

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Haile Gerima <hgerima@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, October 4, 2020 7:35 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: Dr. Heran Sereke-Brhan Confirmation

5 October 2020

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

Dear Chairman Mendelson,

I write to you regarding the consideration of PR23-694, “Commission on the Arts and Humanities Dr. Heran Sereke-Brhan Confirmation Resolution of 2020” by the Committee of the Whole. I am happy to offer testimony in support of Dr. Sereke-Brhan’s confirmation.

I first met Heran when she started her graduate studies at Michigan State University in the 1990s and have been aware of her throughout her professional working life. As a student at such a young age, I found her to be a very serious student of history, literature and above all the cultural dynamics of the African World over.

As a professor of film at Howard University, I immediately recognized her compassion and thirst for knowledge, specifically for African and African American cultural expression. Years later, I had the opportunity to observe her from a much closer vantage point. At the time, Heran was in a leadership position, where she proved to be a cornerstone to the workings and vision of a Pan African Student Organization. She demonstrated her talent for organizational development and communication in the way she navigated effectively amongst a very diverse group of Pan-African graduate students comprised of African, African-American, and Caribbean students.

Her commitment to life-long learning and development in her craft has enabled her to bring to center stage the vast library of the cultural wealth of the Africa diaspora, primarily as it relates to history, culture, and politics. Under such rich foundations she has transformed conversations surrounding music, art and culture of the African Diaspora. From the time she was a graduate student, Dr. Heran created humanities-based programs artists and filmmakers with artists and filmmakers at their core, thereby enriching student and the wider university community with black perspectives in extra-curricular discussions.

From this sound foundation of study and theory, Heran continued her intellectual activism on behalf of black artistic productions. Her depth of knowledge in my own educational and

professional concentrations, which happen to be African and the African American cinematic movement, show her to be not only a rigorous student of the expression but among the most active proponents of the art form. Heran's focus has been on bringing about a very broad cultural form of interactions of the artistic world with that of the very community it explores and mutually benefits. She has worked in Africa as well as in the USA to connect people and resources. She has continued to create safe spaces and forms through which intellectual activism and African-centered artistic production can reach underrepresented communities as well as the public at large.

After years spent continuing her work in Africa, Heran relocated to Washington DC, where she and a network of community stakeholders helped to organize 'Streams of a River: African and African-American History and Identity' an event showcasing my film works and hosted at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art. For two weeks my films were screened to the community at large and followed by panel discussions that included prominent activists, actors, journalists, scholars and former students who brought diverse perspectives and present-day interpretations to the works. The Humanities DC and the Diverse City Fund were two of the sponsors for this program. The project was a great success which further solidified my confidence in Heran's abilities to plan and execute arts and humanities programs and events from the ground up within underrepresented communities.

In the three decades that I've known Heran, I can testify to her untiring work ethic and dedication to community service. Her academic training and range of interests have kept her active in the local and international arts and humanities scenes in various contexts but always with the same intended impact and purpose. The purpose of supporting artists, documenting their life's work, and ultimately bringing the artist, expression, and the community together – bridging gaps that often are at a cross purpose.

Finally, from a personal and professional standpoint, Heran is brilliant, compassionate and generous with her gift and time. In our uncertain times of great unrest within marginalized communities, she continues to be a much needed pillar, providing platforms for their voices and expressions to be heard. Further, I want to share with you the ultimate value of Dr. Heran – wherever she pursues her work, she is and will be a valuable credit. I am in full support of Council's consideration of her confirmation as the next Executive Director of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

Sincerely,

Haile Gerima
Independent Filmmaker and Professor Emeritus of Film Studies
Department of Radio, Television and Film
School of Communication
Howard University

No two people on earth are alike, it got to be like that in music. I can't sing the same song the same way two nights in succession.... **Billie Holiday**
not sent from my iphone.