

The international seminar on forensic investigations of disasters (FORIN): UNAM February 24-25, 2014

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During February 24 and 25 of February, 2014, the International seminar on forensic investigations of disasters (FORIN) was held at the Institute of Geography, National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-UNAM) in Mexico City.

The main objective of the seminar was directed towards sharing FORIN-Forensic Investigations of Disasters, a methodology proposed by the program on Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (IRDR), for investigating the complex and underlying causes of disasters.



Figure 1. Inauguration of the international seminar, Institute of Geography, UNAM. From right to left, Manuel Limonta, Jaime Urrutia Fucugauchi, Carlos Valdés and Irasema Alcántara-Ayala.

The opening ceremony took place on Monday February 24th (figure 1). The welcoming speech was made by Irasema Alcántara-Ayala, Co-Chair of FORIN. Manuel Limonta, the General Director of the ICSU Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ICSU-ROLAC), Jaime Urrutia, Vice-President of the Mexican Academy of Sciences and Carlos Valdés, the Director of the National Center for Disaster Prevention (CENAPRED) concurred on the significance of collaborative work and the need of reinforcing the understanding the root causes of disasters.



Figure 2. Key note Lecture: Prof. Ian Burton, Towards an epidemiology of disasters.

Seminar activities had two modalities:

- 1) Key-note lectures (open to the general scientific community)
- 2) Round-table discussions (exclusive for young students and scientists from Latin-America)



Figure 3. Gustavo Wilches-Chaux, Key note Lecture, Sustainability and Disaster Risk Reduction.

A series of four main lectures were given. Ian Burton, Former FORIN Chair and IRDR member gave a talk entitled “Towards an epidemiology of disasters” (figure 2). The lecture given by Gustavo Wilches-Chaux dealt with Sustainability and Disaster Risk Reduction (figure 3); Anthony Oliver-Smith spoke on Development

and the Cultural Framing of Risk: A FORIN Perspective (figure 4), and Jesús Manuel Macías shared some reflections on the forensic investigation of disasters: a Latin-American perspective (figure 5).



Figure 4. Anthony Oliver-Smith, Key note Lecture, Development and the Cultural Framing of Risk: A FORIN Perspective.



Figure 5. Jesús Manuel Macías, Key note Lecture, Reflections on the forensic investigation of disasters: a Latin-American perspective.

In addition, two more lectures were presented to the working groups of young scientists. Based on round table discussion format, Anthony Oliver-Smith provided

an Introduction to FORIN, followed by Roberto Barrios who gave a presentation on the political ecological emergence of vulnerability: applying the FORIN methodology in the Mississippi Delta.



Figure 6. Lectures for working groups.

The seminar included a series of lectures, working groups (figure 6), open discussions (figure 7) and interviews with local media. Key note lectures and open discussions were webcasted and followed by the researchers and students from Mexico and other Latin American countries.



Figure 7. Open discussion lead by working groups.

The following questions were addressed and discussed during the different activities carried out in the seminar:

- (a) Is it helpful to characterize the present outbreak of disasters as an epidemic?
- (b) How can we move from disaster risk reduction (addressing present disasters) to a culture of disaster prevention?
- (c) Should there be an International (scientific) Panel for Disasters modelled on the IPCC?
- (d) What are some of the most important and underlying causes of disasters and how should we structure or classify them?
- (e) How can we create a network of comparative forensic research projects?? Should this be publically supported and officially recognized but independent from government?

Twenty young scientists from different Latin-American countries including Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Venezuela attended the seminar. The scientific backgrounds of participants included fields in both natural and social sciences, among them geology, geography, civil engineering, administration, economics, anthropology, architecture and Civil Protection. The gender balance was close to even with 9 males and 11 females (figure 8).



Figure 8. Participants of the International seminar on forensic investigations of disasters (FORIN), Mexico City, Mexico.

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