

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20004

Memorandum

To : Members of the Council

From : 
Nyasha Smith, Secretary to the Council

Date : February 14, 2020

Subject : Referral of Proposed Legislation

Notice is given that the attached proposed legislation was introduced in the Office of the Secretary on Thursday, February 13, 2020. Copies are available in Room 10, the Legislative Services Division.

TITLE: "Commission on the Arts and Humanities Dr. Heran Sereke-Brhan Confirmation Resolution of 2020", PR23-0694

INTRODUCED BY: Chairman Mendelson at the request of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities

The Chairman is referring this legislation to the Committee of the Whole.

Attachment

cc: General Counsel
Budget Director
Legislative Services



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMISSION ON THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

2020 FEB 13 PM 12: 57

Kay Kendall
Chairperson

February 13, 2020

The Honorable Phil Mendelson
Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 504
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson:

In accordance with section 2 of the Confirmation Act of 1978, effective March 3, 1979 (D.C. Law 2-142; D.C. Official Code § 1-523.01), and pursuant to section 6 of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities Act, effective October 21, 1975 (D.C. Law 1-22; D.C. Official Code § 39-205 (a)), I am pleased to nominate the following person for appointment:

Heran Sereke-Brhan, PhD
3900 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20011
(Ward 4)

as the new Executive Director of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities, for a renewable 4-year term. Dr. Sereke-Brhan's nomination was unanimously agreed to by roll call vote of all active members of the Commission at the regular and properly noticed meeting of the Commission on January 16, 2020.

Enclosed you will find biographical information that details Dr. Sereke-Brhan's professional experience, together with a proposed resolution to assist the Council during the Council's confirmation process.

On behalf of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities, I respectfully request that the Council please formally consider, for confirmation, Dr. Sereke-Brhan's above-referenced nomination. Please do not hesitate to contact me, should the Council require additional information regarding the above-referenced nomination.

Sincerely,

Kay Kendall



Chairman Phil Mendelson
at the Request of the Chairperson of
the Commission on the Arts and
Humanities

A PROPOSED RESOLUTION

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

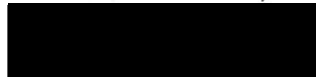
Chairman Phil Mendelson, at the request of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities, introduced the following resolution, which was referred to the Committee on

To confirm the appointment of Dr. Heran Sereke-Brhan as the new Executive Director of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, that this resolution may be cited as the "Commission on the Arts and Humanities Dr. Heran Sereke-Brhan Confirmation Resolution of 2020".

Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia confirms, for a renewable 4-year term, the appointment of:

Heran Sereke-Brhan, PhD



(Ward 4)

as the new Executive Director of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities, pursuant to section 6 of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities Act, effective October 21, 1975 (D.C. Law 1-22; D.C. Official Code § 39-205 (a)).

Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia shall transmit a copy of this resolution, upon its adoption, to the nominee and to the Chairperson of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.

Heran Sereke-Brhan
Acting Executive Director
Commission on the Arts and Humanities
Biography



Acting Executive Director Heran Sereke-Brhan has been Senior Grants Officer for CAH since July 2017. Prior to joining CAH, she served as Deputy Director for the Mayor’s Office on African Affairs. Heran has spent over two decades studying and conducting research on African histories and cultures. Having grown up enjoying music and theatre performances in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where many of the artists were personal friends of her family, Heran understood how the arts nurtured the imagination and created community connection. As a way of giving back, Heran later compiled and edited several works of such notable Ethiopian artists as playwright and national poet laureate Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, painter-poet Gebre-Kristos Desta, and poet and art critic Solomon Deresa, thereby preserving and transmitting their works for posterity.

While a graduate student, she was a founding member of inter-disciplinary and performance groups *Monumental Discoveries*, *Mwendo Black Theatre and Creative Arts Group* and *Amka Africa*. Heran has contributed towards a number of film projects and served as host for a weekly radio program on WDBM in East Lansing, Michigan. As an academic, she has explored aspects of social and political history and the role of women in 19th and 20th century Ethiopia, as well as topics in art history and intellectual property issues for Africa.

In her role as Academic Director following graduate school, Heran successfully integrated traditional and contemporary arts and humanities into a semester-long study abroad program for the School for International Training. She has worked at a number of cultural and educational institutions, including the Harn Museum at the University of Florida, Addis Ababa University, and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art.

Heran holds a PhD in History with minors in African American and Caribbean History and African Art History from Michigan State University.

HERAN SEREKE-BRHAN

Curriculum Vitae

Education

Ph.D. in History. Michigan State University, East Lansing. December 2002. Major: Sub-Saharan Africa. Minors: African Art History, African-American and Caribbean History.
Dissertation: "Building Bridges, Drying Bad Blood: Elite Marriages, Politics, and Ethnicity in 19th and 20th century Imperial Ethiopia."

