

List of Laureate(s) and Recognitions rewarded in the context of the 2004 Sasakawa selection process

Laureate 2004

Dr. Omar Dario Cardona, Colombia
Nominated by Ian Davis, 1996 Sasakawa laureate, from UK, Dr. Yepes, Director of Instituto Geofísico de la ESPONA (1992 Sasakawa Laureate) from Ecuador and the Colombian Association for Earthquake Engineering (AIS)

Certificates of Distinction

Walter Hays, USA
Nominated by Global Institute for Energy and Environmental Systems, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Gustavo Wilches-Chaux, Colombia
Nominated by Corporación Grupo Vigias Salvando Vidas

Certificates of Merit

Municipality of La Paz, Bolivia
Nominated by the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bolivia

South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), Fiji
Nominated by Emergency Management Australia (EMA)

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Omar Dario Cardona
2004 Winner Of The United Nations Sasakawa Award For Disaster Reduction

Omar Dario Cardona is the 2004 winner of the Sasakawa Award. A Colombian earthquake engineer, he is recognized internationally for his comprehensive approaches to vulnerability and risk management. He made a remarkable contribution in the field of seismic risk reduction in introducing the concept of structural seismic vulnerability.

You have just been nominated for the Sasakawa Award? What does this mean for you?

When I found out that several people and institutions wished to propose my name for this important distinction on the part the United Nations, I immediately thought about others who, from my point of view, equally deserved to be rewarded for their remarkable contributions to disaster risk management around the world. I was very honored to realize that somebody thought I had sufficient merit to be a candidate for such an important award, because as far as I am concerned this award is the greatest recognition that a person can receive for their efforts in achieving a safer world when faced by hazardous events. It is very important that this award exists, not only for those who receive it, but mainly because it enhances the subject of risk management and disaster prevention.

You have been working for a long time now on disaster risk reduction and your contribution to disaster prevention is huge and diverse on vulnerability, risk and institutional development. You have dedicated almost all your life to the subject: what has motivated your work?

Colombia is a country of enormous contrasts, natural beauty and amazing cultural expressions that interact with a situation of permanent social crisis and disasters of all types. Since I was a boy in Manizales, where I was born, I realized the attitudes people had when facing up to phenomena like earthquakes, fires, landslides and volcanic eruptions. This particular environment and culture were the reason why I, a young civil engineer, first committed myself to improving our technical-scientific knowledge and later to the integrated study of the socioeconomic and institutional foundations of disaster risk management.

Do you think that people and governments are more aware of risk reduction and do you feel that the subject is gaining momentum?

There are advances in many parts of the world, there is greater consciousness with regard to the problem and today it is possible to identify and describe many good practices that can help stimulate the mainstreaming of disaster risk management in the economic and social development of our communities. Nevertheless, the road we have to walk is very long and we have only just begun our trip. There are places where progress is very limited or none at all, and the problems grows considerably faster than the solutions.

You are an earthquake engineer and did a lot of work establishing a first seismic code of practices to build houses, including social housing, more resistant with simple techniques of construction. Could you tell us more about your project and its impact in Latin America? What are the main obstacles you encountered to implement those practices?

I have always been convinced that the most effective indication of seismic risk mitigation is the application of seismic resistant requirements in the construction of new and existing buildings that have special value for society, like hospitals and schools. Nevertheless, building codes are often not respected or enforced because they are difficult to understand. Therefore, one of the challenges I assumed years ago was to contribute to simplifying the norms without sacrificing their reliability, to writing up requirements that are easy to apply, and to making explanatory and illustrative guidelines that people without professional formation can use in the construction of social housing. Initially this was highly criticized by the specialists, because it seemed a trivialization of engineering, but these contributions were gradually accepted and formally they began to be promoted in many building codes in Latin America and the world. In some places due to well-oriented processes of training we already can see less vulnerable informal housing. What is lacking to obtain wider coverage is a massive diffusion of these guidelines and simplified

techniques.

You created a “Centre for Disaster and Risk Studies” at the University of Los Andes. To what extent do you feel this step was important in promoting the subject in Latin America and throughout the rest of the world?

In addition to this university research and extension centre, which has been the technical “soul” of many prevention projects developed in institutions in Colombia, other processes have also helped. This includes the regular and e-learning graduate programs on the subject of environment and risks run at the National University of Colombia, Manizales, and the Technical University of Catalonia, in Barcelona. These have been of immense importance in “converting” a large number of professionals from multiple disciplines to the integrated risk management paradigm in many different countries of Ibero-America and the Caribbean. In other words, it has been of special importance in providing an option for superior education in the topic that serves to professionalize the subject and integrate it with other development activities.

What are your areas of concern today regarding disaster reduction?

