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Dear Ms. DiFelicianantonio, Ms. Wagner,

I have read your proposal for "Seeking Refuge," a documentary film on torture survivors in New York and the Bellevue Center, and am both honored and pleased to be affiliated with this film, as an advisory board member.

It is my firm belief that this film will tell crucial stories about representative individuals, whose plight and realities awaken all our consciences – inspiring us to engage with questions of community in a multicultural city and world. I hope that this film can become a heartbreaking *and* heartwarming experience for viewers, who will plunge through it into alternate realities of many refugees' suffering, survival, and ordeals in rebuilding a new life with dignity. It is through films like these that Americans can have their eyes opened with respect to the violence that characterizes daily life for citizens of so many countries. This is all the more important given most Americans' lack of understanding or awareness of the havoc wrought abroad by US foreign policy, which leads to apathy and disengagement, usually with tragic repercussions worldwide. Thanks to talented, award-winning filmmakers such as yourselves, there is a chance to shift the balance, with potentially game-changing films like "Seeking Refuge."

Moving from the general to the specific, I was deeply struck by various details in your proposal.

First, I have met Souleymane Guengueng, through my work at Human Rights Watch's Africa Division on the Hissene Habre case (I also worked with RADDHO, the West African NGO spearheading activities in Senegal to see Hissene Habre tried). Souleymane is a remarkable human being, and I would be hard pressed to think of a person whom I have more respect for. His story is an unforgettable one.

Additionally, having made a documentary film about sexual violence in Cote d'Ivoire with CAPA TV, I was particularly interested in Boubacar's background. The short paragraph I read about her life story touched me to my core and brought back numerous memories linked to my own work as a filmmaker.

Moreover, as a long-time human rights activist and a researcher for Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other NGOs, working on torture, I had already heard of Bellevue even before being approached to be a part of this film. I believe Bellevue to be one of the foremost centers of its kind, in New York and indeed in the nation. Its vital work deserves much praise and I believe that this film will become a testament to the center's excellence – perhaps even an inspiration for other similar centers in the US and abroad to improve their services.

Beyond the importance of recognizing torture survivors' lived experience; my respect for Souleymane; and my support for Bellevue's work; another factor played a key role in my decision to join the film board: I have long admired Adeyinka Akinsulure-Smith. Her reputation precedes her, and I met with her personally while organizing a panel on sexual violence in West Africa for the annual African Studies Association conference several years ago. Yinka's expertise, poise, insights, and erudition are extremely rare, and I have great confidence in any project that she is involved in.

I look forward to working with you on this project and supporting you in any way that I can.

Best regards,

Etelle Higonnet