

REDD : Moratorium 'won't hamper' investment

A coalition of activists rallied to convince the government that the forestry license moratorium would not hamper investments but instead give legal certainty to investors doing business in the forest sector. The call came after the delay in implementing the promised moratorium on the conversion of natural forests and peatland areas, following a carbon-offset agreement with Norway.

"The moratorium should be the time to restructure our forest policy," Alliance of Archipelagic Indigenous People (AMAN) secretary-general Abdon Nababan said.

He added that the moratorium offered an opportunity to resolve long-standing forest problems regarding tenure rights, forest boundaries and overlapping permits, in order to reduce forestry conflicts.

"Good businesspeople would benefit because it would provide legal certainty once the moratorium was implemented," he said.

NGOs said the break would give the government, businesses and the forest communities time regroup and start managing forests with a clean slate.

The joint call came from groups such as the Indonesian Environmental Forum (Walhi), Greenpeace, the Civil Society Forum on Climate Change (CSF), the Association for Community and Ecology-Based Law Reform (Huma) and Sawit Watch.

They called on the government to shift focus from the monetary incentive offered by Norway, which had pledged US\$1 billion for the moratorium.

"The forest moratorium should not be about Norwegian money. It should aim to fix forest management for the sake of Indonesia," said Georgio Indarto of the CSF.

The moratorium remained in limbo because of an absence of legal basis. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was expected to issue a presidential instruction to legalize the moratorium.

Currently, there are three drafts of presidential instructions proposed by the Forestry Ministry and the presidential taskforce on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD).

The ministry says the moratorium should only apply to primary forests and peatlands, while the taskforce wants to stop the issuing of new licenses for all natural forests — both primary and secondary — and peatlands as stipulated under letter of intent between Indonesia and Norway.

"There would be no changes if the moratorium would only be for primary forests. Even without the moratorium, primary forests have been declared as protected areas," said Bernadinus Steni, the program coordinator for climate change and REDD at Huma.

He warned that the delay would tarnish the government's image in the international arena on climate change affairs.