

Mega Calls for Logging Moratorium

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KUTA, BALI (JP): President Megawati Soekarnoputri on Sunday called for a temporary moratorium of logging activities to avoid excessive forest exploitation.

"The main point is that we must give our forest a chance to take a breath," Megawati said when opening a two-day national meeting of the Indonesian Association of Timber Entrepreneurs (APHI) in Kuta, Bali on Sunday.

"Are we going to preserve our forest, to give it back its life, or are we going to let it be exploited until it is fully destroyed?" said Megawati, adding that the minister of forestry would devise certain criteria on which the temporary moratorium of logging activity would be based.

Minister of Forestry M. Prakosa said that in order to implement the moratorium his department would not renew the logging license of plots of forest which produced less than 75 cubic meters of logs per hectare.

"If the production is less than that number we certainly will not issue a new license for the plot. By doing that, we will give the plot a chance to recover from any impact of previous logging activity. Currently, there are around 100 letters, asking for license renewal, on my desk, and I have rejected them all," he said.

Prakosa also stated that his department had already informed all the provincial and regency administrations of that policy.

"The local administration will also put a halt on the issuance of new license for small-scale logging company," Prakosa told.

The President also highlighted the fact that illegal logging and trading activities were gravely threatening the sustainability of the Indonesian forest.

"Those activities have also inflicted great losses to the state's revenue, endangered the forest's conservation, raised the forestry sector's unemployment rate, and, moreover, caused the international community to question our ability to manage our forest, this lungs of the earth," she stated.

The success of protecting and conserving the forest, Megawati said, eventually depended on the united commitment displayed by all parties and elements involved in the issue. She recalled how during her days as a member of the House of Representatives under the Soeharto's New Order regime the issue on forest conservation was repeatedly brought up by the House's members to no avail at all.

"Because at that time the government was flirting passionately with the timber industry's barons, to get financial advantage from the industry. No matter that we, the members of the House, screamed and demanded that they stopped the forest destruction, the exploitation just kept going on," she said.

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Separately, the chairman of APHI Adiwarsito Adinegoro in his speech also gave a significant stress on the illegal logging and trading issue, **claimed that the illegal activity had not only destroyed the forest but also heavily damaged the legal timber industry.**

He presented a nine-point recommendation to the government, which, among others, asked for stronger law enforcement to eradicate the illegal logging, trading, and smuggling of forest resources.

On this issue, Minister Prakosa stated that the government had just signed an MoU with the British government. In the MoU the British government stated its willingness to cooperate with the Indonesian government in eradicating the illegal logging and trading activity.

“The British government has agreed to give us technical assistance, and also financial support, so we might be able to devise the 'chain of custody' system, which will enable us to track down and identify whether a certain forest product is illegal or not. The British government will also introduce a new legislation, which prohibits any commercial trade of illegal forest products in its country,” Prakosa said.

Hopefully, Prakosa said, similar MoU would be also accepted by other countries in the EU, and later on by China, Malaysia, India, and Singapore.

“It is a gradual process and will take some time. In the meantime, I ask the members of APHI to support whole-heartedly the government's efforts in conserving the forest. They can show their support by, for instance, not conducting any illegal logging themselves,” Prakosa told.

The World Bank also describes Indonesia as **losing, on average, some 1.5 million hectares of forests each year between 1985 and 1997. By the beginning of 2000, Indonesia's forests had been reduced to a mere 20 million hectares, down from pre-1985 levels of nearly 43 million hectares.**

Unless the government acts quickly and strongly against illegal logging and other deforestation activities, along with putting a moratorium into action, **Indonesia will lose all of its forests in the next 15 years.**

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