

CITIZEN4SCIENCE PRESS RELEASE #5

Harassment of scientific spokespersons and defenders of scientific integrity: Citizen4Science calls on the authorities to intervene urgently

Citizen4Science is a young association of citizens, which was born on social networks as a reaction to the misinformation, scientific populism and obscurantism that we experienced during COVID-19 and that continues a present.

The idea of forming an association was born one day in September 2020, following discussions among scientists and citizens involved in scientific communication and for some of them victims of (cyber)harassment.

We must mention some members of Citizen4Science who are particularly concerned by this cyberharassment, such as Prof. Dominique COSTAGLIOLA and Prof. Karine LACOMBE, respectively recognized experts in epidemiology and infectiology, and whose role is central in this health crisis. This cyberharassment has been accompanied by threats and legal proceedings directly from the IHU Marseille.

Our association is itself the object of defamation on social networks by members and relatives of the IHUM. We are permanently accused of being subordinated to the pharmaceutical industry, which is false. In addition, some of the social network accounts of these IHUM members have contributed to the disclosure of personal information of our founding members.

Recently, accusations by IHUM against Dr. Elisabeth BIK, an internationally renowned scientist fighting against scientific fraud and widely recognized by her peers, are edifying. She is currently the victim of intimidation attempts with disclosure of personal address, accusations of fraud, blackmail and extortion by Prof. Eric CHABRIÈRE, IHUM. She had previously been called "crazy" and accused of leading a "witch hunt" for having reported dubious work published by IHUM teams.

Scientific journals and international press articles are now relaying what is now called "the French scandal".

One year and a few months after the beginning of the health crisis, we make the sad observation that the media time is not followed by a judicial time far from the social networks. Ironically, it is replaced by a legal populism with legal proceedings initiated in series by those who engage in denigration and harassment, which they promote on social networks.

Thus, we note with regret and dismay that the situation continues to deteriorate in a worrying way, leaving more and more room for bad science as well as for truncated and grossly manipulated interpretation data. Attacks from the IHUM seem to increase in proportion to their loss of credibility in the scientific world.

This escalation of aggression and intimidation is particularly disturbing. It destroys the image of seriousness and competence of French doctors and scientists in the eyes of citizens, who are not very familiar with the exercise of scientific debate and who are influenced in spite of themselves by continuous news channels of poor journalistic quality as well as the videos on youtube emanating from the IHUM. This intolerable and deleterious situation strongly contributes to the loss of confidence of a part of the population towards the health authorities and the public prevention messages, thus delaying even more the exit of this health crisis.

The international scientific community and many of our physicians, pharmacists, caregivers, scientists and informed citizens are concerned and disillusioned to see that our country allows disinformation, cyberharassment and legal proceedings against the bearers of consensual scientific speech to flourish. The perpetrators are not even worried or simply called to order.

Today, it is not those who are guilty of these crimes that we question, but those who tolerate these repeated destructive actions.

We ask the competent authorities to look into this matter in order to quickly clarify the situation and to take the necessary measures

The authorities must on the one hand protect the citizens and scientists who are the victims of these acts, and on the other hand investigate and act without delay in order to put an urgent end to these unjustified and traumatic attacks.

We therefore solemnly call upon the APHM, whose silence and inaction are incomprehensible, to assume its responsibilities and to intervene as soon as possible to investigate and put an end to these acts of aggression by the members of the IHU Marseille who are responsible for them

We also call upon the ministries in charge of the IHUM:

- Ministry of Solidarity and Health headed by Mr. Olivier Véran
- Ministry of Higher Education and Research headed by Ms. Frédérique

and

- National Council of the Order of Physicians, Mr. Patrick Bouet
- Regional Council of the Order of Physicians PACA
- Departmental Council of the Order of Physicians Bouches-du Rhône

We also strongly encourage journalists to focus more on this problem of cyberharassment and to enlighten the general public on these acts.

This is a serious time in this critical period of the pandemic, because beyond the damage suffered by the victims of harassment on a personal basis, the distrust of citizens is maintained, conspiracy and anti-vaccine movements are exacerbated. The result can be counted in human lives lost and in a growing number of disabilities.

Citizen4Science will be very vigilant to the follow-up of this press release, which is in line with its mission of promoting well-done, well-communicated and well-used science, of being a whistleblower; and of course, in the framework of the protection it owes to its members who are victims of harassment.

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More information on Citizen4Science (n° RNA W751258960) on Citizen4Science internet website :

<http://www.citizen4science.org>

Twitter : @Citizen4Sci #Citizen4Science

Facebook page : <https://www.facebook.com/Citizen4Science-112042660698911>

Facebook group : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/354060265679040>

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