

What was really accused in the L'Aquila trial

Shinbi Suzuki^{1*}

¹Japan Broadcasting Cooperation

NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) broadcasted a TV program "Documentary WAVE" titled "Scientists accused - Sensation with an earthquake prediction in Italy" at 22:00 on 18 August, 2012. This program is a detailed report covering the case in which scientists and government officials are charged for manslaughter by the victim's families of the earthquake with M6.3 that occurred in April 2009 near L'Aquila city, central Italy. The earthquake was so devastating that it caused deaths of 309 people and collapses of more than 20,000 houses. This earthquake was preceded in several months by an earthquake swarm with more than 400 events, and local citizens in L'Aquila were very anxious about the possibility of major earthquake. The municipal authority of L'Aquila asked the governmental disaster management organization DPC (Department of Civil Protection) to gather the great risk commission (CGR), which consists of scientists and government officials, to cool down the potential of panic. The conclusion of the commission was transferred to the public as a "no risk statement", which means no major earthquake is likely to happen. The main shock happened 6 days after the meeting and caused a devastating damage. The reason why the victim's families in the city decided to sue the members of CGR is that they could have avoided the risk if "no risk statement" had never issued. Scientists argued that they will not say anything useful if they are judged guilty for the failure of prediction on the future issue that has inherently large uncertainty. The TV program verified how a predictive information on natural disaster should be transfer to the public based on the interview on the discussion in the CGR meeting.

In my presentation, as one of a member of the TV program team, I will discuss the social responsibility of scientists showing what was really accused in the trial.