

President vows to balance economic, conservation plans

Amid the rapid expansion of plantations and mining activities in forest areas, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has vowed to both sustain the environment and eradicate poverty.

“As a developing nation, we must prioritize the promotion of growth and the eradication of poverty, but we will not achieve these goals by sacrificing our forests. We must attain both development and the [good] management of our forests simultaneously,” he said at the Forests Indonesia Conference on Tuesday.

Yudhoyono said that forest management was tightly intertwined with people’s livelihoods, food security, the availability of wood and fuel and climate change. Therefore, he added, everyone needs to take bold initiatives through close collaboration and partnership with all stakeholders.

“We must change the way we treat our forests so that they are conserved even as we drive hard to accelerate our economic growth. We must intensify our efforts to reduce emissions from land use and forestry exploitation. These factors account for up to 85 percent of Indonesia’s entire greenhouse gas emissions,” he said.

The Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) recorded that Indonesia was losing about 1.1 million hectares of forest each year, most of which was due to unsustainable logging that include the conversion of forests to plantations for palm oil, and the pulp and paper industry. It is also partly due to large-scale illegal logging, which is estimated to cost Indonesia about US\$4 billion annually.

Indonesia plans to achieve \$15,000 per capita and 8-9 percent of growth by 2025, from the current level of \$5,000 per capita and 6.5 to 7 percent growth.

Indonesia has sealed a notable agreement with the Norwegian government, which has promised to pay \$1 billion in assistance funds in 2014 should Indonesia be successful in reducing levels of deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions.

Norway has confirmed that Indonesia can use the funds for economic and development activities including expanding oil palm plantations on degraded land.

Hadi Daryanto from the Forestry Ministry said that his ministry had made a map of 18 million hectares of forest to accommodate both forest preservation and economic growth. He said that low-income people can take part in the program through the community forest areas.

“We will provide 2.5 million hectares of community forest over 20 years. When the time comes, people can join the formal sector,” he said.

Andrie S. Wijaya of the Mining Advocacy Network (JATAM) said to maintain the environment as well as people’s economic wellbeing, the government should strengthen local economies rather than major firms.

He cited farmers in Kertabuana village in East Kalimantan, who used to earn Rp 14 million per month from agriculture or fisheries before mining activities started operating in the area, which polluted the water and resulted in reduced harvests and fish stocks.

“In many regions in eastern Indonesia, people possess local wisdom regarding their environment. But the government tends to see them only as poor people, which creates dependency,” he said.

Andrew Steer, World Bank’s special envoy on climate change, said Indonesia could capture the carbon market, which was estimated to grow over the next five years as the demand for certified products increase.