My concern is not with a particular area, but, rather, in general. Although many best and exemplary mitigation practices exist that illustrate that reducing vulnerability -and therefore risk- is possible, these best practices are the exception and not the rule. For example, there are excellent cases of retrofitting of schools and hospitals, of territorial planning considering natural hazards, of education and training in the subject, but these cases are one in ten thousand cases that need to be implemented. One swallow does not make the Summer. The problem is not the lack of knowledge but the lack of coverage and effectiveness in the implementation of risk reduction. Far greater commitment is needed than that existing at present in most countries.

According to you, what would be the most urgent priorities to be carried out today in terms of disaster risk reduction?

One says frequently that there is not sufficient political will amongst critical decision-makers and that it is urgent to have that political will in order to obtain expected outcomes. In general, I agree with that. Nevertheless, the problem is not only the lack of political will but of political “feasibility”. Unfortunately, in the developing countries, this feasibility depends, from a political economy perspective, on the international order in terms of economic dependency and of adopted development models. Poverty generates disasters and the disasters generate poverty. Risk management is or should be intimately related to development planning and poverty reduction goals. I do not believe that it is possible to speak of sustainable development if a prevention strategy does not exist. Vulnerability reduction must be an explicit objective of development planning.

Do you think that Latin American countries are advanced in terms of disaster risk reduction compared to the rest of the world?

Due to the characteristics of its development process Latin America and the Caribbean has been an exceptional laboratory for profound reflection and debate by many researchers and practitioners as regards disaster risk management and its relation with economic and social development. Professionals such as those that formed and developed the Network of Social Studies in Disaster Prevention in Latin America, LA RED, have been true pioneers and advanced thinkers that have contributed to base paradigmatic conceptual changes that scarcely begin to be known in other parts of the world. These important contributions are little known because they have been published in good part in Spanish. Due to the particular history and difficulties of development in these countries, paradoxically many from the first world are not cognizant of the solutions, conceptual progress and remarkable examples of prevention that exist in Latin America.

Is there any thing else you wish to add?

Perhaps it is important to emphasize one aspect that has passed unnoticed or that may seem to have already been solved by technicians and scientists and which is the point of departure for the

implementation of any public policy on risk reduction, transfer, or disaster management. Here I refer to the way risk is evaluated and to the way this evaluation may stimulate mitigation. I think that most evaluation techniques are inadequate. They do not capture risk in the language of the diverse decision-makers and they are not based on a holistic approach that "invites" intervention. I think that it is necessary to "make risk manifest" in different ways for those in charge of the economy, the environment, infrastructure, agriculture, or health, to mention but some areas. It is not the same, for example, to talk about risk to a mayor or a community at the local level and to a governmental authority of national order. If this is not corrected, if risk is not made manifest in a suitable way such that it attracts the attention of the stakeholders, it will not be feasible to move forward decidedly in the reduction of disasters.

Walter Hays

Certificate of distinction of the Sasakawa Award 2004

Dr. Walter W. Hays is an engineering seismologist. He is a Senior Fellow in the Global Institute for Energy and Environmental Systems, at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and is Executive Director of the Global Alliance for Disaster Reduction (GADR). Prior to this joint appointment in 2001, he served 2 years as Senior Program Manager for Sustainable Built Environment in the Professional and Technical Activities Division of the American Society of Civil Engineers and for 26 years as Deputy Chief for Research Applications in the United States Geological Survey's Office of Earthquakes, Volcanoes and Engineering

His contributions to disaster risk management and educational programs throughout the world include past and current programs for UN organizations (e.g. UNESCO, WMO, UNDP, the former UNDRO, and UN/ISDR), engineering, scientific and planning professional organizations, the insurance industry, academia, NGO's, foreign government organizations, and Federal, state, and local government agencies in the United States. His leadership, personal involvement in training and program development, his publications have initiated or advanced a number of programs for disaster risk management, reaching and benefiting many professionals throughout the world.

He has been considered eligible for a Certificate of Distinction of the Sasakawa Award 2004, due to his longstanding commitment to implementing and carrying out several natural disasters prevention programs both in his country of origin as well as internationally.

He answered a few questions before his visit to Geneva.

Do you think we are moving towards a culture of disaster reduction?

Yes, a culture of disaster reduction is growing in both the scientific/technical and political sectors of communities throughout the world. Growth is slow, and directly related to (a) the increase each year in the number and impacts of natural and technological disasters, (b) the activities of the IDNDR during the 1990's and now the ISDR in the 21st century, and (c) activities of many other cooperating organizations throughout the world to marshal a complementary global effort with ISDR and other UN agencies to increase the capability of communities for becoming disaster resilient.