M.A. in History. Michigan State University, East Lansing. May 1994. Major: Sub-Saharan Africa.
Thesis: "Ethiopia: A Historical Consideration of Amhara Identity."

B.A. in Political, Legal, Economic Analysis. Mills College, Oakland, California. May 1990.

Professional Profile

Dedicated advocate for the promotion of African arts and cultures; demonstrated vision of and commitment to public education through the arts; knowledge of local and international African arts communities; demonstrated research interests in African and African Diaspora visual, literary, and performance arts and cultures; publications, and presentations on issues of intellectual property, African culture production, and creative economies; excellent analytical, strategic thinking, oral and written communication and research skills; advanced knowledge in grant management and arts administration; bilingual fluency (English and Amharic), and proficiency in French.

Professional Experience: Arts & Humanities

DC Commission of Arts and Humanities:

FY2015 Special Arts Initiative: Innovate DC Advisory Review Panelist. Evaluated applicant proposals for visionary ideas in the arts and creative economy that embodied innovation, responsiveness, and broad transformative impact in the cultural life of the District. Active participant providing constructive comments during Advisory Review Panel meeting.

FY2015 Sister Cities International Arts Grant (SCIAG) Advisory Review Panelist
Participated in reviewer training. Evaluated applicant proposals for artistic content, impact and engagement, capacity and sustainability and overall quality. Active participant providing constructive comments during Advisory Review Panel meeting.

MUSEUM & VISUAL ARTS:

Member, Ethiopian National Museum delegation to the 2nd Pan-African Cultural Festival. July 5-20, 2009.

Instrumental in the conceptual development and implementation of exhibition- and performance-related activities. Translated and contributed to the staged performance of *Dinqinesh Abesha* (Africa the Wondrous), a musical play by Ayalneh Mulatu. Algiers, Algeria.

Consultant, Harn Museum, University of Florida. 2005-2007.

Consultant and active member of team that developed curatorial theme for the exhibition, *Continuity and Change: Three Generations of Ethiopian Artists*. Project liaison and logistics coordinator, handling proper registration, insurance arrangements and international shipment of artworks. Contributor to exhibition catalog. Hosted final exhibition talk at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University. Washington, D.C. and Addis Ababa.

Curatorial Assistant and Education Specialist, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institute. January 2003-September 2003.

Active part of team that conceptualized curatorial theme and selected participating artists in the exhibition *Ethiopian Passages: Dialogues in the Diaspora*. Developed, managed, and implemented educational programs in conjunction with exhibition. Created outreach programs, including the successful 'Community Day' exhibition launch, a film series by locally based

Ethiopian filmmakers, and events showcasing national Ethiopian literary and performance artists. Assisted in educational programming for the concurrent Moroccan textile exhibition by inviting acclaimed Moroccan filmmaker to discuss and show his work. Assisted in fundraising efforts for *Ethiopian Passages*. Liaised between Curatorial, Education, and External Affairs Departments. Washington, D. C., USA.

Minority Student Fellow, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution. Summer, 2001. Began research for an exhibition titled *All that Glitters is not Gold*, then worked with the contemporary African art curator to develop the proposal for *Ethiopian Passages: Dialogues in the Diaspora* instead. Contributed ideas for the conceptual parameters of the exhibition, educational programming, community outreach, and fundraising.

Research Assistant. Michigan State University Museum. 1992-1994.
Media Assistant and member of team developing educational component of the exhibition, *Ethiopia –Traditions of Creativity*. Created community outreach programs and events to introduce aspects of Ethiopian culture, including the Inkutatash Ethiopian New Year ceremony and an Ethiopian film festival, showcasing works by and about Ethiopians.

FILM:

Discussant, 'Modernity, Fascism & Resistance: How Four Ethiopians Confronted, Maneuvered and Survived the War of 1935-41' presentation by NYU professor and filmmaker Yemane I. Demissie. Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimo, NYU Film School, 6 February, 2020.

Produced short film *Ethiopia in Movement*, on conference roundtable themes sponsored by the Fredrick S. Pardee Center for the Longer-Range Future, Boston University. 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, October/November, 2012. [Linked [here](#)]

Narrator and translator, *The Parchment Makers: An Ancient Art in Modern Day Ethiopia*, a documentary film on the making and use of parchment in northern Ethiopia. Reviewed in *African Arts* (Vol. 35, No. 3, Autumn 2002) with special mention of narration. Michigan State University and Hope College, 2000.

Member of three-person team creating English captions for Howard University Professor of Film, Haile Gerima's and his acclaimed work *Teza*, 2008. Also conducted history research for his film *Adwa*, 1999.

