

# Jokowi and Prabowo on climate change

When politicians speak little on a particular subject and act even less, they may have to bear heavy costs politically, socially and perhaps environmentally; especially when the subject in question is a global phenomenon such as climate change. Joko “Jokowi” Widodo and Prabowo Subianto have registered as presidential candidates at the General Elections Commission (KPU). Jokowi, together with running mate Jusuf Kalla, and Prabowo, paired with Hatta Rajasa, are the only tickets for the July 9 polls, Indonesia’s third direct presidential election. In registering, the two contenders were required to submit up to 26 documents. The list of these documents, which include their profiles and their vision and mission statements are downloadable from the KPU website at [kpu.go.id](http://kpu.go.id). The vision and mission statement is the candidate’s platform. Prabowo, chief patron of the Gerindra Party, spells out eight planks in his nine-page program statement that stem from the action plan that he announced on July 15 last year. Plank VII is titled “Safeguarding Nature Conservation and the Environment”. In it, Prabowo has one line on climate change: “To take an active role in addressing global climate change in balance with Indonesia’s conditions.”

The phrase “in balance with Indonesia’s conditions” can invite a broad interpretation. It could mean anything from decisions that support custom-based communities in forest areas to policies that favor holders of forest concessions. To his credit, however, Prabowo stated a parallel promise to reforest 77 million hectares of destroyed forests and turn coal mining into an activity that is environmentally and socially friendly. Other pledges include taking “stern action” against environmental polluters, protecting biodiversity, executing the planting of timber-producing trees by people – both collectively and individually – in plots up to 5 hectares in size, and issuing certification for all forest-based businesses and the products derived from them to earn global market acceptance. Two of his other actions would be to require rent-permit holders of forested areas to develop urban forests at the district and city level and to rehabilitate river systems and water resources.

Meanwhile Jokowi of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) submitted a 41-page action plan that covers 31 “strategic agendas” across three broad fields. Twelve are in political sovereignty, 16 in economic self-reliance and three in cultural identity. These 31 points are crystallized into nine priorities called the Nawacita. Climate change and the environment in the broader sense, however, do not make it onto this priority list. The issue of climate change is only given a single line in point three in the section on economic self-reliance: “We are committed to a climate change blueprint, not only as an environmental issue but also for the national economy.”

Despite this one line, Jokowi plans to offer collateral benefits for the forest sector and customary communities. This includes rehabilitating 100 million hectares of critical land and land without forest cover, resolving conflicts over concessions and overlapping permits, and “establishing accurate forest resource data to ensure business certainty and fairness”.

Regarding the issue of forestry, Jokowi lists 14 actions. He would; he is, after all, a 1985 forestry graduate from Gadjah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta. After graduation, Jokowi worked in a forest concession area in Aceh. Both Prabowo and Jokowi insert climate change into their action plans. But their fleeting references to the issue make them appear to be in denial. They each seem to deny that climate change is a pressing issue. They seem to reject the fact that Indonesia has a climate crisis to deal with. The undeniable fact, however, is that Indonesia’s forests periodically catch fire. Most recently, Riau province sustained widespread forest fires in February and March this year that emitted huge amounts of carbon dioxide, the major greenhouse gas that causes global warming. The wildfires were so severe that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono hastened to Pekanbaru, the provincial capital, to take command and oversee the extinguishing of the fires.

The international community recognizes Indonesia, along with Brazil, as key global actors to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, given their extensive tropical rainforests. One telling indicator of this recognition is Norway, with its ample US\$850 billion sovereign wealth fund, agreeing to grant Indonesia and Brazil up to \$1 billion each for verified reductions of forest-based carbon emissions. Meanwhile, the government bodies entrusted with climate mitigation and adaptation should present the case about their functions to the Jokowi and Prabowo camps. One significant case in point is that the National Council on Climate Change (DNPI) and the REDD+ Management Agency (BP REDD+) are the nation’s voice at international climate gatherings.

The world looks to Indonesia to play a significant role. Indonesia’s next president needs to appreciate that recognition and design a robust climate plan that puts some beef on to the paltry frame of his single-line climate agenda.

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