

# PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

Michael di Grappa  
Vice-President, Services  
Concordia University  
Montreal QC  
E-mail: [michael.digrappa@concordia.ca](mailto:michael.digrappa@concordia.ca)

30 August 2006

Dear Mr di Grappa,

I am writing in my capacity as President of PEN Canada, an independent, non-profit organization that works to defend freedom of expression both in Canada and internationally.

It has come to our attention that David Bernans, an author, Concordia graduate student and a Concordia-based researcher, has been prevented from holding a reading of his recently-released novel *North of 9/11* at the Concordia University campus on September 11, 2006. This, in spite of a successful book launch at the Simone de Beauvoir Centre at Concordia University on May 17, 2006.

According to our information, Mr Bernans sought to do some readings from his novel and share his thoughts about, in particular, the five years that the Concordia community has lived through since 11 September 2006. In mid-June, Mr Bernans filed a room booking request for September 11, 2006. He filled out all necessary applications fully. The following month, on July 20, he received an e-mail informing him that security had approved his event. On July 23, Mr Bernans was sent another email informing him that security had denied approval for his event. No reason was given. When he enquired about which e-mail to believe, Mr Bernans was told that his event had been approved "by mistake". Apparently, it had failed a risk assessment by Concordia's risk management team. The assessment had been done to see what risks were involved in students and faculty hearing readings from a novel about 9/11.

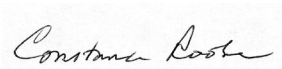
To date, Mr Bernans has yet to receive an explanation for the decision by Concordia not to allow him to hold his event on campus. We find it troubling that a risk assessment committee exists – one that has the power to silence individuals, especially critical voices, who wish to speak freely in an academic setting, where it is generally expected that a range of opinions is allowed. The

Honorary Patron  
John Ralston Saul  
President  
Constance Rooke  
Vice-President  
Camilla Gibb  
Treasurer  
Hank Bulmash  
Chair, Writers in Prison Committee  
Alan Cumyn  
Chair, National Affairs  
Christopher Waddell  
Chair, Legal Affairs  
Bruce MacDougall  
Chair, Communications Committee  
Louise Dennys  
Chair, Fundraising Committee  
Diane Davy  
Chair, Membership  
Michael Helm  
Editor, Newsletter & Annual Report  
Alison Gordon  
Board of Directors  
Martha Butterfield  
David Cronenberg  
Rohinton Mistry  
Anna Porter  
Ellen Seligman  
Janet Somerville  
Past President, ex-officio  
Haroon Siddiqui  
Executive Director  
Isobel Harry  
Administrator  
Caitlin Smith  
Coordinator, Programs and  
Writers in Exile Network  
David Cozac  
Past Presidents  
Margaret Atwood  
Reza Baraheni  
Eugene Benson  
Marian Botsford Fraser  
June Callwood  
Louise Dennys  
Timothy Findley  
Graeme Gibson  
Alison Gordon  
Katherine Govier  
Ron Graham  
Ann Ireland  
Sandra Martin  
Nino Ricci  
John Ralston Saul  
Haroon Siddiqui

action taken against Mr Bernans would constitute a violation of academic freedom and freedom of expression in general.

**PEN Canada respectfully asks that you provide a written explanation for the decision to reject Mr Bernans's application to hold a public reading. PEN Canada would also request that the mandate of the risk assessment committee be reviewed such that the possibility of silencing other individuals at Concordia University not be repeated.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Constance Rooke". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Constance Rooke  
President, PEN Canada

CC: Claude Lajeunesse, President, Concordia University  
David Bernans