RADIO:

Sheger Radio 102.1 FM (independent radio in Ethiopia), 'Shwa Bitin MusiQa' weekly music program. Program disc jockey and host, 2009. Voluntary community service.

WDBM-FM 89.7, Student Radio at Michigan State University. Program disc jockey and host of "Uhuru-Admas the Freedom Sounds of African Horizons" a three-hour weekly African music radio program. 1993-1997. Voluntary community service.

Related Interests & Activities:

Commissioned translator of study, *Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Twenty Ethnic Groups North of the Omo River in South Nation Nationality People Regional State (SNNPR)* by the Ethiopian Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage in collaboration with Addis Ababa UNESCO Office. Addis Ababa, April 2009.

Founding member of *Monumental Discoveries*, an inter-disciplinary graduate student group that organized arts and culture events for the Michigan State University campus community and the public.

MWENDO: Black Theater & Creative Arts Group, Michigan State University. Founding member. Member of Board of Directors for former MWENDO: Black Theater Creative Arts Company in Lansing, 1993-1996.

AMKA AFRICA an African and African Diaspora performance group, Michigan State University. Founding member and dancer, 1993.

Professional Experience

Interim Executive Director, Commission on the Arts and Humanities,
Government of the District of Columbia
October 2019 – Present

Overseeing agency operations, budget and personnel functions; directing the work of diverse staff of 34 multifaceted professionals and establishing agency priorities and performance standards; cultivating a positive and collaborative workplace culture; working with staff and Commissioners to establish grants protocols and determining processes; ensuring agency responsiveness to needs of constituents; keeping apprised of emergent policy issues and legislation as it pertains to agency's independent status; working closely with Commission in formulating agency priorities and direction; preparing for agency's annual performance oversight and budget hearings;

Senior Grants Officer, Commission on the Arts and Humanities,
Government of the District of Columbia
July 2017-October 2019

Oversee disbursement of annual \$21,000,000 in grants budget and manage processing of over 600 awards assessed through a peer-review process annually engaging 140 volunteer panelists; direct 12 grant programs from application through award, including fellowships, general operating, project and capacity-building support; hire, train and supervise diverse staff of nine, including grant managers, administrative staff and contractors; assist in agency reporting for grant funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and for agency performance and budget hearing, including analysis of data.

Deputy Director, Mayor's Office on African Affairs, Government of the District of Columbia
February 2014-July 2017

Responsible for participating in, and supervise planning, directing, and coordinating of general and core programming activities of the Office on African Affairs, including the Multicultural Awareness-Building and Development program that showcase discussions and dialogues on the linguistic and cultural diversity of African residents of the District. Advocate on behalf of African residents to ensure that they have equal access to government programs by addressing a range of staffing, funding, and policy issues that affect the availability and quality of services to District residents. Provide efficient, effective and timely grants management to grantees by maintaining and enhancing the grant application processes; providing support and technical assistance for grantees; conducting timely application reviews; issuing grant award notices; and developing performance metrics for various grant processes. Seek new opportunities for community-based organizations for funding, technical assistance, and coalition building. Implement opportunities for collaborative partnerships among the public, private, and non-governmental sectors to secure additional services for African residents.

Research and Development Associate, Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.
July 2010 – December 2013.

Managing the organization's international education development project, creating fundraising materials, and identifying new areas of program expansion. Coordinate annual national conference on African refugee and immigrant issues: conceptualizing theme; identifying and inviting speakers; evaluating and selecting workshop proposals; negotiating venue and contract

details; managing conference team; overseeing and implementing all logistics related to conference planning. Arlington, Virginia.

Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Fredrick S. Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future, Boston University. September 2009-May 2010.

Conducted research on intellectual property rights and culture production for Africa. Published a Working Paper case study of Ethiopian gourmet coffees and trademark rights. Managed and organized conference and edited conference report titled *Africa 2060: The Good News from Africa* as part of Pardee Fellows team. Advised graduate students and evaluated their semester-long participation in creating this report. Boston.

Managing Editor, African Review of Books (ARB). December 2008-March 2009.

Edited inter-disciplinary article contributions, and solicited book reviews, review articles, and essays with critical analyses, reflections, and debates about Africa. The ARB is a publication of Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), a continent-wide scholarly publication reviewing works in the social sciences, humanities, and the creative arts. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Consulting Editor, Addis Ababa University Press. December 2008-July 2009.

Initiated and managed publication projects, introducing new ideas in arts publications. Facilitated reprints of valuable out-of-print works. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Academic Director for School for International Training (SIT) Study Abroad, Ethiopia, August 2006-July 2008

Served as the first Academic Director. Responsible for academic and administrative components of the program titled 'Sacred Traditions and Visual Cultures'. Actively created program and developed program content, managed program budget and office staff. Organized and delivered students' cross-cultural orientation, taught research methodology class and guided their overall semester-long learning process. Negotiated cost-effective arrangements and organized domestic educational excursions. Managed all logistics associated with students' stay. Facilitated and maintained constructive relationships between SIT students, staff and faculty, and host country nationals. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Maintained regular communication with SIT Study Abroad office in Brattleboro. Submitted detailed, timely reports. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Assistant Professor at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University. February 2005-August 2006.

