

Warming up for climate talks

In New York, the UN Climate Summit was opened Tuesday by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to smooth the way for talks scheduled in December and next year in Paris, aimed at finalizing a new global agreement on curbing climate change.

However, the leaders of India and China, among the world's biggest emitters of harmful emissions, are conspicuously absent. Their absence reflects their refusal to meet demands to drastically cut their gas emissions, saying their rapidly developing economies cannot be stunted while the richest nation and fellow carbon polluter, the US, also refuses to sign the expiring Kyoto Protocol.

The hundreds of thousands marching in New York ahead of the summit along with Ban mirrored widespread anxiety over the possibility of the large powers further blocking any progress in curbing global warming, by not doing anything.

"Catalyzing action" is nevertheless this year's summit theme, and for Indonesia, speeding up necessary action regarding our forests alone will be meaningful. We have experienced various disasters, which make it hard to deny the scientific findings of global warming and its impacts, regardless of who to blame.

Conserving and sustainably managing forests is one of our tasks as over 60 percent of carbon emissions come from the exploitation of our forests. Therefore, Heru Prasetyo, Indonesia's chair of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation plus (REDD+) Management Agency, which is in charge of forest conservation and sustainable management, said the country's driver for sustainable growth with equity was REDD.

Despite vulnerability from our dependence on forests and also our more immediate exposure to rising sea levels compared to landlocked countries, progress on actions to fight climate change is slow. One problem is less tangible incentives for businesses if they were to use cleaner, higher cost technology, though several corporations descending on New York are showcasing their commitment and long-term interest in saving the planet.

Another more pressing problem is that global and regional trade agendas do not necessarily tie up with climate action plans and commitments. So whatever the output of the summit to save the Earth, it will not be able to catch up with the shorter-term interests of commerce.

This is the case even as food security is under threat, as agricultural and fishery production dwindles, when farmers and fishermen cannot harvest their yields. Indonesia's indigenous people also continue to remind us that they must have a say in whatever policies are made in the name of the environment as their livelihoods are directly impacted.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a member of the UN panel formulating the next global agreement on climate change, will bid farewell to world leaders at his last international summit, while asserting Indonesia's commitment.

He will hopefully inspire our next leader on how to make progress on the issue while accommodating the aspirations of the above communities, which include the traditional guardians of our forests.