

APP accused of encroaching on forest

A coalition of environmental groups, Eyes on the Forest, has accused giant paper producer Asia Pulp & Paper (APP), part of the Sinar Mas Group, of clearing forest inside a Sumatran tiger sanctuary set up by the coalition.

Members of the coalition, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) and Riau Forest Rescue Network Jikalauhari teamed up to investigate APP's alleged involvement in clearing the sanctuary.

In a report titled "The Truth Behind APP's Green Washing", the coalition produced analysis and satellite images showing that as late as June 2011, APP was still sourcing wood from trees growing inside the tiger sanctuary in Senepis, Riau. The government has declared 86 percent of the sanctuary as protected forest.

"This is clear proof that APP's global campaign, advertising the company as being actively involved in the protection of the Sumatran tiger, is false and exaggerated," Anwar Purnomo of WWF Indonesia said in a statement.

Senepis tiger sanctuary is home to the critically endangered Sumatran tiger, whose population is estimated to be less than 400, and some other rare wild animals.

Hariansyah Usman of Walhi said the report was valid and members of the coalition were ready to defend its findings.

"By revealing the brutal reality in the field, we aim to inform APP's consumers and investors, as well as the government that they have been misled about the company's commitment to protect the environment," he said.

The report also said that several companies had cut their contracts with APP including Kraft, Nestlé, Unilever and Lego. APP has rejected the coalition's claim and deemed the report to be "totally false".

"The coalition has provided the wrong satellite images because they monitored our industrial forest concessions that permit clear cutting, and not the part of forest we've dedicated to the tiger sanctuary," APP managing director Aida Greenbury told The Jakarta Post.

She added that APP had not reneged on its pledge to the Sumatran tigers, and had provided its own version of the sanctuary map online.

"Just check and you will see that ours fits the government's map. This is why we were so surprised when we were told about the report. For us, the report is not valid," she said.

Greenbury said that the WWF and other groups in the coalition should have first informed APP about their report's findings.

"It's a shame that we learn of such findings from journalists," she said.

Forestry Ministry secretary-general Hadi Daryanto blamed illegal loggers for the encroachment of the tiger sanctuary. He said that ministry officials had found evidence of illegal logging in the area.

"APP is well informed about its rights and obligations in operating its business. They are obliged to obey the regulations," he said.

Hadi said that the ministry would soon check the validity of the report and if evidence of APP complicity was found the company could lose some of its concessions in the area. (msa)