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Sawit Watch



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Press Statement
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For immediate release

United Nations criticises Indonesia's response to Forests and Climate Change: Expansion of biofuels plantations and plans to market forest carbon fail to respect indigenous peoples' rights

In a statement made public on 18 March 2009, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination strongly criticises Indonesia for failing to respect indigenous peoples' rights in relation to oil palm plantations. Oil palm converts existing forests into plantations, in part for the production of biofuels, a process that has resulted in massive forest loss in Indonesia. The Committee also raised concerns about a draft regulation on Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD). The latter envisages the government handing out forest concessions to companies for the capture of carbon much as logging concessions have been handed out in the past, and is proposed as a measure to mitigate climate change by reducing pressure on forests.

The UN Committee, a body composed of 18 independent human rights experts chosen by governments, explains that it remains concerned that oil palm plantations are the source of numerous conflicts with local communities. It was especially concerned with respect to Indonesia's failure to protect indigenous peoples' rights in connection with oil palm concessions.

The Committee reiterates its August 2007 recommendation to Indonesia that oil palm concessions must not violate the rights of indigenous peoples to own and control their traditional lands and must not be issued without first obtaining the consent of the affected indigenous peoples.

Indonesia's national indigenous peoples' organization, Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN), welcomed the Committee's statement as further evidence of the growing international concern about the situation of indigenous peoples in Indonesia, particularly as it relates to their rights to own and control their traditional territories. AMAN urges the Government of Indonesia to respond by ensuring that it effectively implements the

Committee's recommendations and by providing accurate and timely reports to the Committee that show the actual situation on the ground.

Indonesia's draft 2008 Regulation on Implementation Procedures for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation was also criticised by the Committee for being incompatible with the rights of indigenous peoples. The Committee recommended that the draft Regulation, as well as other laws, be reviewed and amended to ensure their consistency with the rights of indigenous peoples to own and control their traditionally owned territories and to consent to activities, such as REDD, that may affect them.

The Committee's statement was adopted pursuant to its early warning and urgent action procedures, which are only used for the most serious and urgent cases. The urgency was emphasised by the Committee when it asked Indonesia to report back to the Committee no later than 31 July 2009. Indonesia has so far failed to respond to the Committee's concerns about palm oil expansion along the Kalimantan border, which were first raised by the Committee over a year ago.

Abdon Nababan, Secretary General of AMAN, calls upon all government institutions to support the implementation of Indonesia's Constitutional responsibilities to recognise and protect the rights of indigenous peoples, not only in Kalimantan's border areas, but throughout Indonesia. "Since the rights of indigenous peoples is an important national issue, not just as it relates to forests, it requires good will and strong efforts by the various government institutions to work together to implement these rights," Abdon says. He also emphasized that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should be used as guidance for the government in protecting indigenous peoples' rights and called upon Indonesia to ensure that indigenous peoples fully participate in all decision making that may affect them.

Abetnego Tarigan, Director of Sawit Watch, explains that his organisation continues to be concerned with development in the border areas, most recently the detention of three Dayak Iban indigenous persons in West Kalimantan who were arrested for opposing oil palm plantations on their traditional lands. Agreeing with AMAN, he calls on the government of Indonesia to stop all activities that are inconsistent with the UN Committee recommendations and to urgently take immediate measures to end repressive actions against indigenous peoples and local communities in handling any conflicts.

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Notes to Editors

1. All submissions and the responses by the Committee can be found at www.forestpeoples.org
2. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's letter to Indonesia can be found directly at:
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/early_warning/Indonesia130309.pdf
3. Perkumpulan Sawit Watch is an Indonesian Non-Government Organisation concerned with adverse negative social and environmental impacts of oil palm plantation development in

Indonesia. It is active in 17 provinces where oil palm plantations are being developed in Indonesia.

4. Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara/AMAN (Indigenous People Alliance of the Archipelago) is an indigenous peoples' organisation that represents indigenous peoples from the whole of the Republic of Indonesia. The Alliance is aimed to be an organisation for indigenous peoples to struggle for their existence and rights inherited with it as well as to struggle for sovereignty in running their lives and in managing their natural resources.
5. Forest Peoples Programme is an international NGO, founded in 1990 to promote forest peoples' rights. FPP supports forest peoples in their efforts to secure and sustainably manage their forests, lands and livelihoods. For further information visit www.forestpeoples.org