Don't pin US tornado on climate change, UN panel head says

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Yellow caution tape marks off the area surrounding the heavily damaged Moore Medical Center after a powerful tornado ripped through the area on May 20, 2013 in Moore, Oklahoma. Pinning the deadly tornado in the US state of Oklahoma on climate change is wrongheaded, even though the world is set to see a rise in high-profile weather disasters due to global warming, the leader of a UN body said.

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said Tuesday.

Rajendra Pachauri, head of the UN-backed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said data was still coming in about Monday's massive tornado which tore through a suburb of Oklahoma City, killing at least 24 people.

"Could there be better preparedness in general? Yes. What could better preparedness have been? Well it's very difficult to say at this stage," Pachauri told reporters in Geneva.

"But one really cannot relate an event of this nature to human-induced climate change. It's just not possible. Scientifically, that's not valid," he said.

The tornado followed roughly the same track as a May 1999 twister that killed 44 people, injured hundreds and destroyed thousands of homes.

Tornadoes frequently touch down on Oklahoma's plains, but Monday's twister struck a populated urban area.

Because of the hard ground, few homes are built with basements or storm shelters where residents can take cover.

The chairman of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Rajendra Pachauri, speaks on June 6, 2011 in Oslo. Pinning the deadly tornado in the US state of Oklahoma on climate change is wrongheaded, even though the world is set to see a rise in high-profile weather disasters due to global warming, Pachauri said Tuesday.

Oklahoma City lies inside the so-called "Tornado Alley" stretching from South Dakota to central Texas, an area particularly vulnerable to tornadoes.

Experts warn that other extreme weather events—like last year's Hurricane Sandy in the Caribbean and United States—could strike more often due to climate change, as global temperatures rise and governments struggle to rein in emissions of greenhouse gases which are blamed for the phenomenon.

"Changes that are taking place, and that we're concerned about, include

an increase in heatwaves, both in intensity and frequency, increase in extreme precipitation events and also extreme sea-level related impacts because of the increase in Arctic sea level," Pachauri said.