

## Italian scientists against verdict on quake warning

Updated: 2012-10-24 11:40

(Xinhua)

ROME

The Italian scientific community on Tuesday contested a court verdict over the deadly 2009 quake in the central city of L'Aquila, saying it set a damaging precedent as "there is now, at present, to predict earthquakes".

Physicist Luciano Maiani resigned as president of national natural-disaster risk-assessment commission in protest against the verdict that handed six years jail sentence to seven government-appointed experts accused of manslaughter for giving a reassuring statement before the powerful shake.

Maiani said he had decided to step down along with some other officials of the commission due to the "impossibility for us of being able to work with serenity and provide the state with a high level of scientific consultancy".

The president of National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV) Stefano Gresta called himself "shocked" by Monday's ruling which "can significantly affect the relationship between scientists and decision-makers".

He said the decision could jeopardize the rights and duty of scientists to participate in the public dialogue by communicating their research results outside the scientific premises, for fear of legal retribution.

"In the entire world, it is impossible to predict earthquakes in a definitive way. Scientists are able to determine the so-called precursor phenomena only after a quake occurred," Gresta told Xinhua.

"Which scientists would like to express their opinion knowing they could go to jail?" he asked, adding that "condemning science means leaving the field open to preachers who brag about knowing how to forecast earthquakes, while giving up the contribution of distinguished scientists".

The president of the National Council of Geologists, Gianvito Graziano, was of the same opinion.

The grounds for the verdict have not been announced yet. If they are about the missed prediction of the L'Aquila disaster,

"it means to condemn the entire scientific community which, at present, has no means to forecast earthquakes both in Italy and in the rest of the world," he said.

What Italian scientists are most concerned about is the possible consequences of this ruling, noted Paolo Messina, the director of the National Research Council's (CNR) Institute of Environmental Geology and Geoengineering.

"I do not want this decision to send a message that earthquakes are predictable, because in fact it is impossible," he stressed. "Then, should we evacuate the entire population at each shock?"