

Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity**Announces Dr Sebatso Manoeli-Lesame as Executive Director**

New York, New York – Today, Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity (AFRE) marked the beginning of its fifth year of supporting changemakers in South Africa and the United States to address the systemic challenges of anti-Black racism and white supremacy. Launched in 2017 with an unprecedented gift of \$63 million from the Atlantic Philanthropies, AFRE has emerged as a distinctive leadership development programme in the racial equity landscape. In marking this moment, AFRE’s Governing Board announced the appointment of Dr Sebatso Manoeli-Lesame as AFRE’s new executive director, effective July 1. She will take over from Dr Kavitha Mediratta, the founding executive director of AFRE.

“AFRE was created at a time of tectonic shifts in the landscape of activism for racial and economic justice with the growth of Black Lives Matter in the US and Fees Must Fall in South Africa, and during the contentious presidencies of Jacob Zuma and Donald Trump,” said Kavitha. “It’s truly been an honour to build AFRE alongside Sebatso and such brilliant colleagues and Fellows. Their courage to seize the moment with radical hope and imagination has made AFRE the remarkable programme that it is today—a transnational programme that lives its purpose in how we work and what we do. I am so delighted to see Sebatso take the helm and I know her inspiring leadership will take AFRE to new heights.”

“AFRE is rooted in the belief that connecting leaders from South Africa and the United States will accelerate efforts to dismantle anti-Black racism and create new spaces and possibilities for solution-building,” said Damon T. Hewitt, President and Executive Director at the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and Chair of AFRE’s Governing Board. “Kavitha conceived, launched and built AFRE into the publicly recognised and respected programme that it is today, capacitating leaders and strengthening the racial equity field for generations to come. We are immensely grateful for Kavitha’s vision and commitment, and we’re excited about the new possibilities Sebatso brings as the incoming executive director. We are confident in her vision for this new phase in AFRE.”

Based at Columbia University, AFRE was incubated by a partnership of leading racial equity organisations based in South Africa and the United States that included BOLD (Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity), Columbia University, Community Change, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Othering and Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley, with contributions from the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), and the South African Human Rights Commission. In this initial phase, AFRE explored how its unique philanthropic gift could most powerfully address the needs of racial equity leaders. Informed by these insights, AFRE developed into

475 Riverside Drive
Suite 306
New York, NY 10115 USA

107 Central Street
Houghton, Johannesburg
2198, Gauteng, South Africa

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a fully-fledged transnational leadership development programme in 2018, anchored by an innovative partnership between Columbia University in New York City, USA and the Nelson Mandela Foundation in Johannesburg, South Africa.

At AFRE, Sebatso has led the flagship fellowship that supports audacious leaders to build more expansive visions and more powerful strategies for achieving racial equity. She has also introduced a new stream of work, the Ideate, Design, Experiment, and Accelerate (IDEA) Space, to foster creative, forward-reaching responses to racial equity challenges. She has served as the editor-in-chief of AFRE's new literary magazine on global Blackness, *Moya*, and host of AFRE's podcast *Race Beyond Borders*, both of which seek to widen the space for imagination in the discursive field of race and to broaden the possibilities for solidarity as essential preconditions for Black and Brown liberation everywhere. As AFRE enters this new phase in its organisational life, it will deepen its substantial and expansive work thus far.

"I have long admired the work of AFRE, and my time here has only affirmed my deep faith in the work and mission of the programme. In this new capacity, I look forward to learning from, growing alongside, and building with our incredible team and fellows," said Sebatso. "AFRE's work matters now more than ever. I believe that this moment – marked by the devastation of COVID-19, police brutality and economic despair – calls on us to embrace both responsive urgency as well as creative foresight."

Over the past decade, Sebatso's career and training have primed her for the ambidextrous leadership AFRE requires in this moment. Previously, at the Cape Town-based DG Murray Trust (DGMT), a public innovator and strategic investor operating at the nexus of public policy and development practice, Sebatso served as Acting Deputy CEO and Innovation Director. She oversaw the largest grant-making division at DGMT, serving dozens of non-profits across South Africa, while also providing strategic management support to six incubated national campaigns and public benefit organisations. She has also worked for the Department of Political Affairs at the African Union Commission, the African Leadership Academy as well as the CDC Group's The Africa List.

A Rhodes Scholar, Sebatso is author of *Sudan's "Southern Problem": Race, Rhetoric and International Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). She has held a departmental lectureship in African History at the University of Oxford. She was also a Lecturer at Stanford University's Bing Centre for Overseas Studies and a Teaching Fellow at the University of Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic Research (FHISER). At the University of Johannesburg, she holds a Research Associateship in the Faculty of Humanities.

She earned a DPhil (PhD) in History and an MSc in African Studies at the University of Oxford. At Amherst College, where she earned a BA in Black Studies and Political Science, Sebatso was a Mandela Scholar. She is also a Senior Fellow of the Moremi Initiative for Women's Leadership in Africa, and a Salzburg Global Seminar Fellow.

"AFRE is incredibly unique in that it values learning and connection as the fuel to sustain and deepen the work of racial equity leaders across South Africa and the United States,"

said Christopher L. Brown, Professor of History at Columbia University and AFRE Board Member. "As the world grapples with rising populism and authoritarian leadership, history—particularly the histories of global racialised struggles—can be a powerful reservoir from which to draw important lessons, strategies and tactics for addressing the social ills we're battling today. Having Sebatso, a noted scholar and historian, at the helm of AFRE will bring much to the programme's work and to the efforts of our Fellows."

"Black women, and women of colour, have long been at the forefront of social justice struggles around the world," said Ayo Tometi, Founder of Diaspora Rising; Co-Founder of Black Lives Matter and AFRE Board Member. "AFRE, with the leadership of Kavitha and the new appointment of Sebatso, is continuing this important legacy."

"South Africa is reaching a critical point as we witness both public and private institutions being undermined, and at the same time terrible failures of leadership at every level means that the needs of our communities are not being met," said Sello Hatang, Chief Executive of the Nelson Mandela Foundation. "We desperately need strong leaders, such as the ones being cultivated through AFRE, to help hold our elected officials accountable and help to realise South Africa's promise as articulated in our Constitution. Sebatso provides a refreshing example in this context."

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Media Contact: Daryl Hannah | D.Hannah@atlanticfellows.org