

Firm leadership needed in conservation

The green economy and sustainable development program could well be implemented as long as President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono shows firm political will and receives support from lawmakers, a former minister says.

Emil Salim, a former environment minister who is now a member of the presidential advisory board, said the President had announced several green economy programs in recent years. However, the implementation was still lacking.

One of the government's efforts in conserving the environment is the REDD+ initiative, which gives the state a role in conservation and sustainable forest management. In 2009, the government also made a commitment to reduce greenhouse gases by 26 percent by 2020.

According to Emil, in order to make the programs successful, one of the challenges would be to balance the interest of political and business groups with that of civil society.

"The President's decision is sometimes hampered by political parties and by the House of Representatives. Educating political leaders in conserving the environment is vital," Emil said in his speech after receiving the The Leader for the Living Planet Award from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) on Friday.

"Have you ever heard the political parties talking about the environment? No! They only care about their campaign funds," he said.

Emil said that the development policies must be based on people's equal rights in the use of natural resources for the benefits of present and future generations in a united and diverse Indonesia.

Emil, a founder of WWF Indonesia and the country's first environment minister, was presented with the award on Friday due to his dedication, leadership and contribution to saving the environment.

According to WWF Indonesia, past receivers of the award, which was first initiated in 2002, includes former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan. During his acceptance speech, Emil said that the government should move from a single economic track to one that includes the economic, social and environmental tracks of sustainable development.

"Our government's investment plans still focus on the developed regions that destroy nature at the same time," he said.

Emil said that focusing attention on the conservation of nature was highly pivotal for the sake of the human race. He added, "Natural resources were not only provided for us. If all of them, including non-renewable sources, vanished, how could our future generations live?"

Jim Leape, of the WWF, said that the challenge faced by Indonesia was moving the economy and industry toward sustainable development. He said that the two core challenges facing the country were the palm oil industry and fisheries.

"The first challenge is to make palm oil a sustainable product. The second is fisheries. Indonesia has great potential, but a lot must be done to make sure illegal fishing is prevented," Leape said.

"We are using 50 percent more resources than the Earth can provide, and unless we change course that number will grow very fast and by 2030, even two planets will not be enough," he added. **(nad)**