Resolution retroactively declaring November 15, 2021, as Rita Semel Day in the City and County of San Francisco, in recognition of her many years of outstanding service in interfaith and civil rights work and celebrating her 100 years on this planet.

WHEREAS, Rita Semel, a native New Yorker, first came to San Francisco when her parents moved here in 1939; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from Barnard College, she married and traveled with her soldier husband, Max, until he was shipped overseas; returning to San Francisco, Rita worked as a copy girl, then as a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle; and

WHEREAS, When she went to work for the Chronicle, Rita had to sign a document, as did many women at that time that, she would give up her job when the men returned after the war; and

WHEREAS, When her husband returned from Army service in Europe in 1945, they settled in San Francisco and Rita became the first Associate Editor of the newly formed Jewish Community Bulletin; she retired from the Bulletin in 1950 when her first daughter, Elisabeth, was born and began doing free-lance public relations for the March of Dimes, the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, and the Israeli Consulate; and

WHEREAS, In 1964, as the nation was struggling for integration, civil rights, and inter-ethnic and interfaith harmony, Rita served on the committee that organized the San Francisco Conference on Religion and Race, and she became its coordinator for the next 25 years; and

WHEREAS, During the period of 1950s and 1960s, Rita became a consulate to the Jewish Community Relations Council, and eventually joined the staff as the Associate Director; among the issues she worked on was overturning Proposition 14, a successful ballot
1 initiative that had nullified the Rumford Fair Housing Law which prohibited racial and other
discrimination in housing; ultimately, Proposition 14 was declared unconstitutional by the
California Supreme Court, and we thank Rita for her contributions to this matter; and

WHEREAS, Rita served as Associate Director and then Executive Director of the
Jewish Community Relations Council, where she built important coalitions and organized
campaigns to advance a just society; and

WHEREAS, For more than five decades, Rita has mobilized broad coalitions to
advance common causes of social concern, worked to advocate for those most in need, and
built long lasting relationships among the Bay Areas’ many communities; and

WHEREAS, In addition to her important role as a co-founder of the Interfaith Center at
the Presidio and the San Francisco Interfaith Council, Rita has served in a prominent
leadership role as the first Chair of the Global Council for the United Religions Initiative; she
has served on the boards of Catholic Charities CYO, Family Services America, San Francisco
Resource and Leadership Council, Friends of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission,
Jewish Family & Children’s Services, San Francisco Children’s Rights Coalition and many
more; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, Rita was honored by the Islamic Society of San Francisco for
“outstanding service and achievement in interfaith dialogue among Abrahamic Faiths;” in 2011
the San Francisco Interfaith Council created the Rita R. Semel Endowment Fund for Interfaith
Work; she received the San Francisco Foundation’s Community Leadership Award in 2012 for
her “life-long successes in creating healthy, just and inclusive communities in the Bay Area
and worldwide, and for building bridges of understanding to help alleviate poverty and end
discrimination;” in 2014 she was honored at the annual Catholic Charities CYO Loaves &
Fishes Gala for her more than half a century of being a champion of San Francisco’s interfaith
dialogue with their “Faith in Action” award; and
WHEREAS, Rita was the co-founder of the San Francisco Interfaith Council in 1990, and her tenure has been marked by orchestrating significant programs which have a direct impact on the lives of San Franciscans – from the emergency winter shelter program for the homeless, for which she has galvanized multi-faith and City cooperation, to the chaplaincy program at the Youth Guidance Center; and

WHEREAS, Rita has served as the unofficial, trusted ambassador of the Jewish community to other religious communities for decades; through the Jewish Community Relations Council, and later working on a national level through Project Interchange, Rita has led dozens of clergies from other faiths to Israel, to learn about the Jewish community’s relationship to the land, people, and their history; she has introduced religious leaders from throughout the Bay Area to Judaism, Jewish history, and the American and worldwide Jewish experience; and

WHEREAS, Rita serves on the boards of Clinic by the Bay, Congregation Emanu-El and Grace Cathedral; Rita was appointed by Mayor Edwin Lee to the Human Services Agency’s Commission; and

WHEREAS, On November 15, 2021, Rita celebrated her 100 years on this planet; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That in celebration of Rita’s amazing contributions and achievements to the City of San Francisco and the Bay Area, the Board of Supervisors does hereby declare November 15, 2021, to be Rita Semel Day in San Francisco.
Resolution retroactively declaring November 15, 2021, as Rita Semel Day in the City and County of San Francisco, in recognition of her many years of outstanding service in interfaith and civil rights work and celebrating her 100 years on this planet.

December 07, 2021 Board of Supervisors - ADOPTED
Ayes: 10 - Chan, Haney, Mandelman, Mar, Peskin, Preston, Ronen, Safai, Stefani and Walton
Excused: 1 - Melgar

File No. 211248

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED on 12/7/2021 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board

I hereby certify that the foregoing resolution, not being signed by the Mayor within the time limit as set forth in Section 3.103 of the Charter, or time waived pursuant to Board Rule 2.14.2, became effective without her approval in accordance with the provision of said Section 3.103 of the Charter or Board Rule 2.14.2.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board