

Actress campaigns for RI forests

Business News - Monday, April 23, 2007

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Just eight months before Indonesia hosts the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali, a Hollywood movie star launched a campaign here over the weekend against rampant forest destruction in Indonesia, including illegal logging and the slash-and-burn practices used to open land for palm oil plantations.

Hollywood movie star Daryl Hannah strongly advocates a boycott of palm oil products that are produced by companies that use slash-and-burn practices in opening their palm oil plantations.

Hannah, who came here to represent former U.S. vice president Al Gore from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), called on international consumers to reduce their dependence on palm oil because aggressive palm plantation expansion has been too costly for the global environment.

Although the actress did not directly point her finger at Indonesia, the country is known for its inability to stop slash-and-burn practices over the last 10 years. Indonesia is the world's second largest producer of palm oil after Malaysia and in just a matter of years it is widely expected take over Malaysia's position.

Addressing the UN Global Business Summit for the Environment over the weekend, the star of several films, including *Splash* and *Kill Bill*, urged consumers "not to buy products from slash and burn production".

For the second time since 2006, the UNEP gave the annual Champion of the Earth award to international environment workers and activists. This year the seven recipients included Al Gore, Jordan's Prince El Hassan Bin Talal and Brazil's Marina Silva.

The UNEP event itself was sponsored by giant chemical company Dow and Singapore-based fiber, pulp and paper producer Asia Pacific Resources International Holdings Limited (APRIL). Its subsidiary PT Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper is one of the world's largest fiber, pulp and paper producers.

Meanwhile, Indonesia, in the words of former minister of the environment Emil Salim, has never paid serious attention to eradicating the annual haze threat despite growing international protests from its neighboring countries.

Emil has also warned that it will be very embarrassing for Indonesia if it does not do much to eradicate forest fires before the climate change conference in Bali in December.

"Our political elites are too busy with their political agenda. They have no interest in handling the forest fires," Emil said on the sidelines of the UNEP conference.

The World Bank, the British Department for International Development, and the

consultancy company Peace have declared Indonesia the third largest greenhouse gas emitting producer after the United States and China. Much of the gas is released in the destruction of the country's tropical forests, which usually involve slash-and-burn and peatland fires.

Nicholas Stern, the author of the *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, last month called on developed nations to provide about US\$10 billion per year to stop forest destruction in developing countries, especially Indonesia.

APRIL president A.J. Devanesan said the forest fires could only be resolved if effective measures to curb the roots of the hand-made disaster were available.

"We need to fix good commercial value to the wood (which will be burned). It can be sold as biomass because Japan and EU are buying biomass... We need to fix good, viable commercial values to all land clearing residue," Devanesan said on the sidelines of the conference.

Will Indonesia be able to eventually overcome the annual forest fires? The government can say anything to belittle Hannah's campaign, but it needs to be aware that with its status as the world's third most polluting nation, it will be easier for the movie star to persuade consumers to follow her stance.