

The delegates meeting in Cancun agreed to stronger language on reductions commitments and a new global fund to help developing countries with mitigation and adaptation efforts, including-capacity building for national monitoring, mapping, financing and readiness systems to better monitor and support local efforts.

Important for Indonesia, delegates also acknowledged the important role curbing deforestation must play in meeting the global climate change challenge and offered new support for a set of programs and activities collectively referred to as REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation).

Delegates were clear that reducing deforestation-related emissions does not mean reducing growth or lowering development aspirations. Just the opposite.

But it is little surprise that some chose to confuse this picture. Alan Oxley, an Australian consultant to palm oil companies, wrote in The Jakarta Post on Dec. 15 that Indonesia didn't need to worry about reducing emissions from deforestation, on the basis of a single new study that suggests that clearing forests is a less important source of global carbon emissions than earlier estimates.

On that basis, Oxley criticizes President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's commitment to reduce GHG (Greenhouse Gas) emissions caused by deforestation and his intention to suspend for two years the issuance of new licenses for clearing primary forests and cultivating carbon-rich peatlands.

Oxley's criticism is misguided in multiple ways. We do not know if the study considers Indonesia's national emissions, or indeed any emissions from tropical peat soils, one of the most important sources of emissions from land-use change in Indonesia.

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In any case, what may be an overestimation at an aggregated, global level does not necessarily demonstrate an overestimation in any particular country.

Furthermore, Oxley has deliberately blurred the distinction between estimates of our so-called “business as usual” emissions trajectory and our actual achievements in recent years in combating deforestation, forest fires and peatland degradation.

That Indonesia’s rate of deforestation is declining, as reported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, demonstrates the seriousness of the Indonesian government in reducing its emissions on voluntary basis rather than, as Oxley contends, that reducing deforestation is unnecessary.

Most importantly, it is incorrect to assume that Indonesian decision-makers respond only to international pressure or global estimates of GHG emissions.

Indonesia has learned the hard way the costs of unsustainable development, not only in monetary terms but also from the loss of lives and damage to well-being from flash floods, uncontrolled fires, landslides, droughts, loss of watersheds and other eco-disasters.

President Yudhoyono has made a commitment to reverse the unsustainable practices of years past and place Indonesia on a track toward a more secure and sustainable development approach.

The four-track strategy of the current administration, namely “pro-poor, pro-job, pro-growth and pro-environment”, has been translated into national development targets as well as selected priority implementation programs.

Preventing forest fires and wanton destruction of forests for private gain will improve public health on a vast scale, will protect crops and plantations as well as forests, will provide jobs to forest communities, as well as helping to reduce the carbon emissions that come from such disastrous events.

Smallholder palm oil growers can benefit from utilizing degraded lands, such as alang-alang,

because the lands have been cleared by timber companies who obtained licenses under false pretenses.

Oxley claims that the two-year moratorium on clearing primary forest lands is a move against development. In our consultations with the private sector, community groups, NGOs and local governments, no companies have raised objections to the idea of a moratorium.

Responsible businesses understand the value of proper enforcement of existing regulations, rationalizing the permitting process, better spatial planning, easier and more secure access to already degraded land, and more transparent and credible databases for land titles and concession licenses.

The moratorium will provide some breathing room for the government to pursue each of these objectives.

The only ones who have something to fear from improved enforcement, better information and more transparency are those who have built their business by undermining the government through bribery and money politics, through illegal activity and lack of transparency.

Oxley's campaign for continuing the unsustainable practice of clear-cutting our remaining primary forest and to fan opposition to the two-year moratorium is no doubt welcomed by the unscrupulous business entities.

The government has strong commitment to allow expansion of plantations, mining and other economic activities in already degraded forest areas. New policies and incentives are also on the table for those who would like to turn unproductive grasslands into high-yielding, productive assets.

The good news from Cancun allows us to move forward with REDD+, cutting carbon emissions, slowing deforestation and promoting biodiversity while simultaneously combating poverty and ensuring economic development. Success in capturing these multiple goals will require the steady and collaborative involvement of all of us: government, business and civil society.

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