

To the President of the French Republic, and to the Minister of Justice

We are writing to draw your attention to the case of our ex-student, colleague and friend Dr. Adlene Hicheur. This 34 year old, of dual French-Algerian nationality, could be considered as a model of successful integration. He arrived in France at the age of one, followed an exemplary school education, and after his senior education took up the study of particle physics, completing a doctoral thesis between 2000 and 2003 at LAPP (Laboratoire d'Annecy Le Vieux de Physique des Particules). He then took up a post-doctoral appointment in the United Kingdom, at the Rutherford Laboratory, followed by the award of a second post-doctoral position at EPFL (l'Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne). In autumn 2009 he had almost completed this position, and had established a solid reputation as an excellent particle physicist, researcher and teacher.

Adlene Hicheur was arrested at his parents' home in October 2009, under anti-terrorist legislation. Since then he has been kept in "provisional detention" at Fresnes Prison, and his applications for release have all been turned down. Adlene Hicheur has consistently proclaimed his innocence since his arrest. According to the scanty information available to us, the evidence against him is extremely slender and seems to be founded on the claim that Adlene Hicheur browsed on the web various internet forums which are suspected of having links to terrorist organizations. We are concerned by the duration of this "provisional detention" and astonished that in France, homeland of human rights, it is possible to keep a person imprisoned with no evidence and no charge, for such a prolonged period.

We are equally concerned for the professional future of this young physicist, knowing the difficulties he will face in pursuing his future career, even if he is completely exonerated of all charges against him. We understand that extreme difficulties are faced in attempting to prevent the horror of indiscriminate terrorist attacks. For this purpose France has put in place specific anti-terrorist procedures. However we cannot accept that this necessitates the suppression of basic human rights. We have seen on frequent occasions that the simple suspicion of criminal activity has taken precedence over the search for any material proof, leading to long investigations which end up with no charges brought. The consequence of this is disproportionate prison detentions for people who are subsequently recognized as being completely innocent. This causes profound distress, ruining completely the lives of the people involved and their entourage.

It seems to us that there is no justification for the prolonged detention, of almost 14 months so far, of Dr. Adlene Hicheur, an internationally recognized scientist, held in much esteem by his colleagues. We are extremely concerned, on the other hand, about the deterioration in his mental and physical health. We request his immediate release, with the appropriate judicial controls, until such time as the investigation is ready to present its conclusions. If any concrete evidence comes to light, Adlene Hicheur has the right accorded to any citizen to defend himself, on a reasonable timescale, in a court of law. In the absence of such evidence he must be completely cleared of all suspicion and compensated for the serious prejudice against him by an unjustified imprisonment.