



SEISMOLOGICAL SOCIETY of AMERICA

201 PLAZA PROFESSIONAL BUILDING, EL CERRITO, CALIFORNIA 94530
TEL: (510) 525-5474 · FAX: (510) 525-7204 · HTTP://WWW.SEISMOSOC.ORG

15 June 2010

President Giorgio Napolitano
Quirinal Palace, Rome, Italy

Dear President Napolitano:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Seismological Society of America, an international scientific society founded in 1906 devoted to understanding and mitigating earthquake hazards.

We are deeply concerned to learn that members of our society and their colleagues have been indicted by the Prosecutor's Office in L'Aquila for failing to issue a short-term alarm prior to the tragic L'Aquila earthquake of 6 April 2009.

The international community continues to make progress in understanding the physics and effects of earthquakes, and on approaches to minimize the risk to human populations. However, I assure you that there is currently no scientifically validated method for short-term earthquake prediction, much less one that could reliably be used by government authorities for rapid and effective warnings in Italy or elsewhere. Pursuing legal action against members of the seismological community after an earthquake is unprecedented and reflects a misunderstanding of the science of earthquakes. This is especially ironic, given the historic role that Italy has traditionally played in earthquake science.

Prosecuting scientists for failing to achieve an earthquake prediction, which is presently impossible, is a disservice to both science and society. The seismological community urges the Italian government, local authorities, and decision makers in general, to continue proactive efforts to support earthquake science and engineering and to establish and implement local and national programs in earthquake preparedness and risk mitigation. Public education, awareness, and preparedness, coupled with sound construction practices and retrofitting of older structures are currently the best available approaches for mitigating the effects of earthquakes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Richard C. Aster'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Richard' being the most prominent.

Richard C. Aster
Seismological Society of America
President