

# Indonesia: Walhi refutes minister's statement that deforestation is acceptable for development

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**Jakarta — The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) says that the claim by Environment and Forestry Minister (LHK) Siti Nurbaya Bakar that deforestation is acceptable for the sake of constructing roads is difficult to accept.**

Walhi Food, Water and Essential Ecosystem Campaign Manager Wahyu Perdana says that the arguments raised by Bakar when she was speaking in front of Indonesian students studying in Scotland — and also uploaded on her private social media account — is completely at odds with the last 10 years of data issued by the Environment and Forestry Ministry itself.

Based on this data, Forest Area Borrow-to-Use Permits (IPPKH) have mostly been used for mining rather than non-mining activities, such as constructing roads for local people.

“The facts over the last 10 years [show that] most forest use permits were used for mining, compared with non-mining which used forest areas”, Perdana told CNN Indonesia on Thursday November 4.

A break down for the period 2014-2020 shows that land given out as IPPKH for mining covered 117,106 hectares, far higher than IPPKH for non-mining, namely 14,410 hectares.

During the previous period, 2004-2014, IPPKH for mining covered 305,070 hectares while for non-mining 17,097 hectares.

In addition to this, Walhi also criticised Bakar's pretext of linking the issue with the mandate of the 1945 Constitution, namely the target of national development for the welfare of the ordinary people in social and economic terms.

According to Walhi, there is no evidence for Bakar's claim. Based on data gathered by Walhi, at least 62 percent of forest land in Indonesia has been allocated as concession for big corporations.

“Based on a rough calculation, not even 40 percent of land is controlled by the ordinary people. And we've yet to calculate oil and gas concessions in the sea and offshore”, said Perdana.

“Is it true that development is always the same as the people's welfare?”, he asked.

Not to mention, he added, referring to National Statistics Agency (BPS) data, since 2013 until now the land inequality index ration has been quite high, namely at 0.068 percent.

“In simple language, one percent of rich people control 68 percent of the land area. So, development for [the rest of] us isn't even 100 square metres which isn't even very much? Or is it for the big

concessions”, said Perdana.

### **Flow on from deforestation**

Perdana warned Bakar that she cannot just use the people’s welfare through the claim of development as grounds for continued deforestation adding that using the pretext of the people’s welfare is not confirmed by the reality on the ground.

Perdana said that environmental rights and the right to a healthy environment must also be considered. “That is a citizen’s human right also”, he said.

Perdana also warned Bakar to consider the ecological impact of deforestation saying that the cost that must be borne as a consequence of ecological disasters is more than the cost of prevention.

“Take the World Bank on forest fires. The World Bank’s quarterly report only cited forest and land fires on twice, in 2015 and 2019. I don’t know whose period that was”, said Perdana.

“But the losses were quite big, even compared with the profits gained when it’s no longer forest”, he said.

Earlier, Bakar equivocated that Indonesia would continue the practice of deforestation for the construction of roads for people in isolated areas. She gave the examples of Kalimantan and Sumatra where, she said, there are still man roads which are broken by forests.

So, Bakar believes that deforestation must continue. If there is no deforestation, then people won’t have roads. It was this that then become the grounds for Bakar to issue a statement that large-scale development during the era of President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo cannot stop in the name of preventing deforestation.

“If the concept is that there is no deforestation, it means roads are not allowed. Then what about the people, must they remain isolated? Meanwhile the state must truly be present among the ordinary people”, said Bakar in a press release explaining what was conveyed during a meeting with the Indonesia Student Union (PPI) in Glasgow.

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Translated by James Balowski.

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