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In the last few years, Indonesia has been facing an acute problem of illegal logging. Domestically, this problem brings an additional burden for the Indonesian government in implementing its policy to achieve sustainable forest management and at the same time has caused huge losses in state revenue.

Internationally, Indonesia has faced the concerns of the international community that the Indonesian government has failed to control its natural resources due to poor law enforcement. In the broader sense, Indonesia is seen to a certain extent as a country that is struggling to achieve good governance.

Recognizing that the role of government is instrumental in combating illegal logging, in March 2005 Operasi Hutan Lestari II was launched, and a few days later was boosted by Presidential Instruction No. 4/2005 on combating illegal logging and illegal timber trade. This operation has achieved remarkable progress and concrete results. Around 140 suspects were arrested, 500,000 cubic meters of logs were seized, as well as 850 heavy transport equipment and 25 ships. This was due to the concerted efforts and coordination of government officials, the armed forces, police, as well as local authorities. However, daunting tasks ahead remain to be confronted, such as speeding up the decision on the future of the seized logs, and follow up actions in court for the suspects. We do hope that in the near future we can see a more viable outcome.

At this stage, we see a clear message from the government for combating illegal logging. First, Indonesia is very serious in dealing with illegal logging, although it is acknowledged that illegal logging is a very complex issue. The more challenging task is that combating illegal logging is very sensitive issue due to the vested interests of officials, police and the armed forces.

Second, basically the problem of illegal logging is perceived as a domestic matter, therefore the ways and means to deal with it are closely related to law enforcement. Having said that, with the positive recent result, we may draw a preliminary conclusion that Indonesia has the ability to make remarkable progress in law enforcement. In this vein, this achievement can further motivate and promote the government's efforts to create a more conducive and favorable climate for investment that is very strategic to achieve economic growth.

Third, the successful outcome of combating illegal logging would eventually improve the image and profile of

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Indonesia in international fora. The reform agenda of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono seems to have worked. Accordingly, this record will help improve the profile of Indonesian diplomacy in the international arena.

In this direction, there is a dire need to have a broader view on this matter. Tackling the problem of illegal logging should not be seen from only domestic interests per se, but should also cover international dimensions.

We are fully aware that Indonesia is widely acknowledged as a country richly endowed with natural resources and its forests are the third biggest in the world. Meanwhile, we acknowledge that the demand for tropical timber in the world is very high, primarily in developing countries with high economic growth. Since there is an imbalance between demand and supply of timber in the international market, this situation triggers the high demand for timber from illegal sources.

The other relevant aspect is the difficulty to identify and differentiate between timber from sustainably managed resources and unsustainably managed forest. To address this problem, the promotion of legality of timber should be taken into consideration.

In this connection, the role of the international community, primarily the consuming countries is paramount. The consuming countries can and should play an important role in accepting only legal timber.

The question is in what capacity the consuming countries can contribute. There are several options that can be undertaken. First, improving the capacity building of the countries that have a problem with illegal logging. Technical assistance has been very popular in this regard. Close to this option is giving a premium price to the countries that have been able to improve and promote timber from sustainably managed resources.

Second, through establishing bilateral agreements on combating illegal logging. Indonesia has made several bilateral agreements with the EU, UK, Norway, Japan, China and South Korea to name a few. Bilateral agreements should also be considered with countries that can potentially become transit points of trade of illegal timber such as Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines.

In multilateral fora such as the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), United Nations Forum on Forest (UNFF), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), illegal logging has become a controversial issue that has caused concern in the international community.

There are two important events in the near future that Indonesia should be actively involved in. First, the United Nations Forum on Forest meeting in New York in May 2005. The meeting will discuss in depth whether the future International Arrangements on Forest will be legally binding or not. Second, the Third Round of Negotiations to Renew the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) 1994 in Geneva, June 27 to July 1, 2005.



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Other important forums such as the Asia Forest Partnership is vital in promoting sustainable forest management through international partnership. Indonesia and Japan are at the forefront in this partnership.

It is also worth noting the active participation of local and international non-government organizations in combating illegal logging. Meanwhile, since illegal logging happens mostly in remote areas, the role of civil society including the local community is equally important.

In conclusion, government efforts to combat illegal logging should be fully supported by all levels of government and civil society. Without that, all energies and funds, as well as strong resolve and political commitment will be meaningless. Indonesia has succeeded in Operasi Hutan Lestari. As such, it is imperative that this momentum is continuously maintained and enhanced.

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