

PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

Michael di Grappa
Vice-President, Services
Concordia University
Montreal QC
E-mail: 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.

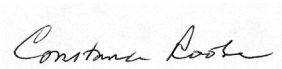
To date, Mr Bernans has yet to receive an explanation for the decision by Concordia not to allow him to hold his event on campus. We find it troubling that a risk assessment committee exists – one that has the power to silence individuals, especially critical voices, who wish to speak freely in an academic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

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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