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29 August 2019

Dear Justice Edwin Cameron,

Open letter of thanks

On behalf of the board and staff of The GALA Archive, we want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the pivotal role you have played in advancing the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people in South Africa during your period serving the judiciary. We are immensely proud and honoured to have you as our patron.

As you well know, the role of the queer archive is to ensure that the histories, narratives and lived experiences of LGBTIQ people are never again relegated to obscurity. History has not been kind to queer people; we've been ridiculed, shamed, feared and reviled. Archives allow us the opportunity to celebrate and acknowledge those within our history and contemporary world whose personal convictions committed them to seeing a different world. It is one in which diversity is celebrated and the sense of self-worth of each and every person is affirmed. This is indeed what pride is about.

It is thus fitting that The GALA Archive proudly calls you our patron. In 2005 you, together with Archbishop Emeritus Tutu, graciously accepted the request to become The GALA Archive's patron. Neither you nor Tata Tutu hesitated in lending your support to the project of reclaiming and re-affirming the histories and narratives of LGBTIQ people in South Africa.

Apart from being our patron, your public presence as an activist, lawyer, jurist and gay man is a personification of your contribution to the freedom and liberation of *our* people. Your humility is evidenced in your ability to ensure that your voice doesn't drown out the voices of others who don't enjoy the privilege afforded to you as a white, gay man. You have always sought to use your position to insist that many other LGBTIQ people are not just watermarked in the pages of history.

You have made a tremendous positive impact on the lives of many in South Africa and this is reflected by people's own accounts of their experiences of you. On your last day as a Justice of the Constitutional Court, many people across the spectrum of age, race, gender, and sexual orientation used social media

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GALA PATRONS: Justice Edwin Cameron, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

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channels to post their memories of you and their gratitude for your service. There were recollections of your kindness and humility, testaments to the inspiration you have provided to generations of South Africans, and acknowledgements of your hard work and ethic.

Twenty-five years on from our first democratic election, the need for role models for young queer people is felt now more than ever. We need to inspire a generation of activists, writers, artists, lawyers and other agents of social change to battle against continuing social inequality, to challenge state abuse of power, and to collectively eradicate the high levels of violence experienced most by the vulnerable members of our society. As The GALA Archive's patron, you serve in this role, and regularly set an example for people to follow as they seek out transformative ways to advance our Constitution.

Your impact on legal scholarly research and its contribution to the shaping of the post-apartheid legal dispensation has been a critical enabler of human rights for LGBTIQ people. In the '90s, during the watershed moments of our country's human rights evolution, you oversaw the contributions of the gay and lesbian movement in the negotiations towards a democratic transition, thereby ensuring that South Africa became the first country in the world to include sexual orientation as protected grounds against discrimination in the Constitution. During this time you also delivered your inaugural lecture at the University of the Witwatersrand, entitled "Sexual Orientation and the Constitution: A Test Case for Human Rights," which, with other work, was influential in securing the express inclusion of sexual orientation in the South African Constitution.

You have always been acutely aware of the importance of your role as one of the final arbiters of law in South Africa. Your positionality as a publicly out gay man on the Bench has profoundly impacted countless LGBTIQ people. In addition, your leading contribution to the development of equality jurisprudence in South Africa has had a material effect on the advancement of dignity, equal treatment and inclusion for LGBTIQ people across the country.

Having played a crucial role in the translation of the Constitution into legal and jurisprudential practice, you have contributed immensely to the realisation of constitutional aspirations that, as maintained in your journal article "Rights, Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law" (1997), "*embod[y] our best hopes and our highest aspirations*" in transforming society towards justice. The many judgements you have penned stand testimony to this. And, when we couldn't rely solely on the law and courts to provide just or equitable outcomes, you took the courageous position of speaking out against power abuse and denialism in the midst of the AIDS crisis in South Africa. In addition, you have also used your position to advocate for the rights of LGBTIQ people the world over. In 2001 and 2002 you lectured judges and lawyers across India on gay rights, with the Lawyers Collective, which many activists there credit to planting the seeds for the changes in judicial understanding of the necessity to strike down sodomy laws in that country.

Thank you for continuing to be a steady champion of The GALA Archive and of rights and justice for all South Africans – especially those at the social and economic margins. As you enter this next chapter of your remarkable life journey, we wish you everything of the best.

With gratitude from all of us at The GALA Archive,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keval Harie', written over a circular scribble.

Keval Harie, Director

The GALA Archive, Johannesburg, South Africa