

A PETITION TO MONIQUE CANTO-SPERBER, DIRECTOR, ÉCOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE, PARIS

We, the undersigned U.S., Canadian and British academics, many of us with long connections to France, and who have long admired the historic role of the École Normale Supérieure in the critical and intellectual life of the country, are dismayed at recent events at the school. The actions of the Director, Monique Canto-Sperber, first banning a talk by Stéphane Hessel and then refusing to allow the Colléctif Palestine ENS to hold a meeting on campus, is a denial of the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Hessel is 93, a former ENS student, member of the Resistance, survivor of Buchenwald, one of the authors of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and of the recent best-selling *Indignez-vous!/Time for Outrage*, in which he (among other things) criticizes Israel's treatment of Palestinians.

We are not persuaded by the reasoning of the Director or of the Conseil d'État, that these meetings constitute a threat to public order or that they exceed the responsibility of the ENS to guarantee all students' rights to speech and assembly.

The action of the Director is an exception to the school's customary toleration of political action by students and it is a recurring exception, aimed at silencing one side in a needed debate about the Israel/Palestine conflict. We believe that the Director's action contravenes a long history of free speech and political expression at the ENS as described in its own publicity: "For decades, the ENS has been the most prestigious site of French intellectual and scientific life. It participated in all the great intellectual debates of modern France, from the Dreyfus Affair to the movements of the 1930's, and from the foundation of the human sciences to the avant-garde movements of the 1970's."

We call upon the Director to reverse her decision and to restore academic freedom, a practice long associated with this distinguished institution.

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