By Alexa Engelman, UCLA Law delegation — one in a series of posts from COP 15 in Copenhagen:

“Oil and politics mix well, but I’m not sure if oil and science mix well.” So stated IPPC Chair Rajendra Pachauri when asked by reporters in a session at the Bella Center Tuesday morning about the hacked emails from climate scientists at the University of East Anglia. With the worldwide media frenzy around the so-called “ClimateGate,” many (including those on legal planet) wonder what role the revelation of these emails may play in the Copenhagen talks. Pachauri’s comment regarding oil was a direct reference to Saudi Arabia’s comments early in the conference Monday calling into question the premise of the science driving the COP 15 talks.

Although the morning’s session focused on the role of the science in the IPCC’s 2007 Fourth Assessment Report , the frenzy regarding the hacked emails has been difficult to ignore entirely in this international gathering. But Raj Pachauri took the issue head on at the outset of the presentation. He stated that the IPCC was looking into the emails for “lessons learned” but dismissed the idea of a formal “investigation,” and he flatly denied that the emails called into question the global consensus on the existence of climate change. He pointed to the fact that the IPCC gathers data from many sources, only one of which is Climate Research Unit (CRU) at East Anglia targeted by the hackers, and went to lengths to point to the robust peer-reviewed process of the IPCC. That process, Pachauri pointed out, led to the inclusion of the “suppressed” research referenced in the CRU emails in the IPCC’s 2007 report showing divergent warming trends in tree rings.

Editorial boards and media outlets do not appear satisfied with this argument and have called for further transparency for National Science Foundation and other federally funded science. Pachauri again voiced the IPCC’s mantra that warming in the climate system is unequivocal, and that the science behind that assertion is not in doubt. And other panelists, all IPCC working group chairs, outlined the central scientific observations of climate impact since the 2007 report. The emerging science will be included in the upcoming Fifth Assessment Report due in 2013 but, in the interim, clear patterns are emerging. For many, these observations may be far from surprising given warming trends but their role in the decision-making process for stakeholders cannot be understated. The central points included higher concentrations of CO2 and increases in concentrations ten times faster than previously recorded; changes in the thickness and loss of ice sheets; and the persistence and long-term committment of CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere.

Dr. Thomas Stocker also discussed the “termination problem” associated with attempts to geoengineer solutions, whereby efforts to engineer solutions to warming end in abrupt climate change when projects are abandoned.

However, here in Copenhagen, ClimateGate is far from the most pressing issue for those sorting out the complex and politically wrought issues of technology transfer, mitigation, adaption, land use and many, many other aspects of the negotiations. The general sentiment among the many NGO’s present is, let’s not expend energy on the skeptics and instead move on and make history. While the IPCC is not ignoring the ClimateGate frenzy, it too has more significant obligations and ambitions here in Copenhagen. With two days down, the negotiations are heating up in expectation of the arrival of over 110 heads of state next week. Stay tuned for updates!