

Is the huge delegation to the UNFCCC necessary?*Evan Oktavianus and Ary Adiati,*

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference in Durban, South Africa, has just ended. The huge number of Indonesian delegates, however, is one interesting point to note. As seen in the conference's list of participants, Indonesia sent 230 delegates, the second largest after Brazil with 289 delegates. Other ASEAN countries sent a smaller number, such as Brunei with 12, Malaysia 22, the Philippines 48, Singapore 49 and Thailand 51. As we understand, the UNFCCC conference discusses issues and future actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation. This year, the 17th session of the conference has its own distinctive significance to determine the future climate regime since the first carbon reduction commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol will expire next year. Despite the importance of the conference, sending 230 people to one conference is an act beyond reasonable limits.

To explain why, we first need to make a distinction of approaches between types of negotiations: political and technical negotiations. Political negotiations are conducted when countries discuss and seek to agree on certain commitments, while technical negotiations are the further talks on how to best achieve them. Dispatching 230 people as delegates is problematic because in political negotiations, the mandate of commitments can, and should, be delegated to selected departments. The participation of more technical ministries is only crucial in the later phase where there is a need to devise a more technical plan of action to meet the commitments made. This means the participation of representatives of 17 ministries in the negotiation, which is the case in Durban, is a waste of resources. Unfortunately, a clear delegation of mandate which should be assumed preferably by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remains unavailable in our legal framework of international engagement; a crucial deficiency in our international negotiation approach. Until today, each technical department still plays a dominant role to the point that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sometimes only assumes the role of a facilitator. At the UNFCCC, technical departments dominate the delegations. According to the UNFCCC list of participants, while many ministries sent more than 10 delegates (some even sent more than 20 people), the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs only had 6 people in their squad.

Even if the conference involves some technical negotiations, to a certain degree that requires technical expertise from each department, more effective and efficient approaches are available, for instance through wireless communication, without having to field a big team. The second problem with sending so many people as delegates concerns the nature of political negotiations, where commitments are made politically between the highest authorities of countries: presidents or ministers. Because only senior officials, ministers and deputy ministers, are able to make a diplomatic and political gesture, only a few non-senior officials are required. Nonetheless, in many international conferences, including in the UNFCCC, Indonesia tends to dispatch a large number of officials below the rank of ministers or deputy ministers. The bulk of the delegation mostly serves as assistants to the high ranking officials. They take notes, prepare speeches and statements, collate supporting documents, produce reports and even to some extent prepare logistical arrangements. To point out an example, in the UNFCCC delegates, the Ministry of Environment and the National Board of Climate Change (DNPI) sent more than 20 people; clear evidence of an excessive use of personnel.

Because the presence of most people there is not a necessity, the cost incurred by sending them there cannot be justified. The estimated cost for sending 230 people to South Africa, including flights, accommodations and allowances, can reach US\$800,000. In a year, dozens of similar international negotiations on environmental and other issues take place. Such an amount of money will serve our environment better should it be allocated for tangible environmental protection and conservation efforts. Not only that, probably less in magnitude but still crucial in essence, the carbon print of air travel is so massive that the demands to put a special environmental tax on air travel has surfaced. Sending 230 people to Durban means, we emit tons of carbon into the atmosphere. This is clearly an act against the spirit of climate change mitigation efforts. Most importantly, with all the costs, the progress we have achieved in international mitigation and adaptation efforts in climate change this year remains minor. The clarity of the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol is still in doubt. The progress made in the promised Green Climate Fund, which should reach \$100 billion for climate mitigation and adaptation projects per year by 2020 has not been materialized. And lastly, the future of Climate Development Mechanism and REDD+ (Reducing Emission through Deforestation and Forest Degradation) to support green projects in our industry and forestry sector is still unclear. Even if there was significant progress to be observed in Durban, it cannot justify the large number of delegates simply because it did not contribute to the course of the negotiation.

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