

## **Forest destruction continues as police, ministry lack personnel**

The National Police said on Wednesday that there was little that they could do to investigate forestry crimes due to a shortage of manpower. The National Police's special crimes sub-directorate chief, Comr. Gen. Nurworo Danang, said that the existing number of personnel could not cover all forested areas in the country.

"We only have a few investigators working on forestry crimes at the National Police," Danang said during a discussion on law enforcement in forestry crimes on Wednesday.

Without giving any details, Danang said that the number of investigators who had extensive knowledge about forestry crimes was only a fraction of the 400,000 enlisted police personnel.

He also said that only police investigators at the provincial level had the ability to handle forestry crimes, while police personnel at the municipal or district level had general knowledge on forestry issues.

The lack of resources has hampered the police in solving forestry crimes, which in many cases has resulted in communal conflicts in some parts of the country.

He said that some of the conflicts sprung from the fact that the central government and the local administration often issued regulations that contradicted each other.

The Forestry Ministry's directorate general of forest protection and natural conservation, Sonny Partono, said that currently 711 investigators and 3,112 forestry police personnel were employed by the ministry to handle forestry crimes.

Sonny said that the number of personnel could not cover the country's 132.3 million hectares of forested areas.

He said the number of personnel could not even cover conservation forests, which made up only 14.88 percent of the country's forests or 19.7 million hectares.

"Ideally, one officer should handle 500 hectares of forest. We need thousands of more personnel," Sonny said.

Forestry Ministry data reveals that only 23 forestry cases have been brought to court in the past five years.

Of the cases, only 65 verdicts have been delivered.

Sonny said that the ministry currently only had 18 investigators who had undergone special training based on the 2013 regulation to mitigate forest destruction. He said that the ministry planned to add 300 more investigators this year.

He added that the new regulation allowed police personnel and forestry investigators to probe investors, field operators and officials implicated in forest destruction.

The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) said that both the National Police and the Forestry Ministry should add more personnel and increase their capacity to solve forestry crimes.

The chairman of Walhi's Central Kalimantan office, Aryo Nugroho Waluyo, said forestry crimes were pressing problems that needed urgent action, especially in critical areas like Central Kalimantan.

"The loser in this problem is not only the government but also the public in general, especially from communal conflict," Aryo said.

He said that police investigators and prosecutors should also apply other laws to go after corporations and individuals accused of destroying the forest.

"Prosecutors could also use the Corruption Law for illegal logging, for instance," he said.