

Police in spotlight after Suku Anak Dalam protest

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The police should not use excessive force when resolving conflicts involving indigenous people, a conservation group said in the wake of a violent clash that injured five members of the Suku Anak Dalam, one of Jambi's remote indigenous tribes.

On Tuesday, two factions of the Suku Anak Dalam clashed at Pelepat Police headquarters in Bungo regency, Jambi.

The conflict started several days ago, when a member of the Kitap faction, identified as Ilham, insulted another faction identified as the Pasir Putih group who reported the incident to Pelapat Police.

They demanded that Ilham's group pay a fine as compensa-

tion for the incident, which is in line with an agreement signed between the two factions that settled a conflict in 2017.

The agreement, which was agreed to under police supervision, prompted Pasir Putih to report Tuesday's incident to resolve the fresh dispute.

But this time, the police appeared reluctant to meddle in the conflict. The resulting Pasir Putih protest turned violent when unidentified individuals broke a window of the police headquarters, causing officers to fire warning shots in the air to disperse the infuriated mob.

Five Pasir Putih members reportedly suffered gunshot wounds in the incident, although no fatalities were reported.

On Thursday, the Indonesian Conservation Community (KKI Warsi) criticized the police for

not acting fairly in resolving the conflict.

"The indigenous people thought that the situation had worsened when the police fired their weapons, provoking them to fight back as a defensive measure," KKI Warsi director Rudi Syaf said.

He added that the police should instead help resolve the conflict by looking into the root cause of the problem: deforestation that posed a threat to the Suku Anak Dalam.

Both Pasir Putih and Kitap, who depend largely on natural resources to survive, live in an area where the forest has been turned into a palm oil plantation and an industrial forest.

"The government should start to accommodate them, for example, by allocating several plots of land [to them] through an agrar-

ian reform scheme. It will help them make a living and settle social conflicts," Rudi said.

Criticism also came from the National Police Commission (Kopolnas) who cited the police's lack of anticipation in preventing the clash.

"The police should now initiate mediation between the disputing factions," Kopolnas commissioner Poengky Indrati said.

"It is also important to thoroughly investigate the [shooting] incident."

Bungo Police chief Adj. Sr. Comr. Januario Jose Morais, who oversees the Pelepat Police, was quick to defend the use of weapons in the incident, saying that it was justifiable after the five injured people resisted the truce.

Two Pasir Putih members have been questioned as witnesses in the shooting incident.