

Indonesia: Tighter supervision of palm oil industry urged after modern slavery finding

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Jakarta — Amnesty International Indonesia is urging the government, and the police in particular, to tighten supervision of the palm oil industry following the finding of human cage at the home of non-active Langkat Regent Terbit Rencana Perangin Angin.

Amnesty International Executive Director Usman Hamid said that greater supervision of the palm oil industry is needed because the business sector is prone to exploitation of workers, traditional communities and the environment.

"Moreover this is not the first time that the exploitation of workers has occurred in Indonesia's palm oil industry. In 2016, Amnesty International found serious human rights violations at several palm oil plantations in Indonesia.

The findings included forced labour, the use of child labour, gender discrimination and labour practices which were exploitative and endangered workers" said Hamid in a press release on Tuesday January 25.

Amnesty says that the human cage found at the Langkat regent's house is of great concern. Hamid admitted that he could not imagine how the practice of inhuman slavery could have gone on for years and years.

"Law enforcement officials must fully investigate this case and ensure that all of the people involved are brought before the courts in hearings which meet international standards on justice and not end with the application of the death penalty", said Hamid.

Amnesty also reminded the state about the United Nations convention against torture, which Indonesia has ratified.

"The UN Convention on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishments also prohibits all forms of torture and inhuman treatment", said Hamid.

In addition to this, he noted that Article 8 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) — which has been ratified by Indonesia — states that no person can be treated as a slave or enslaved.

"All forms of torture are explicitly prohibited in a number of instruments on the protection of human rights, such as under Article 7 of the ICCPR for example", said Hamid.

The finding of the human cage came to the fore after Migrant Care reported it to National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) on Monday January 24. In its report, Migrant Care reported that there were seven alleged cases of slavery.

The human cage was found when a Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) team arrived at the Langkat regent's house during a sting operation on January 18. At the time, the KPK team, which was backed by the police, found at least 27 people inhabiting the cage when it was conducting the raid.

Based on the results of a preliminary examination, the North Sumatra regional police said that it was claimed that the cage were used for narcotics rehabilitation and had been there since 2012 or around 10 years. The dwelling referred to as a rehabilitation facility had no license even though it had been known about by the Langkat National Narcotics Agency (BNN) since 2017.

National police spokesperson Brigadier General Ahmad Ramadhan says that the tens of people occupying the cage at the regent's house were also employed as palm oil factory workers, although they were not paid. He said that they had recorded at least 48 people occupying the cage on the pretext of narcotics rehabilitation.

"Some were employed at the palm oil factory owned by the Langkat regent. [But] they were not paid a wage like workers", Ramadhan told journalists on Tuesday.

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