

Dear Colleagues,

At our upcoming virtual staff meeting, I have asked our leadership to reflect on the topic of equity, which as you know, is core to our mission. Recent events here in the United States have brought this issue to the forefront in new and important ways, which has sent ripples around the world, often underscoring similar racial tensions elsewhere.

The murder of George Floyd under the knee of a police officer has been a stark sign that in so many ways, we are going backwards, not forwards. I want to state clearly that ITDP stands in support of Black Lives Matter, and with the majority of protesters in 150+ US cities and in cities worldwide, from Berlin to Brazil, who have been protesting peacefully and meaningfully. Over the last weeks as protests intensified, we have been using our social media channels to amplify the voices of US partners, as well as others working in this space, both in transport justice and addressing systemic racism.

Equity has been core to our mission since our founding for a specific reason: throughout history, cities and transport systems, like most systems, have been built to further discrimination. Highways and railroads have been built to literally segregate people in cities across the US and across the world. The essential work of transport and urban planners must be to permeate those walls and create cities for all people.

As a global organization, we know that injustice is apparent on our streets and transit systems in many ways. In every place we work, from Rio to Rwanda, there is a unique set of circumstances that represents similar deeply rooted oppressions and tensions. Over the last few years, nearly all of our offices have seen increased violence, unrest, and protests around police and government brutality, such as the uprising in Kashmir and police killings in Brazil. All of these have their own unique cultural complexities, but the desperation and urgency of these movements have a lot in common.

In the United States, racial injustice appears on our streets in many ways. I was struck by this statement in a thoughtful letter from our partners at Transportation Alternatives: "Black Americans are more likely to be killed while crossing the street and cycling on it. Drivers are less likely to yield the right of way to Black men. Black people are more likely to be summonsed while cycling. Black communities are more likely to be impacted by environmental injustice, like air pollution and a lack of access to public space. In New York City, Black people receive the vast majority of jaywalking summonses, the majority of summonses related to social distancing, and are disproportionately stopped and frisked. This systematized racism impacts which communities receive traffic safety improvements, which drivers police choose to stop, and on and on."

Around the world we can point to pockets of strength as our ITDP teams address the depths of inequities. Our Brazil team in particular has made strides in this area and has instigated more attention to this issue across our organization. I want you to know that you are part of an organization that is already doing something. We are not silent on these points. But we can and will do more.

We must use our power and privilege to put change into action. We must be better anti-racists. We must be better allies to communities of color and other mistreated people around the world. We must listen to voices that have been marginalized and provide platforms for them to be heard and amplified. We must provide opportunities within our own organization to bring in diverse perspectives and to support the leaders of the future.

I commit to you that we will take a deep look at our current systems and take action to improve. Here are a few things that we are already doing:

Diversifying our Board. One of our newest Board members brought on last year, Rehana Moosajee, is particularly vocal about inequality and injustice and was invited on to the Board exactly to push us on these issues. This is only the first step, and we are actively working to ensure that our board better represents the cities where we work.

Creating a Diversity and Inclusion (DE&I) Policy. Last year, we decided to prioritize efforts to improve our internal practices regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. This includes the establishment of a standing committee comprising representatives from all our offices to ensure internal improvement and accountability on these matters.

A More Meaningful Stance on Equity. Although we often address equity in our communications, we are not specific and strong enough. I commit to being more vocal about these issues, including being transparent about commitments and practices programmatically and operationally so that others can hold us accountable. We cannot use just equity as a buzzword without a comparable commitment to implementing it.

During our meeting, we will begin the conversation. I look forward to continuing the discussion in the months to come as we make this a priority.

With all my best,
Heather



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