



**Testimony before the Community Forum on
Parks & Waterfront Access on the East Side
September 8, 2011**

Good evening. I am Meredith Ledlie, the Outreach Coordinator at New Yorkers for Parks. New Yorkers for Parks is the citywide research and advocacy organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. Thank you Senator Krueger, Assembly Member Kavanagh, and Council Member Garodnick for your efforts to solicit public input around this important issue. We applaud you for acknowledging that the potential alienation of Robert Moses Playground should only occur if proper parkland alienation process is followed and adequate replacement parkland is guaranteed.

New Yorkers for Parks carefully monitors instances of parkland alienation across the five boroughs, and we have been tracking the potential alienation of Robert Moses Playground since 2004. Parkland is a precious commodity and is sheltered by the Public Trust Doctrine, a concept that affords the greatest legal protection to parks and other lands held in the public's trust. In a city of over 8 million people, every acre of open space is critical to residents' health and quality-of-life. When alienation does occur, New Yorkers for Parks' first priority is to ensure that replacement parkland is provided as quickly as possible within the community.

New Yorkers for Parks supports the current proposal to transfer a portion of Robert Moses Playground to the United Nations, with the understanding that revenue from the sale will be directed toward the expansion of the East River Esplanade and that even more parkland than that lost at Robert Moses will be created for the neighborhood, between the Esplanade expansion and the potential closing of Asser Levy Place for a new playground.. We do not endorse this alienation lightly. When it comes to access to open space provision, east midtown is one of the most underserved neighborhoods in the City. New Yorkers for Parks' most recent *City Council District Profiles* found that Council District 4 ranks last among the 51 districts in the city. Because of the neighborhood's extraordinary density and high real estate values, it is unlikely that a significant amount of new parkland will be created in the future, so this opportunity is rare and must be thoughtfully implemented.

It is our conclusion that this current proposal is an example of "trading up" in terms of parkland. A contiguous East River Greenway would provide new, unique recreational opportunities to this community, not to mention access to this waterfront for the first time in decades, and the potential development of a new replacement playground would result in a net increase of parkland in Community Board 6. We encourage public officials to commit to a community process that allows for significant input into the design of both a waterfront park and replacement playground to ensure that if Robert Moses Playground is alienated, the new open spaces meet the needs of area residents.

New Yorkers for Parks looks forward to engaging with the community and public officials in a continuing dialogue about this issue. We view this as an extraordinary opportunity for the City's park system, but it must be done with due process and careful consideration to ensure a win-win for both Community District 6 and the United Nations. Thank you.