

# Firms pledge commitment to forests

A coalition of NGOs criticized on Tuesday the involvement of large companies — which, according to the NGOs, are the cause of deforestation — at the UN 2014 Climate Summit in New York, saying the companies would only hinder efforts to save the forests. The summit discussed efforts to accelerate global action in the fight against rising carbon emissions, prior to the annual climate conference that will take place in Lima, Peru, in December.

To show their commitment, 27 countries and 34 companies signed a non-legally binding political declaration on forest action statements and action plans, which aims to restore 150 million hectares of degraded landscapes and forestland by 2020 and at least an additional 200 million ha by 2030. Indonesia is one of the signatory countries, with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono delivering a speech at the summit.

Among the company signatories are Asia Pulp and Paper (APP), Golden Agri-Resources, Unilever, Cargill and Wilmar International. Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI) national forest campaigner Zenzi Suhadi said on Thursday that the involvement of several companies that were allegedly linked to deforestation in Indonesia but also signed the declaration had obstructed the significance of the summit.

“The declaration disguises their evil practices from global society. It will only save the real culprits of deforestation issues,” he said. The June edition of academic journal *Nature Climate Change* said Indonesia had overtaken Brazil as the country with the world’s highest rate of annual loss of primary forest.

That finding is despite international pledges made by Yudhoyono to reduce emissions. The government’s bold claims were never truly realized as law enforcement remained ineffective in stopping illegal plantations in primary forest areas and in arresting perpetrators of forest fires.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Indonesia reported that an NGO consortium dedicated to monitoring Kalimantan’s natural forest, Relawan Pemantau Hutan Kalimantan (RPHK) found that APP had failed to protect up to 1,400 ha of natural forest in West Kalimantan province by excluding the area from its self-imposed moratorium on logging and land clearance.

Also on Thursday, the South Jakarta District Court rejected a lawsuit filed by the Environment Ministry against palm-oil company PT Surya Panen Subur concerning peatland fires in Tripa Peat Swamp, West Aceh Regency, Aceh, arguing that the ministry’s lawsuit failed to define the burning of forests allegedly inflicted by the company.

Earlier, APP chairman Teguh Ganda Wijaya said “we at APP also believe that forest-based products can help in this regard because they retain carbon, are recyclable and, when sourced from responsibly managed plantations, are often more sustainable than the alternatives.”

APP also announced its forest conservation policy and zero deforestation commitment in February 2013. Budi Wardhana, policy and transformation director at WWF Indonesia — which also signed the declaration — said separately that the main problem was “the lack of monitoring and law enforcement in the country”, which made regulations merely paper tigers. (ask/idb)