Comments by Jessica Clemente, Nos Quedamos’ CEO, During Ribbon-cutting / Park Dedication Ceremony of Yolanda García Park on Tuesday, June 18, 2019.

Thank you Commissioner Silva, Commissioner Rodríguez, Bronx Borough President Díaz Jr., Councilmember Salamanca, Congressman Serrano, Assemblymember Blake, Community Board 3 and all of the community partners, leaders and friends who supported the “Friends of Yolanda García Park” efforts! We did this together!

Good Morning Everyone. I am Jessica Clemente and I am proud to say I am the CEO of We Stay/Nos Quedamos.

It was Yolanda’s pride, passion and tenacity that made Nos Quedamos possible. It is that spirit and empowerment, that drew me to Nos Quedamos and why I felt compelled to pick up the baton.

Fundamentally, I believe in what Yolanda García believed in 25 years ago. The community with one voice can change their reality!

Outraged by the injustice of their displacement, the local community banded together to create the We Stay/Nos Quedamos Committee in 1993 with Yolanda leading the charge.

This lead to the unprecedented passing of the community-led alternative proposal, the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Plan.
We are proud to have been an agent of change in our community; where the transformation has included:

● The development of affordable housing for more than 4000 families,
● More than 400 new homeowners in the Melrose community
● The addition of nearly one million square feet of commercial real estate space
● This neighborhood revitalization plan earned first Stage II LEED-ND Silver certification in New York State under the LEED for Neighborhood Development Pilot Program. Certification of this plan at the Silver level not only raises awareness of what has been accomplished in the South Bronx, but also increases public confidence in the sustainable redevelopment of other urban neighborhoods across the country.
● Direct Social Services, serving approximately 3,000 clients annually
● Advocacy for the preservation of affordable housing, open space, environmental health and social justice
● A total investment value of approximately $451,215,000 in Melrose
Now, with intergenerational changes in leadership and the demographic shifts in our larger community—we build on legacy and use this to demonstrate how much further we can go when we know our history and feel empowered to change our future even when things seem out of reach.

Eight years ago, Nos Quedamos was in dire straits and most counted us out. In its darkest hour, I was asked to lead Nos Quedamos, while the decision was not an easy one to make, understanding to a degree, the personal sacrifice and sweat equity that would be required of me.

I felt it was my obligation as someone who grew up in this community, who fought alongside Yolanda for environmental justice to do whatever I could to safeguard and rebuild—determined to reach our full potential against all odds.

Yolanda once said—“We Stay” is not only our name, it is our mission. This is true in more ways than one.

It’s important to say...this mission is not won alone...our success is the result of the unwavering commitment, hard work and dedication of the Nos Quedamos team (past and present).

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly give a special recognition to our Board who stepped up. Anna Vincenty who I respect, is my mentor and true link to the integrity of the past.

Ely/Awilda who stood with me from the beginning when there was no funding for two years. And yet we still worked to keep the doors open and continued to provide social services to the community. To Eddie and Lydia our dynamic communications and development duo, Rafa, our community advocate/organizer, Ilaine, social services, Antonio and Susie our facilities support team. Of course, Ana and Anthony who are no longer with us, but their contribution is valued.

Partners/Advisors—Petr and Jeremy Stand

Last, but not least, my family who support me.

Thank you!

Today, we celebrate Yolanda García, we celebrate Melrose and we celebrate the rebirth of Nos Quedamos!!
This park represents one of many small victories for Nos Quedamos and our community. *It was our intent to shine the light on our collective resilience!* 

While the physical regeneration of our communities have improved, a lot of the issues that plague our community 25 years ago are still present.

This is a great time to reflect and engage the community to stand again with us and lead on issues that demand community leadership (preservation of affordable housing and displacement pressures, top-down land use decisions that are encroaching Melrose (from the Jerome Rezoning to the Southern Blvd. Rezoning) and defining what community ownership means to us, to name a few.

It is imperative for our community (both old and new) to understand and appreciate what community power and local victories look like when we are bold and tenacious.

To be heard, respected and valued. Yolanda and Nos Quedamos symbolized this.. then and now!

Nos Quedamos is and will always be about the impacted community standing up, speaking out and defining what is sustainable growth for our community.

**We stayed, We engaged, We empower, We transform!**