

# Opinion

## JakartaGlobe

### Deforestation, the Evil The Govt Won't See

We are now in a grave emergency situation. Today is the last day of a moratorium on new land-clearing permits for primary and peat forests first imposed in 2011 by then-president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. As of tomorrow, anybody can clear these once-protected areas for plantations mines or logging, threatening the fate of Indonesia's remaining 93 million hectares of woodland.

We demand President Joko Widodo swiftly issue a stronger presidential regulation that allows for sanction and even punishment — as opposed to the weaker presidential instruction currently in use — to extend the moratorium before it expires.

We have reason to be deeply worried because the current administration seems to have no sense of emergency, and to take the situation lightly, even as the clock ticks down to the destruction of the country's forests. We can't let this happen.

Indonesia is losing its forests at a rate of 600,000 to 800,000 hectares every year, even with the moratorium in place. In 2012, a year after the ban was imposed, Indonesia surpassed Brazil's rate of deforestation, becoming the fastest forest-clearing nation in the world.

That puts Indonesia on pace to destroy all its forests within the next two decades.

The country is also one of the biggest emitters of greenhouse gases on the planet because of its massive deforestation; and the wildlife that depend on the forests face the threat of extinction.

Imagine how much worse things would have been without the moratorium, as sketchy as it is.

We desperately need a moratorium backed up by tough regulation, monitoring and law enforcement across the archipelago.

This is the only way to avoid destroying our natural resources, and our country, at the current pace.

Jakarta Globe is published by BeritaSatu Media Holdings: PT Jakarta Globe Media, BeritaSatu Plaza Lt. 11, Suite 1102, Jl. Jend. Gatot Subroto Kav. 35-36, Jakarta 12950

#### MANAGEMENT

**President**  
Theo L. Sambuaga  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
Sachin Gopalan  
**Senior Advisor**  
Samuel Tahir  
**General Affairs**  
& **Finance Director**  
Lukman Djaja  
**Marketing & Communications Director**  
Sari Kusumaningrum

#### EDITORIAL

**Group Chief Editor**  
Sachin Gopalan  
**Senior Editor**  
Shoeb K Zainuddin  
**Managing Editors**  
Bhimantio Suwastoyo - Broadcast  
Dominic G Diongson - Digital  
Abdul Khalik - Print  
**Editor at Large**  
John Riady  
**Group Editorial Board**  
Theo L. Sambuaga, Sachin Gopalan,  
Tanri Abeng, Markus Parmadi,  
Didik J. Rachbani

We appreciate the contribution of all writers who appear on these opinion pages and encourage readers to add to debate by sending letters for publication. Please note that in submitting articles or letters for publication, you grant to PT Jakarta Globe Media the unrestricted right to edit and publish the contents in this newspaper and associated electronic or print publications and to archive the contents for possible republication. The views of writers on these pages do not in any way represent the views of the newspaper's management, directors or owner unless clearly stated otherwise.

## OUR SERVICES

**General Editorial Inquiries (Print or Digital)**  
Tel (021) 2995 7500, Fax (021) 520 0072  
contactus@thejakartaglobe.com

**Subscriptions** To get home delivery for just Rp 132,000 per month, or to get great discounts for 6-month and 12-month subscriptions, or to report delivery problems, call us at (021) 2995 7555, fax to (021) 520 0812 from Mon-Fri 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., or e-mail us at [subscription.services@beritasatumediamedia.com](mailto:subscription.services@beritasatumediamedia.com) or text us at (0878) 888 00964 from Sat-Sun.

**Advertising** For rates, to request a media kit and to place display, classified or job ads in print or online, call us for immediate service at (021) 2995 7500, fax to (021) 520 0072 or e-mail [adsales@thejakartaglobe.com](mailto:adsales@thejakartaglobe.com). For digital advertising e-mail [digitaladsales@thejakartaglobe.com](mailto:digitaladsales@thejakartaglobe.com)

Environment Erik Meijaard

## Taking Some Lessons From One of Nature's Strongest Team Players



was lazy a while ago. The sun was out, and rather than parking myself in front of my computer, I decided on a spot of sun bathing. But sun bathing is actually terribly boring and I soon got distracted.

