



Environmentalists win human rights award

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Environmental activist Eva Bande and a local group from Central Java, Sedulur Sikep, have won the prestigious human rights Yap Thiam Hien award for their roles in agrarian conflicts.

Imdadun Rahmat, board supervisor of the Yap Thiam Hien foundation, noted the growing trend of conflicts that involved big corporations and local communities.

"There are problems such as conflicts between people and big corporations, whether they are mining corporations or oil palm plantations," Imdadun said.

"People were denied rights to their land and deprived of their land. Therefore, the struggle of those who fight to preserve the environment needed to be highlighted."

For decades, Eva has been fighting alongside the farmers of Toili in Luwuk, Banggai regency, Central Sulawesi, who wanted to protect their customary land from environmental disaster.

She was jailed from 2010 until 2014 for advocating for the farm-

Award winners advocate local communities in agrarian conflicts

Environmentalists most prosecuted activists in past four years

ers against a company who was allegedly exploiting them. She was later freed because President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo granted her clemency.

"I would like to say thank God [for this award]," Eva said after the ceremony.

"Honestly, I never thought I would receive this award. I don't know if I deserve this honor. This is the result of a collective fight of people who fought alongside me."

Eva further said that she hoped the agrarian reform promised by Jokowi would happen.

"I hope that the president is determined to resolve agrarian conflicts and free the farmers who are still in jail," Eva said.

"When I was pardoned by the President, he said that there should be no more criminalization, no other Eva Bandes."

Sedulur Sikep is a local community from Mount Kendeng, Central Java, which has been fighting against cement factories in the area, the presence of which they argued was harmful for both the environment and the local community.

Imdadun added that, as devout followers of Kejawen, a native faith, they were stigmatization by society.

"The members of Sedulur Sikep were chosen because they had inspired other groups [to fight for the same cause]," he said.

"For example, they got academics involved in public discussions, particularly on the impact of [factories] in rural areas.

"Furthermore, they shed light on rotten dealings behind the business, such as manipulation of licensing practices. More importantly, they managed to inspire changes without using violence."

Gunretno, a member of Sedulur Sikep, said he was grateful for the acknowledgement.

He also pointed out that the people needed the protection of the law.

"We don't mean to vilify [the

government], but the government must remember that without its people, they wouldn't exist, so please act as good public servants," Gunretno said.

Imdadun further noted that the upcoming government need to find a middle ground between human rights and development.

"They have to support human rights-based development."

Indonesia is slated to elect a new president and vice president in April next year.

Recent data showed that environmentalists have been the most persecuted activists over the past four years.

According to Protection International Indonesia data, about 80 percent of cases of human rights violations against activists and rights defenders from 2014 to 2018 involved environmentalists, many of whom have been jailed for what are widely believed to be dubious or legally flawed charges.

The prestigious Yap Thiam Hien award, named after a renowned lawyer and human rights activist who died in 1989, has acknowledged human rights activists since 1992. (spl)