

Indonesia: Environmental group predicts jump in palm oil, mining permits ahead of 2024 elections

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Jakarta — The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) predicts that the issuance of mining and palm oil plantation permits will increase during the political year in the lead up to the 2024 elections. This prediction is a reflection on what happened in 2018, ahead of the 2019 elections.

Walhi noted that as many as 1,158 Forest Concession Rights (HPH) were issued in 2018. Then, 1,524 Business License Management of Industrial Plantation Forest Products (IUPHHK-HTI). A total of 76,040 Forest Use Loan Permits (IPPKH) and 1,422 Mining Business Permits (WIUP) were issued.

“In political years the issuance of permits always increases”, said Walhi Executive Director Zenzi Suhadi during the launch of the book “Monitoring the Environment” on Tuesday January 31.

In addition to this, it is predicted that there will be more mining and palm oil companies operating illegally in forest areas that will be “forgiven” or given clearance to continue operating.

“It won’t just be the issuance of permits that will increase but also a mass amnesty for crimes in the natural resource sector”, he said.

Suhadi said that during President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo’s second term in office there were some 829 palm oil companies and 1,600 mining companies that were proven to have committed environmental violations.

But with the issuance of Law Number 11/2020 on Job Creation (Ciptaker) thousands of companies became eligible for an amnesty under the condition that they make administrative improvements and pay a fine. The law gives them three years to fulfill this requirement.

Even though the Constitutional Court declared the Jobs Law conditionally unconstitutional in November 2021, said Suhadi, thousands of companies could still potentially be forgiven. This is because in December last year President Widodo issued a government regulation in lieu of law (Perppu) to replace the Jobs Law.

“Two thousand or so companies will again be given an opportunity in November this year. November this year is a political year, the year in which the candidates register themselves for the elections”, he said.

“We’ll see, in November 2023 and with the Perppu Ciptaker, the state is giving space to the political elite to involve natural resource business criminals to get involved in Indonesian politics”, he said.

Last year, the Environment and Forestry Ministry (KLHK) revealed that there are more than a

thousand companies found to be operating illegally in forest areas throughout the territory of Indonesia.

Thanks the Jobs Law, these companies can receive amnesties and continue operating.

So far, a total of 75 companies operating in forest areas have received amnesties using the Jobs Law. The breakdown is 18 companies that were “forgiven” using Article 110B of the law and 57 using Article 110A of the law.

This data was outlined by KLHK Secretary General Bambang Hendroyono during a meeting with the House of Representatives (DPR) Commission IV in Jakarta on Monday August 23, 2021.

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