Co-taught a graduate course on inter-disciplinary perspectives on Ethiopian Studies. Part of faculty that developed an inter-disciplinary graduate program in Ethiopian Studies launched in Fall 2005. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Publications

Compiled & Edited Volumes:

Soaring on Winged Verse: The Life of Ethiopian Poet-Playwright Tsegaye Gabre Medhin by Fasil Yitbarek. Tsehai Publishers, Loyola Marymount University, 2013.

Special Issue of the Journal of Ethiopian Studies in honor of Richard and Rita Pankhurst. Vol. XL, Nos. 1-2, 2007, (Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, published in June 2011).

Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, Tarikawi Tewnetoch (Historical Plays). An anthology in Amharic of four works by Ethiopian Poet Laureate Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin. Addis Ababa University Press, June 2011.

Gebre Kristos Desta – Expansive Pathway... Lifetime Traveler – An anthology of poetry (Amharic with English renderings). Germany: Engelhardt & Bauer, 2006.

Essays & Monographs:

"Introduction" in *Soaring on Winged Verse: The Life of Ethiopian Poet-Playwright Tsegaye Gabre Medhin* by Fasil Yitbarek. Tsehai Publishers, Loyola Marymount University, 2013.

Coffee, Culture, and Intellectual Property: Lessons from Africa from the Ethiopian Fine Coffee Initiative. The Pardee Papers / No. 11 / July 2010. Boston University: The Fredrick S. Pardee Center for the Longer-Range Future.

"Foreword" in *Empress Taitu*, a play (in Amharic) by renowned poet and playwright Getinet Enyew. Addis Ababa University Press, 2008.

Book Review. Solomon Addis, *History of Gondar*. In *African Studies Review*, September Issue 51 No. 2, 2008.

Articles:

Heran Sereke-Brhan and Shiferaw Bekele. "Fluorescence of the Arts in the "New Flower" (Addis Ababa) before 1974." In *Continuity and Change: Three Generations of Ethiopian Artists*. Gainesville: Samuel P. Harn Museum, University of Florida, 2007.

"Gebre Kristos Desta: The Painter's Eye, the Poet's Hand," in *Gebre Kristos Desta —The Painter-Poet*, edited by Elizabeth W. Giorgis, Yonas Admassu, Birhanu Teferra. Germany: Engelhardt & Bauer, 2006.

" "Like Adding Water to Milk": Marriage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Ethiopia," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 38, 1 (2005), 49-77.

"Ethiopia: A Historical Consideration of Amhara Ethnicity" in *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 1, edited by Harold G. Marcus. Red Sea Press: Lawrenceville, NJ, 1994. pp. 742—774.

Professional and Public Presentations

Moderator. Young African Professional Network April Speaker Series, "The Blurred Lines between Innovation, Imitation, and Homage: Panel Discussion on Intellectual Property." Reeves Center, Washington DC, April 24, 2015.

"Legacies of the Italian Occupation of Ethiopia" international symposium. Presenter on panels for Plays & Performance and Literature & Storytelling. New York University, Casa Italiana Zarilli-Marimò, October 24, 2014.

"When International Becomes Local: Immigration in the D.C. Metro Area." Panel presenter and participant at Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum's symposium *Revisiting Our Black Mosaic*. Woodrow Wilson Center, September 19, 2014.

Presenter and coordinator of roundtable discussion "Human Development in the Longer Range Future of North East Africa, 2060AD" sponsored by the Fredrick S. Pardee Center for the Longer-Range Future, Boston University. 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Dire Dawa, October/November, 2012. Producer of short film *Ethiopia in Movement* documenting panel participants and conference for Pardee Center, 2013.

"Coffee, Culture, and Intellectual Property." Delivered at The Walter Rodney African Studies Seminar, African Studies Center, Boston University, April 2011.

"Coffee, Culture, and Intellectual Property: Lessons from Africa from the Ethiopian Fine Coffee Initiative." Featured speaker, Library of Congress, Hebraic Section, African and Middle Eastern Division, March 2011.

Featured speaker, Schomburg Distinguished Visiting Scholars Program, Ramapo College of New Jersey, February 2011.

"Currents & Happenings in African Film and Music" Delivered at *Africa 2060: The Good News from Africa*. Delivered at conference by Boston University's Fredrick S. Pardee Center for the Longer-Range Future, April 2010.

Languages

Fluent in Amharic (Ethiopian language), English, and proficient in spoken and written French.