

*Be Prepared For
The Unpredictable Largest Earthquake*



International Seismic Safety Organization
Headquarters: Arsita (TE), Italy

Alessandro Martelli
President

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Arsita, November 5, 2012

President Giorgio Napolitano
The Republic of Italy
Palazzo del Quirinale
Piazza del Quirinale – 00187
Rome, Italy

Copy to: Press agencies, journals

Subject: Indictment and conviction of members of the Italian “Commissione Grandi Rischi” (CGR)

Dear Mister President Napolitano:

We are very concerned about misleading information which is being actively circulated by certain organizations, journals and newspapers on the conviction in first degree of members of the “Commissione Grandi Rischi” (Commissione nazionale per la previsione e prevenzione dei grandi rischi, CGR) of Italy, that convened in L’Aquila on March 31, 2009.

The misinformation on this issue has deliberately induced the scientific community and public opinion to erroneously believe that the motivations for the indictment of the CGR members consisted in "**failure to predict the earthquake**"; this wrong interpretation may influence the scientific community and public opinion against a sentence pronounced in the name of the Italian people. A letter signed from over 5,000 exponents of the international scientific community had already been sent to your attention before the indictment, based on this false assumption.

We have observed with disappointment that such a wrong position persists even now, after the trial in the Court of L'Aquila, long and painful, has brought to the conviction in first degree of all the CGR members. It seems to us that those people that have taken sides against the judge decision have not understood, and perhaps not even read, the motivations of the indictment, showing, among others, their very little respect for the Italian judicial system. Instead, we are convinced that the decision of the judge has stressed precise responsibilities of the CGR members, who were accused not for not having been able to predict the earthquake, but for having wanted to corroborate a forecast of "no risk" in progress, although some of these scientists had previously published articles in which they sustained the opposite position on the situation in L'Aquila. In addition, the lack of independence of judgment by the CGR, based on released declarations in line with the Department of Civil Defense (as documented in their phone call recordings published in the website of "La Repubblica"), shows that the interactions between scientific community and the institutions in charge for preserving public safety require significant improvements.

The trial was public and carefully documented in the judicial registers. The already available documentation on the motivations of the conviction – that will be deposited soon – certainly will demonstrate that **science has not been put on discussion or attacked in any case**. The Prosecutor (Dr. Fabio Picuti, already in his memories) was extremely careful and clear on this aspect, as can be testified by those who were present in the debate. The purpose of this trial was to ascertain the truth for the triumph of justice, certainly not to intimidate science. The trial on the events in L'Aquila will constitute a reference for the international juridical point of view. By interpreting it as **an attack to science and scientists**, the detractors distort the reality of the facts. On the contrary, we believe that this process is extremely important to stimulate researchers to "to apply science" in a responsible and impartial way, particularly when dealing with investigation of natural phenomena, like earthquakes, that are not predictable with precision and are susceptible to extremely serious consequences.

We are convinced that all those endowed with good sense will agree on the fact that scientists, including the CGR members, shall answer for their actions in a responsible way as all other professionals in civil protection service. It is correct that the respect and honor granted to them by the community shall be reciprocated by them with activity performed with integrity, altruism and honesty. We absolutely don't feel threatened in our professionalism by the conviction sentence by Judge Marco Billi in the Court of L'Aquila. The conviction doesn't concern science, and it is not a conviction of science.

We strongly disagree with whoever spread fears that, as a consequence of the conviction by the Court of L'Aquila, scientists will be afraid in the future to provide their work in support for civil protection. We believe that such an unfounded view is the direct result of the wrong interpretation for the motivations of both the indictment and conviction. We think that the conclusion of this tragic event can represent the beginning of a more virtuous process, from both scientific and ethical points of view, for the future of Italy. We affirm with emphasis that scientists will be, in the future, more than available to put their experience to the service of the community, using great precaution when the question is safeguarding safety of the population, in which the limits of scientific knowledge shall always be communicated with honesty.

We strongly disagree with those scientific institutions and media that keep on distorting, in irresponsible and unreasonable ways, the charges and decision of the trial, thus influencing public opinion with unfounded scenarios. We finally stress that, even if earthquakes are not predictable with precision, civil defense policy can be effectively oriented also by results of the most recent studies in the field of both seismology and seismic engineering, taking into consideration the expected maximum event that can be estimated in a "robust" way, for both the short- and long- term policy. About this aspect, attach to this letter is a document (*Position Statement*, both in Italian and in English), signed by international experts for reducing or preventing catastrophic earthquake induced disasters for civil protection policy. In every case, independently of any method used, science must always remain free.

We are available to be of any assistance to make sure that another catastrophic devastation is not repeated again in Italy.

Submitted respectfully,

Alessandro Martelli
President

Lalliana Mualchin
General Secretary

Letter sent also on behalf of the other founding members of ISSO and supporters:

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Attachment:

Position Statement of ISSO (in both Italian and English), with names and
affiliations of founding members.