

Greenpeace on Thursday released new evidence of illegal land clearing in West Kalimantan conducted by the Sinar Mas business group, the second largest palm oil plantation company in the world.

A report by the international green group into the matter revealed that Sinar Mas companies were not complying with basic legal requirements, including the timber harvesting permit (IPK), which is required for clearing forested areas, and environmental impact assessments, known locally as Amdal.

The 1999 Forestry Law clearly prohibits companies from cutting down trees without an IPK permit, which is usually issued by authorities in each region.

Greenpeace's report accuses three Sinar Mas companies — PT Kartika Prima Cipta, PT Paramitha Internusa Pratama and PT Persada Graha Mandiri — of land clearing activities in Kapuas Hulu district of West Kalimantan from 2006 to 2008. It also alleges that Sinar Mas is endangering the biodiversity of the province's Sentarum National Park Lake, a wetland wildlife reserve, to expand its palm oil plantations.

The report also revealed that while another Sinar Mas company in West Kalimantan's Ketapang district, PT Agro Lestari Mandiri, received Amdal approval in 2007, newspaper photographs dating from 2005 showed the company holding an official ceremony to start land clearing. The ceremony was attended by the Ketapang district head.

The Sinar Mas group accounts for more than 10 percent of Indonesia's palm oil production, making it the country's largest palm oil plantation company.

"Even if they had secured an Amdal, it is still considered illegal because they cleared land without the necessary legal documentation," said Joko Arif, a Greenpeace Southeast Asia forest campaigner.

"Greenpeace is not against industry, but the illegal activities of industries conducted at the expense of our forests."

Joko said that Greenpeace had been targeting environmental offenders in the pulp, paper and palm oil industries because their businesses were considered the main instigators of massive deforestation around the country.

In 2008, companies in these industries had secured concession rights to 392,000 hectares, including 213,000 hectares in Sumatra, 165,000 hectares in Kalimantan and 12,700 hectares in Papua.

Gandi Sulistiyanto, managing director of Sinar Mas, denied the reports accusations and instead

accused Greenpeace of stirring up trouble.

“This is a form of global competition where [Greenpeace] are sponsored by foreign corporations to weaken Indonesian companies,” Gandi told the Jakarta Globe via a text message, without elaborating further.

Bustar Maitar, another Greenpeace Southeast Asia forest campaigner, said palm oil buyers around the world should cancel their contracts with Sinar Mas unless the group stopped clearing forests for palm oil expansion.

“Tomorrow, the palm oil industry will come together in Bali for the sixth annual global round table on sustainable palm oil meeting,” he said. “They must stop member companies like Sinar Mas from destroying forests and peatlands, or kick them out.”

In a separate development, Rev. Yohanes Jonga, who received this year’s Yap Thiam Hien Award for his activism in Papua, said the military still played a large role in sanctioning illegal logging activities across more than 677,000 hectares of forested regions in the country’s easternmost province.

He said the military intimidated people in order to protect the illegal logging.

“Every month, illegally-cut Papuan timber is smuggled into China, and the smuggling allows timber traders in Jakarta, Singapore and Hong Kong to reap handsome profits,” Jonga said.