

# The International Council for Science pledges support for scientists in the L'Aquila case

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The International Council for Science (ICSU), as representative of the global scientific community, expresses its strong concern regarding the case of the six scientists who have been found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to six year prison terms because of their role in providing scientific advice prior to the earthquake in L'Aquila, Italy, in 2009.

While ICSU is not privy to all the information that was available to the prosecutors, it appears that these scientists are being penalised essentially for using their experience and knowledge to provide evidence for decision-making. In the field of natural hazard risk, such scientific evidence has its limitations. The timing and strength of earthquakes cannot be accurately predicted. Nevertheless, science can, and does, make important contributions to hazard response strategies. In the case of L'Aquila, six scientists accepted their responsibility to society to try and support decision-making in a situation of inherent uncertainty. That these scientists should be condemned to prison for so doing is a gross injustice.

The L'Aquila earthquake was a tragic event in which more than 300 people died and ICSU endorses the need to determine whether these lives might have been saved if the public authorities had reacted differently before the event. The role of scientific advice in the decision-making processes prior to the earthquake is a legitimate area of enquiry. We all need to learn the lessons from the past to be better prepared for the future. In the meantime, blaming scientists and scientific advice for the deaths that occurred in L'Aquila is a grave error that will,

unfortunately, make many scientists reluctant to accept public advisory roles.

We call on the responsible authorities to take urgent and decisive steps to correct this error and ensure due justice for Franco Barberi, Enzo Boschi, Giuli Selvaggi, Gian Michele Calvi, Mauro Dolce and Claudio Eva.

Provided by International Council for Science

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