

ASSISi

Anti-Seismic Systems International Society

Territorial Section for the EU and other Western European countries (EUWEC)

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Bologna, May 25, 2011

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SUBJECT: ABRUZZO EARTHQUAKE OF APRIL 6, 2009 – INDICTMENT OF THE MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN “MAJOR RISKS COMMITTEE” (“COMMISSIONE GRANDI RISCHI”)

Dear Sirs:

The members of the Italian Major Risks Committee (“Commissione Grandi Rischi”) shall soon defend themselves from the charges of the L’Aquila prosecutors related to their behaviour before the Abruzzo earthquake, which struck L’Aquila and other surrounding towns and villages on April 6, 2009.

Thus, I believe that time has come to let the entire international scientific community and public opinion know **the truth** about the reasons for the indictment of such members after the aforesaid earthquake.

In fact, a **false translation** into English of the charges mentioned in the indictment act was circulated abroad by colleagues of some of these members. Based on this “translation”, which stated that the charges were “*to have failed to predict the earthquake*” (see Attachment 1), almost 4,000 researchers from 100 different countries signed a letter to the Italy’s president, blaming the prosecutors. Even *Nature* believed this misleading information, as shown by the article of Nicola Nosengo published online in your journal on June 22, 2010 (“Italy puts seismology in the dock – Scientists who assessed earthquake risk at L’Aquila could be indicted on manslaughter charges”).

How false is the aforesaid translation can be easily verified by reading the text of the indictment act, which has been published in internet (see, for instance, www.inabruzzo.com/memoria_finale_13_luglio.pdf and Attachment 2 to this letter, containing part of it).

In my opinion, before signing letters or writing articles, it would have been advisable to check the substance of the not very plausible information received: if it had been true, it would have meant that the concerned Italian prosecutors are rather stupid or crazy guys! Maybe, Italy has become such a “strange” country that people believe that all and some may occur there!

Luckily, not all had such a poorly scientific attitude. For a matter of concision, I will restrict myself to the cases of ASSISi and its member associations, which did not promote any “collection” of signatures, and that of the UNESCO offices in Paris, which, on June 23, 2010, circulated the following message of Dr. Takashi Imamura to the members of GTFBC (“Global Task Force on Building Codes”):

“Dear GTFBC colleagues,

I would like to share with you some updates. I apologize for the long message, but for more details, please also refer to the attachment.

... (*omissis*) ...

Part 2: Indicted Italian scientists

<Message from the GTFBC Secretariat>

I assume that many of us, including myself, have already signed the open letter as we simply interpret the fact that the Italian scientists have been indicted for “failing to predict earthquakes.” Everybody must have thought it is ridiculous. It is clearly written in the last paragraph of the proposed letter (in English translation).

However, there is a voice that we, non-Italian scientists, etc., are not correctly informed about the situation in Italy. If the information we received were more precise, our reactions would have been somewhat different.

The Italian High Risk Commission has not been indicted for “failing to predict earthquakes”, but for other reasons. It is important to stress that judges did not accuse these members for not having predicted the earthquake! They were accused to have underestimated / not understood the available data and not to have taken the correct measures to minimize the number of victims in case the earthquake had occurred.

More precisely, taking into account the concomitance of at least two seismic alarms for the area or its immediate neighborhoods (including that of the Italian National Research Council - CNR) and of the ongoing earthquake sequence, the Italian "High Risks Commission" (which should represent "the best" of our seismological and seismic engineering community) should not have declared that there was no risk for an immediate violent earthquake. By stating this, they caused the return to L'Aquila of numerous people, including some students who died in the "Students House".

... (*omissis*) ...”

For your convenience, I am attaching the full text of this message too (Attachment 1).

Somebody, by believing that the information received was correct, talked of “outrage” of the Italian Justice against Science: in this shameful affair, the real outrage is what some persons, taking advantage of their institutional roles, made the foreign experts understand, by providing a false “translation” of the charges, in order to obtain signatures for a misleading letter against the prosecutors to the Italy’s President. Unfortunately, “thanks” to these shameful behaviors (before and after the earthquake), this affair will be

certainly detrimental for the credibility of the entire Italian scientific community in the seismological and seismic engineering fields.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AM', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alessandro Martelli, PhD
Coordinator of *ASSISi*-EUWEC
Past-President of *ASSISi*