PRESS RELEASE

Digital technology to increase participation of women, youth in reconstruction of Gaza Strip

Gaza, 13 December 2016

With financial support of the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium, UN-Habitat and UN Women have launched a new innovative Programme to advance women's and youth's rights to participate in reconstruction and recovery efforts in Gaza.

Implemented in cooperation with the Palestinian Housing Council, AISHA Association for Women and Child Protection, and GGateway for Outsourcing Information Technology, the "**Utilizing Digital Tools to Promote Human Rights and Create Inclusive Public Spaces in the Gaza Strip**" will support the design and implementation of three inclusive, safe and accessible public spaces through the utilization of digital technologies.

The UN-Habitat-UN Women joint programme will take advantage of digital tools and video games such as MineCraft and SaftiPin to support engagement of communities in the design of their public spaces, linking simultaneously with selected female architects from Gaza trained on the use of digital technologies for the development of gender inclusive, safe and accessible public spaces free from violence against women.

The programme will work in parallel on building the capacity of local councils and professionals on the use of digital technologies to better inform citizens on planning, land and development available, through developing interactive municipal website.

Coalitions for change

H.E. Bruno Jans, the Consul General of Belgium said: *"In this challenging world, the classical recipes of development cooperation will no longer be sufficient. In order to obtain sustainable results, we have to establish coalitions for change, and for development, involving as many actors as possible, including children, young, graduates and women".*

Zeyad Elshakra, UN-Habitat Officer in Charge in Palestine said: "*The provision of safe and inclusive public spaces results in improved standards of living for all, and become a key enabler for the fulfillment of human rights. Utilizing digital technology such as MineCraft will boost community engagement, especially youth, in the design process of their public spaces, which will strengthen their sense of community ownership*".

Sabine Machl, UN Women Special Representative in Palestine said: "*We believe that the reconstruction in Gaza provides a powerful window of opportunity for change and fulfillment of the rights of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. In this process, active participation of all and the establishment of a social dialogue on urban development issues is critical, and digital technologies provide those avenues for women and youth to engage*".

Research has demonstrated that digital technology provides new avenues for youth and women through which to become informed, shape opinions, and get organized, countering challenges often faced by these

groups in accessing public space and decision-making. Access to information is critical to individuals and communities to effectively have a say in the decisions that affect their life.

The innovative and positive use of digital technologies in the new UN-Habitat-UN Women joint programme will actively help strengthen the relationship between the local authorities and communities, increase civic engagement of all citizens, and promote good governance.