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**RE:** Letter Supporting Renée De Palma for WIHW Prize Gold Medal for Interfaith Harmony Film Festival Event

To Whom It May Concern:

During 2013 World Interfaith Harmony Week, I had the pleasure of giving a presentation at the World Interfaith Harmony Film Festival in Los Angeles, California. This festival--which was so much in harmony with the goals of the UNGA Resolution that established World Interfaith Harmony Week--was founded, organized, and run by filmmaker and religious activist Renée De Palma, a person of impeccable character whom I have known as a colleague for over fourteen years.

I believe Ms. De Palma deserves to win the WIHW Gold Medal Prize for her efforts, thus I am writing this letter to explain why she is qualified for the Prize and to demonstrate how extraordinarily well the film festival she organized fits the goals and aspirations the WIHW Prize is intended to reward.

First, I would like to testify to Ms. De Palma's credentials as a person eminently qualified to put on a film festival designed to encourage international interfaith harmony. Ms. De Palma has been making films, television programming, home video, and DVD releases for a quarter of a century, travelling to over 30 countries. During that period, she has produced, directed and edited shows for ABC, HBO, Discovery Channel, Discovery Health, The Travel Channel, PBS, Paramount, Sony, and Warner Brothers studios. At present she is President of OneMotion Pictures, LLC, an independent film development and production company.

Ms. De Palma's interest in world interfaith harmony is long standing. In 2007, her film *Let the Conversation Begin*, won first prize from the Council on American Islamic Relations, the United States' largest Islamic Civil Liberties Advocacy Organization. This film explores peace-building and promotes dialogue between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish faiths. Her documentary *Believe* was not only a film, it was a generous act of charity which helped establish programs all over the United States for homeless and welfare dependent families.

All of this hands-on film experience has made Ms. De Palma an astute critic of films enabling her able to select entries for the film festival that were moving, spiritually educational, and superbly made. Members of many religious faiths attended the festival, and the interreligious dialogue that the films stimulated was extraordinary. Ms. De Palma was, in short, supremely qualified both by temperament and experience to organize and run the 2013 World Interfaith Harmony Film Festival.

Ms. De Palma's long-term involvement in organizations that promote religious harmony is equally impressive. She has served on the Board and been the Treasurer of the Southern California Council For A Parliament for World Religions; acted as Co-Chair of the West Side Interfaith Council For a Parliament For World Religions; was a Co-Founder of the Los Angeles Spiritual Salons, served on the Board of the Santa Monica Interfaith Council, and is a member of the Culver City Interfaith Alliance. In addition, she teaches Mahayana Buddhist Meditation.

Given her qualifications and her long standing involvement in religious communities that promote interfaith harmony, it is not surprising that the World Interfaith Harmony Film Festival which she founded, organized, and ran was such a brilliantly successful event. All the films in the festival were related to the goals of interfaith religious harmony. Representing many different faith traditions, these films—all of the very highest quality-- gave the audiences who viewed them an opportunity to learn about religions other than their own and to engage in harmonious, civil dialogue that encouraged a culture of peace and mutual understanding based on those fundamental religious Commandments: Love of God and Love of Neighbor.

The film festival offered prizes in nine categories, and given the extraordinarily high quality of all the films made by filmmakers from all over the world, the judges must have found it difficult to decide which to honor. Among the winners were *God and Allah Need to Talk*, a film which documents the efforts of a group of courageous Muslims, Jews, and Christians who work together to bring about healing and reconciliation after the events of 9/11; *Shift of The Ages*, a film documenting the traditional indigenous wisdom of a Mayan elder; *The Heart of a Murderer*, a film about a father who in an act of holy compassion forgives his daughter's murderer; and *Interfaith Carol*, a film made by young people as part of a special outreach to community youth.

Often after the films were shown, as I listened to conversations, I wished that world outside the conference center could be engaged in a similar dialogue and that that we all, whatever our faiths, could live in a culture of mutual understanding and peace. This was the effect the film festival had on me, and, I believe, the effect that it had on all who attended it.

The person responsible for making this all happen, the person who founded the Interfaith Harmony Film Festival, organized it, ran it, and brought this exceptional opportunity for interfaith harmony and understanding into being is Renee De Palma.

The Interfaith Harmony Film Festival was undoubtedly one of the best events of Interfaith Harmony Week, unusual, creative, successful in every respect in promoting WIHW goals. Given this, I recommend Ms. De Palma without reservation for the WIHW Gold Medal.

Sincerely,

Mary Mackey, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus, California State University