What are the main obstacles to implementing a culture of prevention?

The major obstacles are: ignorance, apathy, and in the box thinking of a large percentage of the citizens, scientists, engineers, planners, educators, and politicians in every community, and the people.

Is education the main hope for implementing a culture of disaster prevention?

Education at the community level of every nation will help reduce ignorance of citizens, transform apathy into passion, and help scientists, engineers, planners, emergency managers, and politicians learn how to think outside the box as they consider the main barriers to disaster reduction -- the Social, Technical, Administrative, Political, Legal, and Economic (STAPLE) factors of their community. Education is not a silver bullet for disaster reduction now, but it could become one as a result of advances during the UNESCO led Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2015, and beyond).

How would you describe your current work?

My work is performed as Executive Director of the Global Alliance for Disaster Reduction (GADR), an NGO comprised of over 1,000 members who are actively involved at present in finding solutions to meet the full range of societal needs, including education, associated with disaster reduction in over 70 countries. My goal is to concentrate GADR's culturally, technically and geographically diverse human resources on building scientific/technical and political capacity for disaster reduction at the community, national and regional scales. GADR has developed and is continuing to develop Global and Regional Blueprints for Change to facilitate the ongoing process of helping communities to become resilient to disasters from floods, severe windstorms, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, droughts and all other natural hazards, and is cooperating with ISDR, UNESCO, WMO, UNDP, the World Bank, and more than 70 Supporting Organizations representing the public and private sectors.

What is your main message to the world?

My message is that "We are all here to meet the serious challenge posed by recurring natural and technological disasters to our world." We all know what to do for each hazard, and we all know how to improve cooperation, communication, coordination, and collaboration at community, national and regional scales to solve all of the problems we face together. The bottom line is that "We just need to do it!" .

I believe that if we improve knowledge management and education, and improve and sustain our linkages between professionals of the developing and developed worlds, we can empower millions of people who have no role at present to have a significant role in disaster reduction for the first time. As this process unfolds, we will see many more people and their communities becoming scientifically literate, self sufficient and resilient to disasters, even within the relatively short time frame of the next decade, 2005-2015. This is possible because knowledge and education are both integrating and facilitating mechanisms, and cooperation, communication, coordination and collaboration at community, national and regional scales are enabling mechanisms. In a global strategy, these mechanisms will equip all professionals (e.g. scientists, engineers, planners, emergency managers, educators and politicians) to realize the power of $1 + 1 = 2$ (i.e. the highly leveraged benefits that only come from working together).

Gustavo Wilches-Chaux

Certificate of Distinction of the Sasakawa Award 2004

Born in 1954, Gustavo Wilches-Chaux is a writer from Popayan (Colombia). He is a Doctor in Law and Political and Social Sciences from the University of Cauca. He undertook post-graduate studies in audiovisual production (Bristol Polytechnic, 1985) and disaster management (Oxford Polytechnic, 1986) under the tutorial of Dr. Ian Davis. He was in charge of the self-help reconstruction process of low income families houses after the Popayan earthquake (1983) and the reconstruction process of the Indian region of Tierradentro (south west of Colombia) after the Paez earthquake (1994). Most of his work is at the community level. He is the author of more than 30 books and essays, including the now classic "La Vulnerabilidad Global" ("Global vulnerability"), in which he analyses the many dimensions participating in the vulnerability/sustainability complex system. During the past 5 years, he has been promoting

research and advocacy around human rights, both of persons and communities affected by disasters. He has just published his first book of science fiction stories: "El Universo Amarrado a la Pata de la Cama" (The Universe tied to the leg of the bed).

In light of his devoted and pioneering work in risk management in his country's local communities, Dr. Gustavo Wilches-Chaux was a natural choice for a Certificate of Distinction of the Sasakawa Award 2004. Particular attention was given to the multi-disciplinary approach, environmental and sustainability aspects of his activities. In addition to the active support and involvement of all age categories of community members in prevention and risk management, Dr. Wilches' work gives particular emphasis to training, education and capacity building for all community members.

A few words from Gustavo Wilches Chaux

" I have always tried to help local leaders, educators and "common people", to understand and grasp scientific and technical concepts related to environment and development. The knowledge and cultural heritage of every individual and of communities are tools for change. Now, for example, I am working on how vulnerabilities create new hazards, based on the experience of communities living in the urban wetlands of Bogota city. A UNDP/BCPR consultancy in which I am currently involved gives me the opportunity to test my findings in other parts of Colombia, Bolivia, Jamaica and Nicaragua. Most of my work –including my philosophy work- comes from a permanent field experience at the community-ecosystem level. I am also very interested in the ethics of risk management and sustainability management and on the human rights of individuals and communities affected by disasters".