

Press Release

Is the "Wind Without a Passport" the Cause of the Haze Disaster in Southeast Asia?

The haze disaster has caused an uproar across Southeast Asia, with ASEAN even designating it a regional security issue. A statement made by a former governor of Jakarta has suddenly resurfaced in public discourse: "The wind holds no ID card," he remarked years ago, referring to how the haze—triggered by forest fires—is carried by the wind.

This haze originates from hundreds of thousands of hectares of burning Indonesian forest. Indonesia's National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB) recorded a total forest fire area of 72,798 hectares, with the largest affected area being West Kalimantan province (38,310 hectares). The smoke does not stop at Indonesia's administrative borders; the wind carries it across to Sarawak, Malaysia. In Serian, the air pollution index was reported to reach 195, while in Tebedu, the figure hit 200. A total of 108 schools in Serian were temporarily closed. Across Sarawak, 591 schools were shut down in 10 districts (affecting approximately 197,000 students), with the potential for closures to extend to Penang. Also in Indonesia, the impact of the haze and forest fires is also severe. An estimated 3 million people across 37 regencies and cities have been directly exposed to the smog, with cases of Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) surging by up to 78% in some areas. Vulnerable groups—children, toddlers, pregnant women, and the elderly—have been hit the hardest.

At this stage, there is no longer a need to debate whether the cause is natural (such as El Niño) or man-made. Rather the central debate is "corporate crime" alongside "biased law enforcement." This can be observed in the fact that: (1) Since the early 2000's, massive concession permits have led companies to construct giant canals that drain peatlands, making them highly flammable down to the sub-surface layers; (2) WALHI and a number of NGOs highlight that dozens of hotspots are located precisely within palm oil and mining (mostly private even foreign) company concession areas. (3) Law enforcement that is harsh on the powerless—where smallholder farmers face criminal prosecution while the permits of peat-destroying corporations remain unrevoked—is viewed as a clear injustice and a sign of bias in law enforcement.

Being an Indonesian citizen or WNI means being accustomed to economic colonization through selective secular law enforcement and forest exploitation that enriches oligarchs and impoverishes the common people. Data from WALHI indicates that up to 142 companies are suspected of involvement in forest fires; the organization has even highlighted the alleged participation of foreign firms—particularly in the mining and nickel sectors—in these activities. At this juncture, the phrase "the wind holds no ID card" takes on a poignant, contemplative resonance. Indeed, the wind carries no identification; it recognizes neither passports, provincial boundaries, nor administrative lines—let alone border fences.

Amidst this succession of calamities, the haze and the wind may well serve as a sign from Allah (SWT) to the Muslim communities of Indonesia and Malaysia, urging us to question the barriers dividing us and to revisit the roots of our identity. These fierce winds, which know no passport nor ID card, should prompt us to rethink the very nature of our citizenship: do we choose silence and continue playing the victim, or do we actively critique the status quo and seek new alternatives for the way our nations are governed?

This is the opportune moment to revisit the concept of Khilafah (Caliphate), as its genuine system of governance would prevent the exploitation of the Ummah's forests by corporations or foreign entities—also it would dismantle the artificial boundaries that carve up forests across Muslim lands, leaving them vulnerable to being devoured by capitalist powers. The Khilafah will only rely on the law of Allah (swt), the Most Just.

﴿وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ * أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَكِن لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ﴾

"When they are told, "Do not spread corruption in the land," they reply, "We are only peace-makers! Indeed, it is they who are the corruptors, but they fail to perceive it." [QS Al Baqarah: 11-12]

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