

Nickel mining threatens Sulawesi orchid

The endemic Sulawesi orchid (*Phalaenopsis amabilis* var *celebica*), a flower that when in bloom produces pristine white petals, is under threat from nickel mining in the Sulawesi, a researcher says.

The orchid species, which is synonymous with Sulawesi, grows in Sorowaku Forest, Luwu Timur, an area rich in nickel.

“Our worry is that the forest in which these orchids are growing will be destroyed for mining,” said Radhi Abdullah, the head of Research at South Sulawesi on Thursday, as quoted by kompas.com.

Muslih said that the species possessed pristine-white flower petals with a yellow - sometimes red - flower base, and that his team was currently taking samples of the orchid to Puca Botanical Garden in Maros.

“The preservation of the habitat of *Phalaenopsis amabilis* var *celebica* should be maintained, together with conservation efforts. But the support from our government is minimal since preservation efforts have not produced instant revenue,” Radhi added.

Balibangda noted that as of 2008, there were 216 endemic plant species in Sulawesi.

“If [the conservation efforts] are taken seriously, we can develop them the same as how tulips were made economically profitable and sustainable,” he added.

There are six types of *Phalaenopsis amabilis* in Indonesia. They are scattered throughout Sulawesi, Maluku, Papua, Kalimantan, Sumatra and Java. The word *Phalaenopsis* derives from the Greek for butterfly-shaped flower.