

## In Durban, RI task force weighs plan to use idle forests

After agreeing to a forest-clearing moratorium to secure a US\$1 billion grant from Norway, the Indonesian government is currently considering revising a ministerial decree barring the reforestation of primary forests.

Indonesia's REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) task force chief Kuntoro Mangkusubroto said that the revision would revive approximately 32 million hectares of bare land in primary forests that were left idle after illegal forest cutting.

"We are reviewing the decree. It is a waste to have idle land with nothing on it," he said on Thursday on the sidelines of the 17th United Nations Climate Conference (COP17) in Durban, South Africa.

The government has agreed to freeze forest cutting in primary forests and peatland areas for two years in return for the Norwegian funds, which would be disbursed for REDD+ projects.

A Forestry Ministry decree stipulates that forest areas cannot be cut down and be replanted. Poor legal enforcement, however, has allowed sections of primary forests remain bare and idle for years.

The government is currently preparing a framework and financing body to oversee implementation of the moratorium.

There is a chance that Indonesia will not get the money if Norway determines that Indonesia has allowed authorized areas to be encroached or if an independent assessment team fails to see emissions drop starting 2014.

A pilot project has been set up in Kalimantan and the task force is finalizing a national strategy to serve as a legal framework to implement the deal.

"We are putting the last touches on the final draft. We will release it soon," Kuntoro said.

He said the government had created a plan to ensure that projects in Central Kalimantan would benefit and be supported by the local government.

"There is no need for a transparency guarantee since the task force is doing things directly with the local governments," Kuntoro said.

The United Nations Environment Program's (UNEP) executive secretary, Achim Steiner, said he supported the reforestation of bare lands.

"There has been a study in Malaysia that shows that the benefit of planting palm oil plantations in [bare] tropical forests will be superior in 25 years," he said.

The government is currently also negotiating terms on REDD+ in the Durban conference. Indonesian negotiator Nur Masripatin said that the talks had progressed toward a decision that would contribute to establishing reference levels for forests and forest emissions.