



Women's Major Group Intervention

UNEA 3: GMGSF Session 4th

Grassroots voices from across the world: impacts of pollution on people's and communities actions

Nov. 27th, 2017

Thank you chair. and thank you Mr. Gutierrez – President of UNEA for your support to civil society. I am Helda Khasmy, speaking on behalf of the Women's Major Group. My organization, SERUNI, is a grassroots women's organization working in fifteen provinces of Indonesia. Our members include peasants, workers, Indigenous peoples, and women in poverty.

We have heard the words of the Executive Director of UNEP, and we appreciate that he has highlighted the role civil society. We hope he now has a better understanding of the essential roles our organizations play. Grassroots organizations in the Women Major Group work with communities on the front lines of environmental defense, and **we do not want them, to be in more danger**. We look forward to continuing communication with the Director on his previous remarks as well as future engagements.

I am honored to speak today on behalf of **forty-three million Indonesian people affected by toxic haze pollution**. In 2015, half a million people developed serious respiratory infections. The particulate measurement figure in 2015 was **four thousand** while the safe particulate air rate range is zero to fifty.

For 19 years, a terrible smoke season follows monsoon. We suffer from breathing in dark, yellow air filled with toxins and harmful particles, causing pains in our heads and chests. Vulnerable groups including **children, pregnant women, elderly and people with a history of respiratory illness suffer more**.

The theme of UNEA-3, **to beat pollution**, cannot succeed without **systemic change**. Industries, companies, and unsustainable practices brought large amounts of plastic in our oceans, chemicals in our lands and rivers, and **created this dirty air that we breathe every day**. None of these developed by accident. We are in this situation because decisions were made to **structure our economies towards extractivism, mass production of plastics, consumption of fossil fuels, and use of pesticides and fertilizers in our agriculture**.

Indonesia has the largest stretches of tropical peatland in the world: almost 22 million hectares. Tropical peatland stores 20 times more carbon than other kinds of tropical forests. In Indonesia, **peat is dried and burned as fuel on palm oil plantations owned by private sector**. This practice, along with palm oil and acacia wood plantations, continues not because the **people want it**, but because **large corporations are able to make billions in profits**. Palm oil and acacia plantations are owned by large companies such as Sinar Mas Group, Royal Golden Eagle group, Salim Group, Wilmar Group and Surya Dumai Group. **They are given special rights to license land**, allowing them to profit from the irreversible damage to the community and environment.

This shows that ending pollution **is not about simply stopping some people from using fossil fuels, but should be about systemic change. If we do not change the neoliberal economic model that profits a few at the cost of the lives of millions, we will not see a pollution free future, nor will we achieve the 2030 Agenda**. We need to see a just and equitable transition out of dirty energy, and we need a just form of development that includes all people.

We are not about opposing development: it's about including everyone in a just and inclusive form of **development that moves away from neoliberalism, and does not hurt the people or the environment**. We call this **Development Justice**. This is development that we need, that makes our lives better, where our children are born to a pollution free world where they can breathe safely.