Govt asked to side with small food producers

A coalition of activists is commemorating World Food Day, on Oct. 16, by demanding that the government shift focus from big food producers.

The Coordinator of the Alliance for Prosperous Villages, Tejo Wahyu Jatmiko, said Thursday that food security policies for the period 2010 to 2014 were sufficient to achieve food security, but not legally binding.

“No presidential decree or regulation has been made to ensure implementation,” he said.

He added that as a result, the government was enforcing existing laws, which benefitted investors in large-scale food production, such as the 2004 Plantation Law and the 2007 Management of Coastal Regions and Small Islands Law.

In June Agriculture Minister Suswono, who pointed to a trend toward falling rice production, suggested that Indonesians reduce their consumption of steamed rice through the “No Rice Day” program.

Achmad Surambo from Sawit Watch noted that the government supported the oil palm industry, allowing the expansion of oil palm plantations, which take up land formerly used to produce other crops.

Sawit Watch has recorded a 400,000 hectare increase in the area under oil palm plantations.

“One-hundred-thousand hectares of this total area consists of farmland and rice fields converted to oil palm plantations,” he said.

Riza Damanik from the People’s Coalition for Justice in Fisheries (Kiara) mentioned a similar problem in the fisheries sector, in which large fishing fleets marginalized traditional small scale fisheries.

Data at Kiara shows that large fishing vessels, which account for only 8 percent of the total fishing fleet, take 30 percent of the total catch, or 1.3 million tons, while traditional fishing boats, which comprise 92 percent of the total fleet share 70 percent of the catch, or three million tons.

According to Riza, this year the government had opened wider opportunities for foreign investors to play a significant role in the sector.

“By doing this, the government has violated the Fisheries Law by prioritizing foreign investors to rule over the national fishing industry,” he said.

He added that the fisheries sector was not orientated towards making fishermen prosperous and only served the interests of the industry.

Earlier, the Agriculture Ministry said the government would ensure food security in Indonesia despite the impact of climate change.

Minister Suswono said that the problems threatening food security in Indonesia included erratic weather leading to failed harvests.

The FAO’s World Food Day was on the theme “United against Hunger”. The FAO said that in 2009, the critical threshold of one billion hungry people in the world was achieved in part due to soaring food prices as well as the impact of the financial crisis, a “tragic achievement in these modern days”, according to FAO director general Jacques Diouf.

The London-based non-profit organization the International Institute for Environment and Development marked World Food Day with a call to democratize agricultural research and ensure food sovereignty.

The United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, has backed citizens worldwide who are demanding a fundamental shift in food and agricultural research towards more accountability in a democratic society.

“The democratization of agricultural research is a vital for those who seek to achieve the human right to adequate food a reality,” writes De Schutter. (Ind)

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