

Open letter to Madame Catherine Bréchnignac, Présidente du CNRS

June 24, 2009

Dear Madame la Présidente:

We write as academics, independent scholars, and writers based outside France to express our concern regarding the disciplinary hearing convened by CNRS on June 29, 2009 for our colleague Vincent Geisser. Many of us are scholars of France and/or the Muslim world, and we believe that Mr. Geisser has made, and continues to make, valuable intellectual contributions to the study of Islam, the Maghreb, and Muslim minorities in France. Regardless of whether we agree or not with his scholarly conclusions or political positions, all of us are adamant that Mr. Geisser's academic freedom and freedom of expression be respected.

We are concerned that Mr. Geisser is the subject of a disciplinary commission in large part because of his work on Islam in France, a concern already expressed publicly by numerous colleagues of Mr. Geisser's, including many at CNRS. If this is the case, Mr. Geisser's disciplinary hearing and the charges against 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 the Rights of Man and Citizen as its founding principle. We believe that Mr. Geisser's research should be evaluated by his peers on scholarly rather than ideological grounds – to do otherwise would constitute a grave violation of academic freedom.

We support the call by the *Comité de soutien à Vincent Geisser* for the immediate revocation of the disciplinary procedure against Mr. Geisser.

We also echo the *Collectif pour la sauvegarde de la liberté intellectual des chercheurs et enseignants-chercheurs de la fonction publique* in underscoring the importance of academic freedom, which is foundational to our research and our intellectual and scientific legitimacy as scholars. While the majority of scholars in France may also be public servants, they cannot thereby be considered subservient to political institutions and political power and must be guaranteed the same academic freedom and intellectual liberty as all scholars. Intellectuals in a free society best serve the public interest when left free to make critical judgments, especially unpopular ones, about taken for granted political views. Liberty of thought, of opinion, and of expression is indispensable to critical thinking, which is in turn necessary for any democracy to function.

Respectfully,

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Michaëlle L. Browsers, Associate Professor of Political Science and Junior Faculty Fellow (on leave 2008-2009), Wake Forest University

Martha Mundy (in a personal capacity), Professor of Anthropology, London School of Economics

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