

# Indonesian forest fires turning into a global menace

Greenpeace calls on Indonesian government to end conversion of peatland forests

July 12, 2007



Smoke billows over recently burnt peatland forests in Kuala Cinaku, Riau Province of Indonesia. Villagers said the area, owned by a subsidiary of one of the world's largest oil palm companies, had been deliberately set on fire a number of times since June. The combination of peatland conversion and forest fires is causing global environmental damage by releasing massive quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere, further adding to the problem of climate change. Once a health and environmental hazard to millions in Southeast Asia, Indonesia's forest fires are now turning into a global menace that contributes significantly to climate change. Indonesia is currently third largest emitter of greenhouse gas, trailing only China and the US, mainly due to deforestation, land conversion and forest fires.

Jakarta, Indonesia — Greenpeace challenged the Indonesian government to immediately declare a moratorium on the conversion and destruction of peatland forests to put a stop to the country's annual cycle of forest fires, which has now become a global menace given its significant contributions to the problem of climate change.

A team dispatched by Greenpeace to Riau recently witnessed forest fires flaring up yet again in the province despite frequent government pledges to stop the annual catastrophe from recurring. Indonesia is currently the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases worldwide trailing only China and the US, according to the World Bank, and this is mainly due to deforestation, land conversion and forest fires (1).

"The endless cycle of forest fires and forest destruction in Indonesia must now be seen as a global problem because our country contributes a lot to climate change. Beyond the frequent lip service and rhetoric coming from officials whenever these fires flare up, the government must take bolder measures to prevent the problem from taking place, starting with a moratorium on the destruction and conversion of peatland forest areas all over the country," said Hapsoro, Forest Campaigner of Greenpeace Southeast Asia.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has put Indonesia on the global spotlight when it said that about 50 percent of the world's total mitigation potential could

be achieved by reducing emissions from deforestation (2). Indonesia has the largest intact ancient forests in Asia, but these are being destroyed faster than anywhere else on the planet.

The recent field documentation conducted by Greenpeace in Riau also established the links between forest fires and the conversion of peatland forests by oil palm companies operating in the province. Recent satellite maps of the areas affected by the forest fires also suggest a strong correlation between the fires and the different plantations operating in the area.

The combination of peatland conversion and forest fires is causing global environmental damage by releasing massive quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere, further adding to the problem of climate change.

“Indonesia is playing host to the most important inter-governmental meeting on climate change in Bali this December. We hope that the government will take this opportunity to showcase to the world how it can help avert this global crisis. Aside from seeking the support of the international community, the government must show good faith by stopping the further destruction of peatland forests. It must strictly enforce laws against violators including oil palm companies and plantations which deliberately start these fires as part of their land clearing operations,” Hapsoro added.

Notes to editor:

(1)“Indonesia and Climate Change” report, published by the World Bank and the British Government in June 2007

(2)Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 4th Assessment Report 2007