

REDD+ agency hopes for committed new govt

A Officials from the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation plus (REDD+) Management Agency have urged the incoming government to remain committed to the ongoing efforts to reduce carbon emissions. REDD+ chairman Heru Prasetyo said on Thursday that the next government had a big task ahead, as it not only had to maintain momentum but must also ensure the indigenous groups' rights bill was passed. The bill, if passed by the House of Representatives, is expected to empower indigenous groups in reclaiming and sustaining customary forests for sustainable development.

"By acknowledging their rights, indigenous groups can serve as strategic partners in the protection of forests," said Heru. He said that indigenous groups were estimated to hold the rights to around 45 million hectares of forest currently being misused as commercial concessions. REDD+, setup this year to protect rainforests and peatland, has advocated the rights of indigenous people and local communities, including the 2012 Constitutional Court verdict stating that customary forests should no longer belong to the state. "The indigenous community can also be strategic to reclaiming land from concession holders," REDD+ chief operating officer William Sabandar said. The next administration, of president-elect Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, was also urged to help smooth policy reviews under the authority of the agency.

"We expect there will be a change in the mechanism of license provisions so they prioritize the protection of the environment," said Heru. REDD+ must be brought to the regional level as regents held just as much authority in influencing the deforestation debate as the central government, according to William. The agency is also in the process of preparing the operational and institutional aspects of the REDD+ initiatives in measuring and reporting on carbon emissions by the end of 2016. "As much as 18 percent of all carbon emissions in the country are caused by the misappropriation of forests and critical land," he revealed. According to a national survey from 2006, Indonesia would be contributing 2.9 gigatons of carbon emissions by 2020 if the government continued with its laissez-faire policy. Heru estimated that 88 percent of that burden came from the forestry and agriculture sectors. Indonesia's target is to cut greenhouse-gas emissions by 26 percent by its own volition or as much as 41 percent with international aid. The nation started dozens of demonstration projects for REDD, which was sponsored by the United Nations to measure the climate benefits of slowing deforestation and awarded credits based on each ton of emissions prevented by saving forests.

This initiative was recognized by Norway, with its ample US\$850 billion sovereign-wealth fund, which agreed to grant Indonesia up to \$1 billion for verified reductions of forest-based carbon emissions. Heru said that both the local and international communities recognized Indonesia as a key global actor in reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono issued a moratorium on deforestation in 2011 with the intention of synchronizing economic, social and cultural development with environmental development. According to Heru, the real reason was to prevent the issuing of new forest concessions. With the moratorium expiring in 2015, the agency is mulling passing the baton to the next government. "If the new government does not ensure continuity, it may lead to widespread disappointment and serious ecological repercussions," said Heru. "We have to assume that the new government has more short-term priorities. This should not be the case, as this initiative is both a short- and long-term plan that does not use state funds," he said. Heru also said that the new government would be burdened with unfinished bureaucratic reform and capacity building for forestry and environmental officials as well as demands for the strengthening of interagency coordination and law enforcement. (tjs)