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May 27, 2010

Indonesia Agrees to Curb Commercial Deforestation

By AUBREY BELFORD

Indonesia has declared a two-year moratorium on clearing natural forests as part of a billion-dollar deal aimed at reviving efforts to fight [climate change](#) after the collapse of global talks in Copenhagen last year.

The deal, signed Wednesday at a [climate conference](#) in Oslo, is open to other countries and would tie the \$1 billion in funding to “verified emissions reductions” as part of the [United Nations](#)-backed effort known as Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, or REDD. Under the plan, rich countries help pay for the preservation of forests in developing countries.

REDD projects are widely seen as among the most promising avenues for fighting climate change ever since nations failed to reach an agreement on climate change in Copenhagen last December. Indonesia’s part in this deal involves banning new permits for the conversion of virgin forest and carbon-rich peat lands, though analysts say any new laws limiting commercial clearing could prove difficult to enforce.

The clearing of forests for commercial uses has helped make Indonesia the world’s third-largest greenhouse gas emitter, behind the United States and China, according to some estimates. The country has major timber and paper industries and is the world’s leading producer of palm oil.

“Indonesia understands the necessity of doing its part to face the urgent global challenge of combating climate change,” said Indonesia’s president, [Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono](#).

“As a developing country, and an archipelago of 17,000 islands, our people face the brunt of impact of climate change,” he said.

Mr. Yudhoyono has staked some of his international prestige on fighting climate change, most recently by pledging to cut emissions at least 26 percent by 2020.

But such pledges have often been met with skepticism, given Indonesia’s high levels of corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency. The government has also been accused of sending out mixed signals. For example, it recently announced plans for a 4-million-acre agricultural development in the heavily forested eastern province of Papua.

“It will not be easy to enforce this,” said Krystof Obidzinski, an expert at the Center for International Forestry Research, a nonprofit group in Indonesia.

The deal is a model for action pending a more comprehensive global climate agreement, Mr. Obidzinski said, but it could be hobbled by such basic challenges as confusion over what land can be considered virgin forest.

The deal, starting with pilot projects, would provide capital for projects that would help deter deforestation by increasing yields on existing cropland or by steering development to “degraded” land. But Mr. Obidzinski cautioned that much of the degraded land was still covered in forest.

Agus Purnomo, an adviser to Mr. Yudhoyono in at the conference, said the amount of forest land saved under the deal “still needs to be calculated.”

Licenses already granted to clear peat land or virgin forest would be honored, Mr. Purnomo said. He said the deal included cooperative measures with Norway to root through corruption.

“It is not something we are sweeping under the carpet,” Mr. Purnomo said. “No, we are entering it with open eyes and we will go one-by-one, systematically addressing the issues. It will not happen within a year or two, it will take several years to come to a meaningful impact.”

Mr. Purnomo said Indonesia hoped to extend the moratorium beyond two years, but this would depend on increased international cooperation.

“We are not putting our local development as a sacrifice to the world. The world will also need to share the burden of finding alternatives of local development,” he said.