



The L'Aquila trial

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The first step of the trial in L'Aquila (Italy) ended with a conviction of a group of seven experts to 6 years of jail and several million euros refund for the families of the people who died during the Mw 6.3 earthquake on April 6, 2009. This verdict has a tremendous impact on the scientific community as well as on the way in which scientists deliver their expert opinions to decision makers and society.

In this presentation, we describe the role of scientists in charge of releasing authoritative information concerning earthquakes and seismic hazard and the conditions that led to the verdict, in order to discuss whether this trial represented a prosecution to science, and if errors were made in communicating the risk. Documents, articles and comments about the trial are collected in the web site <http://processoaquila.wordpress.com/>.

We will first summarize what was the knowledge about the seismic hazard of the region and the vulnerability of L'Aquila before the meeting of the National Commission for Forecasting and Predicting Great Risks (CGR) held 6 days before the main shock. The basic point of the accusation is that the CGR suggested that no strong earthquake would have occurred (which of course was never mentioned by any seismologist participating to the meeting). This message would have convinced the victims to stay at home, instead of moving out after the M3.9 and M3.5 earthquakes few hours before the mainshock.

We will describe how the available scientific information was passed to the national and local authorities, and in general how the Italian scientific Institution in charge of seismic monitoring and research (INGV), the Civil Protection Department (DPC) and the CGR should interact according to the law. As far as the communication and outreach to the public, the scientific Institutions as INGV have the duty to communicate scientific information. Instead, the risk management and the definition of actions for risk reduction is in charge of Civil Protection authorities, including the Municipalities, the Regions and the National Department.

We also discuss the role of the media in this complex matter and how they dealt with this issue in the days preceding and following the earthquake, contributing to affect the risk perception.