

cover letter

to United Nations/ Special Procedures Branch
 to the attention of Beatriz Balbin
 from Ben van Berkel
 date 17 May 2023
 regarding UA OTH 49/2023 – Joint urgent appeal special procedures

Dear Mr. Rajagopal, Mr. Gillett, Mrs. Yeophantong, Mr. Tidball-Binz and Mrs. Khan,

Thank you for your letter dated 28 April 2023. As a modern and creative company committed to designing buildings for lasting impact, contributing to societal challenges of urbanization, social inequality, climate change, and aging populations, UNStudio takes its human rights responsibilities seriously and is committed to upholding the highest standards in all its projects. Working with 300 employees from 27 countries for more than 30 years, we've learned to respect cultural and political differences. We try to bridge those differences in close cooperation with our clients and especially in our designs we have the ambition to create a better, more social and future-proof world.

Based on the above we acknowledge your concerns and appreciate the opportunity to respond to the questions you have raised. The points you raise deal with complex social and cultural issues, and it is important that all parties involved approach them with sensitivity and respect for the local communities. On the specific matter of the development in NEOM, we would like to clarify that we are proud and honored to work on this unique, innovative, sustainable, and world-changing initiative and that we are committed to respecting human rights, including the rights of indigenous peoples, as set out in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. We are aware of the concerns and cases raised by local residents in your letter and more specific the Howeitat tribe, and we are willing to work with our partners and stakeholders to address these concerns, including through regular and transparent consultation processes.

As a responsible but relatively small business, UNStudio has not an extensive human rights due diligence framework in place but we engage with local communities, study human rights impact assessments, and regularly monitor and evaluate our projects. We are committed to addressing any significant human rights issues that we become aware of and will take (together with our partners/clients) appropriate actions where necessary.

In terms of our previous projects, we are proud of our work in Doha, Qatar, where we incorporated a clause against violation of human rights and safety & security in our contracts and closely monitored these issues to ensure compliance. We also ceased all work in Russia following the Netherlands' announcement of boycott measures in connection with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As an accountable European firm, UNStudio is fully committed to following all the EU's human rights sanctions and relevant requirements. We continuously observe the imposed sanctions or limitations by the European Commission and act accordingly.

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UNStudio welcomes opportunities to engage with civil society and other stakeholders on these issues. We have established effective grievance mechanisms in our own company and are committed to cooperating with relevant authorities to address any human rights violations that may arise in the context of our projects.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and would like to assure you that we take our human rights responsibilities seriously. We look forward to further dialogue with you on these important issues.

Sincerely,



Mr. Ben van Berkel
Founder Van Berkel en Bos U.N. Studio B.V.

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