

Opinion

JakartaGlobe

Basuki Will Do What The Police Won't

Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama has apparently — as we all have — been humiliated by the Safe Cities Index published recently by the Economist Intelligence Unit, which ranked Jakarta as the least safe of 50 international cities.

In an attempt to fix the capital's image, Basuki last week launched a number of programs aimed at reducing the capital's crime rate, ranging from ongoing installation of 2,500 CCTV cameras and a smartphone app for crime prevention.

Basuki also shows an understanding that most crimes are committed because of financial factors. The Jakarta administration will therefore this year disburse Rp 1.7 trillion (\$134 million) to finance the Jakarta Smart Card program, under which school students in the capital will receive financial aid to cover school costs.

Furthermore, the administration will continue to build low-cost apartments to house low-income people, especially in densely populated areas. This year, the target is to build a total of 7,200 low-cost apartment units.

We commend and fully support Basuki's efforts to make Jakarta a safer place. Feeling safe is the number one factor that will attract tourists and investors to come to Jakarta and Indonesia.

Because Jakarta is the symbol of Indonesia and the main gateway to the archipelago, it is urgent that we prove to the global community that such a survey is wrong. It will take a lot of effort and money and require all the support the city can get.

As an institution with the task to secure Indonesia and the capital from crimes, the police should be even more humiliated by the ranking than either Basuki or the public. We have the right to ask, where are you, police officers? Basuki can only do so much. But without a serious effort from the police to tackle crime, everything will be a waste.

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Conservation Erik Meijaard

Serious Law Enforcement Needed To Save Indonesia's Orangutans

Killing of orangutans goes back a long time. 40,000 years ago, the people who lived in and around the large Niah caves in what is now Sarawak, Malaysia, were regularly snacking on the species. In fact, throughout much of its fossil record, orangutans are quite often the second-most commonly represented species, after pigs.

Maybe this is not too surprising. Orangutans are big, meaty and smart but relatively slow animals. They do live in trees, but with a decent weapon such as the incredibly effective blowpipe, they will drop out of those trees pretty easily. Although, having said that, naturalist Alfred Wallace, co-discoverer with Charles Darwin of the theory of evolution through natural selection and avid orangutan hunter, did comment on the annoying tendency of these animals to get stuck on tree branches after being shot.

Orangutans are very slow breeders, having one baby every six or seven years, and as such hunting pressure has necessarily taken its toll. In the past 20,000 years, the species disappeared from China, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Peninsular Malaysia, Java — yes, there were once wild orangutans in the Jakarta area — and large parts of their remaining island ranges in Sumatra and Borneo. Climate and ecological changes could have played part in this demise as well, but it is safe to say that humans had a big impact.

Genetic analysis confirms these declines, with studies indicating that some populations declined possibly by as much as 100-fold in the past few thousand years. And even within historic times, we can detect population declines, including in areas where no logging has taken place. At the time when Wallace was trundling through Borneo's forest, one was six times more likely to encounter an orangutan than now.

And the killing hasn't stopped. Both in Borneo and Sumatra orangutans are regularly killed for meat, pet trade, because they are stealing someone's durians or simply because people feel like it. Our estimates published in several scientific papers indicate that in Kalimantan alone up to 2,500 orangutans are killed every year. On a population of give and take 50,000, such killing rates are far more than the species can deal with.

Now, I have talked about killing before, and many Indonesians tell me they don't believe our estimates. I chatted with some local Dayak people representing non-government organizations recently, who told me that such killings were really rare, and maybe happened once every two or three years in the villages where they are from.

I explained that's exactly the point. If each of the 4,000 villages in and around the orangutan's range killed one orangutan, we end up with several thousand dead orangutans annually. Compared to the hundreds of pigs each village consumes, the one dead orangutan may not count as much to villagers, but to the orangutan species it is fatal.

People can deny whatever they like, but orangutan killing is a massive conservation problem that needs to be stopped if governments are serious about saving the species from extinction. The tools are all in place. Orangutans have been legally protected in Indonesia since 1924 — that's 90 years of full prohibition of anything that harms the species.

Indonesia has developed a range of



rather toothless conservation strategies, including the most recent 10-year National Orangutan Action Plan, which has been lots of plan and little action, as I wrote before. Interestingly, killing of orangutans is rarely mentioned in these strategies, which primarily focus on preventing habitat loss and taking care of orphaned baby orangutans and releasing these back into the forest.

Luckily an update of the original plan, which is valid until 2017, is soon required. This provides an opportunity to develop a much-improved plan that, this time, really leads to action and succeeds in reducing orangutan losses.

What is needed, more than anything, is effective law enforcement. A recent case indicates that this won't be easy. Two people were arrested by the local conservation authorities (BSKDA) near Pontianak, West Kalimantan, for killing and eating an orangutan. It came to a court case, which stirred up a lot of heated discussion. The local government got involved and the governor's daughter weighed in.

As reported in Tempo, she commented that the Dayak people are used to eating orangutans, unaware that they are a protected species, and we should therefore not victimize them. The accused were released apparently because of some procedural error, but public and political pressure likely helped.

Despite frequent attention on television and in newspapers, some people

indeed may not know that orangutans are legally protected. When we interviewed some 7,000 people throughout Kalimantan in 2008, 73 percent responded that they knew that orangutans were protected under Indonesia's national law, 2 percent reported that they were not protected and the remaining 25 percent reported that they did not know.

Anyway, I always thought that one of the most basic principles pertaining to the law is that every citizen is supposed to know it. For instance, if I would be loaded up on some drug and caused a massive car accident, surely the argument that as a foreigner I wasn't aware that such thing was illegal in Indonesia, wouldn't go down too well in court.

The point is that most people know that killing orangutans is illegal. So why are some politicians undermining the few law enforcement attempts by suggesting this is part of local tradition? If Indonesia is serious about preventing the extinction of its orangutans, killings of the species have to be stopped.

It would take a few dedicated groups who work with the police, judiciary, lawyers and legal experts, local media, and get political support. Effectively prosecuting a range of cases of illegal actions that harm orangutans, resulting in serious prison sentences, would quickly get the message out that killing or harming orangutans is indeed illegal and will not be tolerated by authorities. There are no better awareness programs.

I reiterate a recent call by the Center for Orangutan Protection for the Indonesian government and many local and international NGOs to stop pussyfooting around the issue of illegal killing of orangutans. The issue is real and has to be addressed if any of these groups feign any interest in saving this close genetic relative of ours from annihilation.

Erik Meijaard is a conservation scientist who coordinates the Borneo Futures initiative.

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