

Moratorium to preserve only protected forest areas: Draft

Deforestation would continue in the country despite the pledged two-year moratorium, since it would only take effect in areas categorized as protected under the Forest Law, a civil society group said on Wednesday.

After analyzing drafts of presidential decrees on the forest moratorium, Greenpeace said the target of the moratorium would only be 41 million hectares of forests. "The 41 million hectares have been designated as protected areas under the 1999 Forest Law," geographic information center (GIS) specialist for Greenpeace, Kiki Taufik said at a press conference on Wednesday.

The figure is far lower than the Forestry Ministry's prediction of approximately 60 million hectares.

The press conference came after a meeting of high-ranking officials to discuss drafts of presidential decrees was reported in a deadlock on Monday.

There are currently two drafts of the decrees issued by the Forestry Ministry and Presidential Taskforce on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, known as REDD plus.

One source said the draft from Forestry Ministry was backed up by Coordinating Minister for the Economy Hatta Rajasa and the Environment Minister, Gusti Muhammad Hatta.

That version says the moratorium would only affect primary forests and primary peatlands.

The other draft, by the REDD plus taskforce, headed by Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, wanted to include primary forests and secondary peatland areas.

The letter of intent (LoI) between Indonesia and Norway on climate says Indonesia would temporarily stop issuing new licenses in the natural forests and peatlands.

It is not clear which draft was submitted to the President for approval before implementing the moratorium, which was supposed to be done by Jan. 1. "The two drafts produce the same output of only 41 million hectares that would be protected under the moratorium," Kiki said.

Greenpeace used data of forest coverage released by Forestry Ministry in 2006.

"With the data, there are only 95 million hectares of both primary and secondary forests as of 2006 with another some 9.4 million hectares of peat," he said.

Indonesia lost over 1 million hectares per year due to, among other factors, illegal expansion of plantation and mining activities.

It said that oil palm plantations and coal mines had converted some 12 million hectares in primary forests. "The total primary forest that could be protected was only 32 million hectares."

Greenpeace also said that 3.2 million hectares of peatland were converted into business purposes, leaving only 6 million hectares that could be protected.

In addition, the peatland located outside the forest was only 6.5 million hectares.

The coalition, consisting of activists from Greenpeace, the Indonesian Environmental Forum (Walhi), the Civil Society Forum on climate change (CSF) and Sawit Watch, renewed its call on the government to include primary and natural forests as well as peatlands in the moratorium.

The head international campaigner of Walhi, Teguh Surya, said the current drafts showed that with or without the moratorium, the 41 million hectares should be banned from business conversions.

“The moratorium should be momentum to improve forest management, but with the drafts there would no changes in the forest,” he said.

Georgio Indarto of the CSF said the government should issue stronger policies rather than presidential decrees to implement REDD in the country.

“The presidential decree is unfit for the moratorium concept,” he said.

Presidential special staff on climate change Agus Purnomo said the 41 million hectares would be double the size of England, and it was a good start to improving forest protection in Indonesia.

He said the forest moratorium would also take place outside the protected forests.

“With such a huge area of damaged forest, we can’t merely rely on a forestry moratorium; it is only one instrument to protect the forest,” he said.