

Indonesia to embrace Int'l Biodiversity Day, Year

Wednesday, May 5, 2010 22:12 WIB

Jakarta (ANTARA News) Jakarta (ANTARA News) - Indonesia has been acknowledged by scientists as one of the world's mega centers of biodiversity for her abundant flora and fauna species and a wide range of natural habitats.

Having a population of around 235 million, Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world, located between two oceans, the Pacific and the Indian, and bridging two continents, Asia and Australia.

The country consists of more than 17,000 islands, including five main islands - Java, Kalimantan (Borneo), Papua, Sumatera and Sulawesi, which host the world's third largest forest area after Brazil and Zaire.

About 17 percent of all species in the world can be found in Indonesia, although it accounts for only 1.3 percent of the Earth's land surface.

According to data compiled by the Indonesian forestry ministry, the country's forests are habitats for 38,000 plant species including 27,500 species of floral plants (10 percent of the world's floral plants), 515 mammalian species (12 percent of the world's mammalian species), 511 reptilian species (7.3 percent of the world's reptilian species), 2,827 species of invertebrates, 121 species of butterflies (44 percent of the endemics), 480 species of hard corals (60 percent of the world's coral species), 1400 species of fresh water fishes, 270 species of amphibians (the world's 6 percent), 1531 species of birds (the world's 5 percent), 240 rare species (the world's 1 percent).

A number of the world's rarest and endemic fauna species can be found in Indonesia. They include Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*) - most primitive reptiles with a prehistoric appearance; and Orangutans which comprise the Bornean Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*) species and the Sumatran Orangutan (*Pongo albelii*).

The rich flora of Indonesia includes many unique varieties of tropical plant life in various forms. *Rafflesia arnoldi*, for instance, is found only in certain parts of Sumatra and Kalimantan, and is the largest flower in the world.

In Papua Island, 2,500 different orchids are known; among them is the world's largest orchid, *Grammatophyllum papuanus*, with three-meter sprays of orange blossoms.

Indonesia has 477 species of palm; 3,000 species of medicinal plants; more than 400 species or 70 per cent of the world's dipterocarp species (the most valuable timber species in Southeast Asia) including ebony, teakwood, and sandalwood; 122 species of bamboo; and over 350 species of rattan.

Indonesia deserves to celebrate the year 2010, which has been declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) under the theme "Biodiversity is Life, Biodiversity is Our Life".

In response to the UN's decision, the forestry ministry has planned to launch the International Year of Biodiversity and organize the commemoration of the International Biodiversity Day (May 22), at Manggala Wanabakti Building, Jakarta, on May 24-26, 2010

Around 150 participants consisting of various biodiversity conservation stakeholders, are expected to join the events, according to a press statement of the forestry ministry, early this week.

The events will be highlighted with a number of activities such as an exhibition on biodiversity conservation, talk shows, a national seminar, and a journalists' trip to One Thousand Islands National Park where participants to transplant coral reefs together with local fishermen.

The UN hoped the IYB will provide a unique opportunity to raise public awareness about the global biodiversity crisis and the urgent need for stronger action to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to achieve the Convention's objectives.

The United Nations General Assembly decided on 15 April 2010 to hold a high-level event on biodiversity on 22 September 2010 or on the eve of the opening of the general debate of its sixty-fifth session.

The meeting will be an occasion for world leaders to provide political impetus and support for a sustained global response to the world's biodiversity challenges, and the need to address the Convention's three objectives.

The Convention encompasses three equally important and complementary objectives, namely the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

In 2002, 10 years after the entry into force of the Convention, member countries attending the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention acknowledged that the rate of biodiversity loss was still accelerating and that, in order to reduce and halt this loss, threats to biodiversity must be addressed.

A former UNEP Executive Director, Klaus Topfer, said "If any part of the web suffers breaks down, the future of life on the planet will be at risk." That is why the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity, he said.

"A wide variety of environmental goods and services that we take for granted are under threat, with profound and damaging consequences for ecosystems, economies and livelihoods," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in November at the start of the pre-celebrations.

"In this International Year, we must counter the perception that people are disconnected from our natural environment. We must increase understanding of the implications of losing biodiversity. In 2010, I call on every country and each citizen of our planet to engage in a global alliance to protect life on Earth."

One of the most serious threats to the biodiversity loss is the destruction of forests - the habitats of flora and fauna species.

Among the world's fastest deforestation rate, unfortunately, happens in Indonesia. Illegal logging activities, forest fires and human encroachment have caused forest dwindling.

According to Forestry Minister Zulkifli Hasan recently, Indonesia's forest area reaches 130 million hectares, and 40 million of them are in a good primary condition, 45 million hectares are critically damaged, and the remaining 45 million hectares had no planted trees.

Given the important meaning of biodiversity to support life on Earth, the Indonesian government and people urgently need to take concrete actions immediately to save the remaining forests beside organizing ceremonial activities in observing the International Day and Year of Biodiversity 2010.(*)

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