

Gapki secretary-general Joko Supriono told The Jakarta Post after the meeting that Yudhyono said he did not abide by foreign countries asking palm oil companies not to touch Indonesian forests.

President Yudhyono pledged to accommodate the interests of palm oil companies in order to allow them to expand their businesses during the moratorium period, Joko said.

“[Yudhyono] doesn’t want [palm oil industries] to become victims of the moratorium since the sector has provided ample contributions to the country,” Joko said.

Joko said Gapki was delighted by the President’s words, which provided some reassurance to business leaders amid the opaque negotiations regarding the moratorium’s regulations.

Before the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Dipo Alam said that the president would soon sign a presidential instruction to begin implementing the moratorium.

Yudhyono had led efforts to support the global cause of reducing emissions by signing an agreement with Norway in May 2010 to stop forest-clearing for two years.

But, the agreement clashed with the government’s desire to become the biggest palm oil producer in the world with a goal to produce 40 million tons of crude palm oil by 2020.

REDD-Plus taskforce head Kuntoro Mangkusubroto said earlier that the delay in the moratorium’s implementation was a result of lobbying by businesspeople, including those from mining companies and palm oil producers.

Gapki head Zoefly Bahrin said after the meeting with Yudhyono that there had been a “misinterpretation” in the moratorium negotiations that might block the development of palm oil plantations in Indonesia.

“The moratorium on natural forests and peatland stipulated in a US\$1 billion deal between Indonesia and Norway would hamper the expansion of their business,” the association said.

The Forestry Ministry had restricted the moratorium to only primary forests and peatland in a draft presidential instruction regarding the moratorium.

Yet, a draft proposed by the presidential taskforce on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, known as REDD-Plus, said the ban on forest conversions should be applied to both primary and secondary forests as well as peatlands.

The expansion of plantations in Sumatra and Kalimantan has spread to secondary forests.

The palm oil industry is major agricultural sector that has contributed to the country’s growth. A

study from World Growth, a pro-palm oil group, estimated that the industry directly and indirectly supports nearly 20 million Indonesians.