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April 10, 2014

The Right Honorable Baroness Catherine Ashton  
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
1046 Brussels  
Belguim

Dear Baroness Ashton,

I urge you, as a citizen of our biologically imperiled world, to **communicate to Indonesia its obligation protect its rainforests, and it reject its proposal o destroy the Leuser Forest Ecosystem** in the province of Aceh. This proposed law, the 'Qanun RTRWA' Provincial Law on Spatial Planning, would open the Leuser Forest to biological genocide at the hands of mining companies and oil palm producers. The Leuser Forest is one of the Earth's most abundant, exuberant Edens of biological diversity, making the rezoning proposal unspeakably heinous and immoral. An astounding array of every type of plant, animal, and microorganism is found here, and biologists are only beginning to explore these riches. **To scrape away the living tissue of Leuser Forest for the dead, lifeless palm oil, minerals, or other commodities is an act of biological genocide**, and Aceh must not commit such a heinous crime. Every creature of the Leuser Forest, from the smallest beetle to the most charismatic monkey, has a right to exist that supersedes the desire of either the Aceh government or any private palm oil or mining company to exploit it.

The biological riches of the Leuser Forest cannot be overstated. Scientists have identified this region as one of the greatest concentrations of biological diversity remaining on Planet Earth. Countless species of plants and animals of incomparable beauty have collected in this rainforest that is now a global treasure of all humanity. **The governments of Indonesia and Aceh have a responsibility to all fellow humans to shepherd, nurture, and protect the Leuser Forest**, and to reject the filthy propositions of all mining and logging companies who would dismember this forest for profit. The proposed revisions to the 2000 land-use plan would cause a biological genocide to sweep over Aceh, and must be rejected. No amount of palm oil, rattan, or mineral ores are comparable in value to the priceless, kaleidoscopic diversity of plants and animals that call the Leuser Forest home.

Indonesia has lost a horrifying proportion of its original rainforests, mostly within the last half-century, and the **Leuser Ecosystem is one of the very last strongholds of plant and animal life**. In particular, this forest is the last place on Earth with its nearly complete complement of large mammal life, including orangutans, tigers, elephants, rhinos and sun bears. The biological genocide that has swept over much of Southeast Asia's rainforest landscape is near completion, and is now at the doorsteps of the Leuser Forest. Between 1990 and 2010, Indonesia lost approximately 20% of its forest area, according to satellite images, a shocking abdication of responsibility to our global ecosystem. **The citizens of the European Union are entitled to the oxygen produced by these rainforests, and to coexistence with the unique forms of life that live therein**. As Europe's representative, you must convey these rights and responsibilities to the government of Indonesia with all necessary diplomatic and legal force.

The indigenous people of the Leuser Forest who live sustainably within have articulated their opposition accordingly through public protests and petitions that the Aceh and Indonesian government have so far ignored. The rainforests of Aceh are a critical component of the Earth's life-support system. **The destruction of this rainforest would constitute an act of aggression against all humans whose lungs inhale the oxygen from this forest.** Neither Indonesia nor any corporation has any right to destroy the ecosystem that is a common endowment of all humanity. The Leuser Forest is part of the global ecosystem that regulates Earth's atmospheric chemistry, weather, and hydrologic cycle. These functions are of vastly greater value than any amount of minerals, crops, or timber into which the Leuser Forest could be liquidated. Humanity depends upon these forests for its survival, and they are the domain of their rightful indigenous stewards, not of the Aceh or Indonesian government to which the native inhabitants have not subordinated themselves.

**Indonesia is obligated to reject the proposal to strip the Leuser Forest of its legal protections,** and to maintain the integrity of this ecosystem, pursuant to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The existence of this precious rainforest within the boundaries of Aceh confers great responsibilities Indonesia's national and state governments to protect the plants and animals that live here, as the stewards that history and geography have appointed to the island of Sumatra. I understand that the government of Indonesia had nearly completed an agreement with Norway for large payments in exchange for maintaining this forest. While it is unfortunate that such financial aid was not forthcoming, this does not release Indonesia from its obligations, as a member of our fragile global life-support system, to maintain the Leuser Forest. This obligation is not contingent upon whether other countries provide assistance to Indonesia. Humanity has a right to the survival of this rainforest, and Indonesia has no right to destroy it upon the end of an arbitrary payment timeline. **The 'REDD' Initiative or other carbon-payment arrangements are a privilege for the Indonesian government,** to which the existence rights of the Leuser Forest are superior.

Again, please **compel, through all means of international law and diplomacy, Indonesia to reject the immoral and illegal 'Qanun RTRWA' Provincial Law on Spatial Planning.** Moreover, the Indonesian and Acehnese governments must revoke all existing agriculture, timber, and mineral concessions inside the Leuser Forest, and instead protect this global treasure and its indigenous people from outside sabotage. Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue.

Sincerely,

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