock of the ways in which they can strengthen women’s roles in building peace and security.

“Women can talk with a collective voice”, asserts Shreen from Sri Lanka, and adds “We, women, have experienced wars differently and have a unique perspective and specific concerns in connection to demilitarization, social justice and reconciliation. Women need to participate in vital aspects of peace and security such as ending impunity for conflict-related sexual violence and holding the perpetrators accountable while addressing the needs of women and girls as war-torn communities are rebuilt”. Shreen leads an interethnic community project that brings Tamil and Muslim women to resurrect peace for their communities. She has gathered and supported a multiethnic team of young women to inspire a next generation of peace makers and social activists in her country.

“I believe and trust in the work done by women at any level”, says Electronita from Indonesia, who cherishes the power of networking and advocates for “creating economic opportunities and providing education, the best strategies to prevent conflicts and ensure sustainable peace”.
With her likeminded pals, gathered in Bangkok, Purna Shova Chitrakar, an activist working tirelessly for banning landmine and cluster munitions, shared her “peace” of the story about protecting the civilians and making Nepal a prosperous society. Filomena brought her lessons from Timor-Leste, “We can only reach peace when justice has already been well established for all.”

Some 225 women who are community leaders in conflict prevention, dispute resolution, post-crisis reconstruction and peace-building, participate in the N-PEACE network and communicate online and through face-to-face consultations to share experiences and strategies in advocating, promoting and keeping peace in their countries. The N-Peace Network was launched in 2010 to mark the ten-year anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

“In just one year after its launch, the network has demonstrated its potential and value added at country level, says Nicholas Rosellini, UNDP Deputy Regional Director, Asia and the Pacific. “The national civil society dialogue which was hosted by UNDP and the Government of Indonesia to discuss policy on women, peace and security is a good example of how the network can be used as a platform for dialogue on critical policy issues”.

The consultation in Bangkok is the second annual meeting of the N-PEACE network which is facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the non-profit organization, Search for Common Ground, with support from AusAID. The event marks the formal launch of the network’s interactive internet portal www.n-peace.net through which members will continue to collaborate and work together.

The four who received the first N-PEACE Awards, are:

- **Nepal: Purna Shova Chitrakar** created the Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal in 1995 to promote an international ban on the use, production, transfer and stockpile of landmines. Purna works to teach families, students and teachers about the risks of landmines in their communities, especially in rural areas. Her efforts to outlaw these indiscriminate weapons of war were successful when in June of this year Nepal was declared landmine field free.

- **Indonesia: Electronita Duan** has been involved in numerous programs to empower women in Indonesia and helped develop Politeknik Perdamaian Halamahera, an institute of higher education for those whose studies were interrupted by conflict and who could not afford to resume their education. Electronita knew that normalcy could never return to conflict zones without a skilled and educated population.

- **Sri Lanka: Shreen Abdul Saroor** is a founder of the Mannar Women’s Development Federation and Mannar Women for Human Rights and Democracy in Sri Lanka. Shreen’s work grew out of her experience of being forcibly displaced in 1990 by the militant group fighting for a separate Tamil state. She helped establish these two organizations on the understanding that through microcredit and educational programs, Tamil and Muslim women could find common ground to resurrect past peace in their communities.

- **Timor-Leste: Filomena Barros dos Reis**, a human rights and justice activist, is the project coordinator for peace building development with the Asia Pacific Support Collective in Timor-Leste. Even before Timor-Leste secured its independence, she worked tirelessly to ensure a
credible truth and reconciliation process for her country and to ensure that human rights are protected, sometimes dressing as a nun and carrying religious material to protect her true purpose in documenting horrific human rights violations.

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**N-PEACE** is a multi-country network in support of strengthening the role of women in building and restoring peace

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