

Discourse: Balthasar vows to address major environmental damage

*In the Cabinet reshuffle last month, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono installed **Balthasar Kambuaya**, a professor at Jayapura-based Cendrawasih University, as Environment Minister. He was former deputy of the organizing committee of Papua's special autonomy law in 2000 and a former member of the National Commission on Innovation. The Jakarta Post's **Tifa Asrianti** talks to the new minister about his plans for the ministry. He highlighted his commitment to probe potential cases of environmental damage from mining activities, including that involving PT Freeport Indonesia in Papua. Excerpts below.*

Question: *What is the focus of the Environment Ministry for the next three years?*

Answer: Three years is a short period of time, and we actually have less than three years.

Our focus will be on the guidelines that we received from the President during the ministerial inauguration. For us, these include environment control, pollution and climate change, conservation and biodiversity protection in which we will work with the Forestry Ministry, and the Clean Indonesia Movement, in which we are the leading ministry.

In relation to environment control, we are currently waiting on two government decisions that have been stalled since 2009. I've spoken to the deputies to get them completed soon.

The 2009 Law on the environment has many derivatives, including these government regulations that will be the basis of our work.

We will also focus on things related to cases and permit issuance. On the first floor of this office, we have our One Stop Service, a service for the rapid and transparent facilitation of environment-impact assessments (Amdal).

We have to have standard operating procedures and set times to create certainty so people know when they can obtain the papers. We hope to complete this in November.

When I first met my deputies, there were 91 cases of environmental damage. Now the number has increased to more than 100. I want to make the priority big and strategic cases but of course, we will complete all cases in the end.

With climate change, we need to have a strong campaign. This month we will have a regional meeting on sustainable consumption and production, which relates to climate change and the green economy.

The President has declared a 26 percent cut in emissions, so we need to control progress. Recently we held a meeting in Bali to talk about progress, problems and solutions.

During the meeting in Bali, you mentioned completing around 10 environment cases in the first 100 days. What are the cases?

I did not exactly say 10 cases, I said if I could finish even five or 10 big cases in the first 100 days, it would be a good achievement. I have asked my deputies to prioritize the big and strategic cases, I don't yet know the chosen cases. Big and strategic cases mean cases that have a major impact on the environment and in which the companies have huge interests, such as Newmont and Freeport.

Do you have a specific program for Papua?

When we talk Papua, we talk about forests. We need to boost efforts to protect our forests. If we cut down all of the forest, not only does Indonesia have environmental problems but the world experiences them too. We will evaluate forest management in Papua, Kalimantan and Sumatra. If we can protect forest, we will do that. We will monitor forest management, if it only creates destruction we will limit it.

In Papua, there is a big company, Freeport, that works and also dumps waste in the area. They have to work according to the regulations.

The people claim there is environmental degradation. But there are also cases where people mixed environmental degradation with the collective territorial (ulayat) rights. We need to educate and empower the people and create community-based forest management.

We have to give compensation money from industry to the people. They will then understand that while there is a part of the forest that needs to be sacrificed businesses will help protect the other parts. Freeport will come to talk about this. They should work according to their Amdal permits. If not, we will have to evaluate the situation.

How has the government fared on the national strategy plan on REDD+, in relation to the Indonesia-Norway agreement?

We will push it. I've asked my deputies to complete it. The compensation for people has yet to be carried out. We need to enforce the regulations. To protect our forests, we need to empower and involve the people.

The President is committed to maintaining both the environment and economic growth. What are the suggestions from the ministry to achieve both goals?

We will try to create economic growth through a green economy, so we need to do things with an environment-friendly mind-set, such as no land burning, no pollution. Industries and businesses should be aware that they can still do business but they need to protect the environment. Everything is possible with a green economy.