

Italy disaster experts quit over quake trial

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(AP)—Four top Italian disaster experts quit their posts Tuesday, saying the manslaughter convictions of former colleagues for failing to adequately warn of a deadly 2009 earthquake means they can't effectively perform their duties.

A court in the quake-devastated town of L'Aquila convicted seven former members of Italy's so-called "Great Risks Commission" and sentenced each of them to six years in prison, prompting predictions that experts would be discouraged from working in Italy for fear of similar risks of prosecution.

Commission president Luciano Maiani and two other members resigned, along with a top official for earthquake and volcano risk in the national Department of Civil Protection. Maiani said Monday's court ruling made it impossible to work in a "calm and efficient" way.

Prosecutors alleged the defendants—who included some of Italy's most internationally respected quake experts—didn't properly inform town residents of the risk of a big quake following weeks of small tremors. But scientists have ridiculed the case, saying earthquakes cannot be predicted. The convictions are expected to be appealed.

With the verdict, "we understood why the Great Risks Commission has that name," a front-page commentary began in *Corriere della Sera*, a Milan daily. "The great risks are those to its members, as one deduces from the verdict."

Senate President Renato Schifani has called the convictions and prison terms "strange, embarrassing."

Many scientists and commentators have noted that the court case failed to address a major cause of fatalities in disasters like quakes and [mudslides](#): erecting homes, schools, hospitals and other public buildings on quake-prone terrain without the proper [construction techniques](#) or materials to make the structures more resilient.

After the April 2009 quake, which left 308 people dead, many experts said that the 6.3-magnitude [temblor](#) wouldn't have caused such extensive damage if buildings been constructed or retrofitted to meet modern [quake](#) zone construction standards.

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