

Open letter to Madame Catherine Bréchnac, Présidente du CNRS

June 26, 2009

Dear Madame la Présidente:

We write on behalf of Middle East scholarly associations in Europe and North America representing academics and independent scholars across the world to express our concern about the disciplinary hearing convened by the CNRS on June 29, 2009 regarding our colleague Vincent Geisser. Many of our members are scholars working on France and/or the Muslim world, and we believe that Dr. Geisser has made valuable intellectual contributions to the study of Islam, the Maghreb, and Muslim minorities in France. Regardless of whether our members agree with his scholarly conclusions or political positions, all of us are united in the belief that Dr. Geisser's academic freedom and freedom of expression be respected.

We are concerned that Dr. Geisser is the subject of a disciplinary commission in large part because of his work on Islam in France, an issue already publicly addressed by numerous colleagues of Dr. Geisser in France, including many at the CNRS. If this is the case, Dr. Geisser's disciplinary hearing and the charges against him, accusing him of a lack of political neutrality in public discourse (*le manquement grave ... à l'obligation de réserve*) constitute a form of ideological surveillance, a deeply disturbing occurrence that is contrary to the spirit and laws of a democratic republic that claims Human and Citizen Rights (*Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*) as its founding principle.

Intellectuals in a free society best serve the public interest when left free to make critical judgments, especially unpopular ones.. Liberty of thought, of opinion, and of expression is indispensable to critical thinking, and absolutely necessary to modern democratic societies..

We support the call for the immediate revocation of the disciplinary procedure against Dr. Geisser, and echo the statements of the open letter of the *Collectif pour la sauvegarde de la liberté intellectuelle des chercheurs et enseignants* (<http://petition.liberteintellectuelle.net/>) in underscoring the importance of academic freedom, which is foundational to international research and intellectual and scientific legitimacy.

Sincerely,

Virginia H. Aksan, Professor of History, McMaster University, Ontario, Canada and President,
Middle East Studies Association of North America

Guenter Meyer, Professor of Geography, University of Mainz, on behalf of
German Middle East Studies Association (DAVO)
European Association for Middle Eastern Studies (EURAMES), representing all Middle
East studies associations in 23 European countries
International Association for Middle Eastern Studies (IAMES)
Council of the World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES).

Harold Walker, President, British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES)