



Concern about the outcome of the L'Aquila prosecution

The Geological Society of Japan wishes to express its grave misgivings about the way in which 6 geoscientists were held to be guilty of manslaughter as a result of the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake in Italy.

The L'Aquila earthquake resulted in the death of more than 300 people and widespread destruction to a culturally important area. This is a tragic loss and our thoughts are with the victims. It is important that lessons are learnt from this and other similar events to contribute to a better understanding of earthquake disaster and how risk governance can be improved. Geoscientists have a central role in this process.

Japan is particularly conscious of the importance of incorporating seismic risk in long-term planning. We recognize the great advances that have been made in disaster mitigation and the role that geoscientists have played. Thanks to their contributions, we now have a much-improved understanding of the distribution of earthquakes and the probability of their occurrence. However, precise prediction of the size, location and timing of individual earthquakes remains elusive and, as shown by our experience with the Great East Japan Earthquake, earthquake models are far from complete.

The L'Aquila case has alarmed many in the Geoscience communities throughout the world. If eminent geoscientists can be held responsible for the effects of earthquakes as a result of their willingness to help in the risk assessment, who will come forward to offer take on this important role in the future? Geoscientists are struggling to understand extremely uncertain and complex natural phenomena such as earthquakes. We think it will be of greater benefit to society if geoscientists are encouraged to place greater emphasis on researching earthquakes and engaging with hazard assessment.

Earthquakes, tsunami and other violent natural phenomena are part of the workings of our active planet. Geoscientists have a vital role to play in minimizing the resulting risk to human society; both through better understanding of the way in which earthquakes form and in communicating this knowledge effectively to the public. Locking the scientists up and burdening them with crippling fines will do nothing to minimize the next earthquake disaster and will discourage the next generation of geoscientists from engaging with government authorities and participating in the public debate needed to work towards a safer and more secure society.

We express our serious concern about the prison sentences given to the Italian scientists. We hope they will continue their studies on earthquakes and associated damage mitigation without the fear of imprisonment.

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