

UN-Habitat 2020 Executive Board Meeting:

Statement on behalf of Block by Block

As the Chair of the Block by Block Foundation, I am pleased to make this statement on behalf of our organisation.

The Block by Block Foundation empowers communities to turn neglected urban spaces into vibrant places that improve quality of life for all. Over the last 8 years, we have in partnership with UN-Habitat developed a unique methodology which uses the world's most popular computer game, Minecraft, as a participatory design tool which helps engage citizens who are typically left out decision making processes in their neighbourhood. Our work focuses on two areas; operational efforts such as public space projects on the ground, as well as our normative approach of developing policies and toolkits to embed the public space agenda in planning, legislative and financial frameworks in the long term.

Our close partnership with UN Habitat's Global Public Space Programme has helped us deliver 109 public space projects, impacting the lives of more than 1.7 million people to date. A working relationship built on trust and accountability has been central to our success, and I want to highlight the importance for NGOs and other organisations to partner with UN-Habitat on equal grounds.

In this Executive Board session we have specifically appreciated the approval of the partnership strategy and look forward to consultations in development of the implementation plan.

When we work with communities, it is our responsibility to ensure that we reach all sectors of society. Our use of the videogame Minecraft has helped us to engage with youth and children in a meaningful way, giving them the opportunity to shape the public spaces which they will grow up in. Our focus on inclusivity also means working in fragile environments with marginalised group including migrants and refugee communities, who may not have access to safe and good quality public spaces.

In both the implementation of projects and advocacy of our work, we strive to combine the benefits of hard data with personal and emotional narratives. People are at the center of any good public space, and communicating their stories is an important part of our mission. As an example of this, we created a video which revisited one of our projects in Kosovo, 5 years after the public space had been built. Speaking to some of the young residents who had participated in the original workshop, we learned how it had made a difference in their lives, as well as the wider community. This video was shared at Minecraft's annual show, watched by over 100 million people worldwide, promoting the cause of public space to a fresh, new audience.

Finally, in our efforts to continuously adapt to a changing context we have developed a strong response to the COVID-19 pandemic. By prioritizing support for communities where we are already active, we have been able to provide immediate emergency funding in 10 countries. We have also adapted our own methodology to cope with travel restrictions by introducing remote workshops and training sessions in Minecraft.

In what has been a challenging year, we are hugely grateful to UN-Habitat for our collaboration and look forward to another year of strong partnership even further strengthening UN Habitat's focus on disadvantaged and marginalised groups such as women, youth, refugees, migrants and stateless persons. Thank you.