Across the tiles in front of me, tiny ants were zooming around at incredible speeds, heading in one direction, making a quick stop, and veering off into a new direction. From a non-ant perspective it looked like total chaos. But when a few ants noticed a dead wasp, I realized that they knew exactly what they were doing.

These ants obviously had very smart, collaborative strategies to achieve a common objective. They weren't running around randomly, but apparently employed an effective search mechanism, honed by millions of years of evolution. They were constantly interrupting their runs to briefly exchange information with fellow ants.

When they found the prize — the dead wasp — they didn't all pile onto it or stand around and look on while others did the work. No, it took exactly five ants to move the wasp, and those were the only ants involved. Occasionally, one ant who apparently got tired was replaced by a fresh ant, but there were no unnecessary bystanders, onlookers, or commentators. They just got on with the job.

It was in fact a remarkable feat. The wasp was about 100 times the size of one ant, but it took only a few ants to move it across eight floor tiles, presumably to where their nest was. And to give an idea of their speed, these ants actually moved very fast. I estimated that on average a 2.5-millimeter ant crossed a 25-centimeter tile in three seconds; that's 2,000 body lengths per minute. If I was able to do the same I would run a marathon in just over 10 minutes!

But back to the point of this story: in conservation we act entirely unlike ants. And our inability to work like ants is one reason why the conservation movement is so incredibly ineffective.

When conservation people or organizations see a big prize, like the promise of large pots of money for saving a species

like the rhino or orangutan, they all flock to it. We push and pull each other and everyone is trying — and generally succeeding — to get a piece of the pie. But once we have our piece, we don't collaborate like the ants to all move into a commonly agreed direction.

No, we all do our own thing, complain a lot about how we are not achieving our target (like saving the rhino or orangutan), but rarely join forces.

Of course, one major difference between conservation organizations and ants is that the former do not need success to survive. If ants didn't work together effectively their colony would go extinct as there wouldn't be enough food. After that, larger populations would disappear, and ultimately their species would cease to exist.

Conservation organizations or government authorities responsible for conservation have none of these worries about survival. How many of such institutions have been closed down because they failed to prevent the decline or extinction of a species? None is the answer, I think.

Occasionally, some small NGOs will go out of business, or merge with larger ones but this is rarely because they fail to achieve their objectives. More likely, they just weren't smart or organized enough to find the money.

So unlike ants, the conservation movement is not shaped by success and failure in achieving conservation goals. In fact, sometimes I think that the more we fail, the easier it becomes to find more money. And because there are no selective pressures that reward positive conservation outcomes, we remain a rather rudderless,

selfish, and highly competitive movement in which maintaining our own organizations takes priority over achieving actual conservation results.

There is much we could learn from ants about working together to achieve commonly shared goals. This should come naturally to Indonesian organizations. After all *Gotong Royong* (voluntary mutual co-operation) is one of the core tenets of Indonesia's founding principles, elevated by former president Sukarno, who went as far as implementing a *Gotong Royong* Parliament.

It would be so much more powerful if conservation organizations got together and formed a front with which they jointly countered conservation threats and pushed for policy change. Each organization would be responsible for the implementation of a particular strategy or action, which jointly would add up to an overall coordinated movement towards change.

Such collaboration would require that individual organizations stopped competing with each other at the national level, which won't be easy because most conservation organizations are part of large conglomerates that compete internationally.

It might work though if conservation organizations are really held accountable for achieving tangible conservation outcomes. If conservation failure would mean that funding is cut, it would force organizations to become more outcome focused, and engage strategies such as collaboration to generate real success.

If a bunch of anonymous ants can achieve remarkable feats on a daily basis, surely a group of committed, smart, well-heeled, and well-educated people who presumably all care about positive environmental outcomes, can do the same. Or can't we?

The ants seem to know that they need to work together to survive, but I am not yet convinced that conservation groups have come to the same conclusion.

Erik Meijaard runs the Borneo Futures initiative as a conservation scientist based in Jakarta.



**We all do our own thing, complain a lot about how we are not achieving our target (like saving the rhino or orangutan), but rarely join forces**