

Govt deforestation to continue amid emission-reduction plans

The government will maintain its deforestation targets despite its pledge to control emissions. Forestry Ministry secretary-general Hadi Daryanto said on Tuesday that the government would proceed with plans to clear 14 million hectares (ha) of degraded forest from 2010 to 2020. Indonesia currently contains 180 million ha of forested land.

According to Hadi, the degraded forest would be transformed into convertible forest as the country's growth has forced the government to provide more space for development needs, such as infrastructure, energy and food supply.

"Deforestation is inevitable [for development], but we will allocate the land for better use," Hadi told The Jakarta Post.

He added that the government would carefully select which degraded forest to clear. He emphasized that this would be strictly supervised so as to prevent illegal logging and other environmentally detrimental activities.

"We will provide the forested land information on our website and we will invite people to monitor the process by using the satellite imagery to supervise the land," Hadi said, adding that the government would neither replace nor replant the degraded land.

Data published in the Nature Climate Change journal indicated that between 2000 and 2012, Indonesia lost over 6.02 million ha of primary forest. The study also revealed that by 2012, Indonesia began recording losses of 0.84 million ha a year, almost twice Brazil's annual primary forest loss of 0.46 million ha.

The study emerged despite the government's aggressive international campaign to reduce deforestation through Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programs and the creation of a dedicated agency to run REDD+ programs. The Forestry Ministry recently issued Ministerial Decree No. 63/2014, a milestone for realizing REDD+ projects.

The decree sets an emission level of 0.816 gigatons per year. The number, according to Hadi, is based on average emission levels in the period of 2000-2006. Hadi added that while the current emissions level was lower than 0.816 gigatons, the government should work diligently to maintain it.

Yuyun Indradi, a Greenpeace Southeast Asia analyst, decried the announcement, saying it proved the government was not truly committed to reducing emissions. He added that the plans would accentuate the already alarming rate of deforestation occurring in Indonesia.

"Greenpeace disagrees with the plan. While we should be fighting deforestation, the government has decided to sustain its deforestation plan," Yuyun said.

Agus P. Sari, deputy chair of the REDD+ Management Agency, questioned the decree and said that the ministry should provide details on how it would still uphold its emissions targets, as well as release data regarding the country's true deforestation rate.

"The ministry only said that they used emission data from 2000 to 2006, but the real calculation to get the figure was never revealed," Agus said, adding that the decree should serve as a technical guide, not just for political purposes.

In a recent contribution to The Jakarta Post entitled "The inconvenient truth about Indonesia deforestation", Agus cited deforestation data from various sources and emphasized that the government should consolidate its forest and deforestation data.

"The Forestry Ministry currently works according to a jurisdictional definition of forests that may be smaller than the actual area of forests in the country," Agus said. (idb)