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Environment

NGOs CRITICISED FOR USING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

KUALA LUMPUR, June 17 (Bernama) -- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were today taken to task by Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik for using environmental issues to pressure and affect the economic growth of developing countries.

"I am very angry at them because they are using all these social environmental issues, hiding behind trade and health issues," Dr Lim told reporters after opening the three-day International Tropical Wood Conference organised by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) here.

According to him, they had now moved into international organisations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to apply pressure on their own politicians in their countries.

"And they are trying to move into the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and World Trade Organisation (WTO)," he said.

Dr Lim said International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz had put up a big fight against them at the WTO and he hoped that Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek would give a similar fight at the ILO as "we will fight them at all fora."

Dr Lim said the new approach among NGOs reflected the change of attitude among developed countries as they no longer could compete with developing nations.

He said instead of using the domestic protectionists policy, they were using international fora to bring about a protectionist policy by putting developing countries out of competition before they could even start by using social, environmental and health issues to stop them from developing.

"I'd like to ask NGOs in this country like the WWF, Tenaganita, Friends of the Earth, Sahabat Alam, Nature Society and others of their stand...whether they are going to support us or not?" he said.

"Are they on our side? I strongly feel that it is a big conspiracy on the part of these international NGOs as indicated in their letter to our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad...I will hit back at them in my reply on his behalf," he said.

He said Malaysia was in the position to articulate on behalf of Third World countries and that was why they wanted a conventional forestry agreement but it was rejected by NGOs who said it would not be a good agreement because it was hastily resolved, and was only promoted by timber trading nations.

Dr Lim then questioned the rationale behind them wanting a convention in 1992 in Rio.

"Now after five years, we got a non-legally binding agreement on free timber forestry that covers conservation, management and sustainable development of all forest in the world. When are we going to start?"

"And yet they are the ones who wanted to have the Rio summit?" he said.

In his speech earlier, Dr Lim said the government supported actively appropriate research and development (R&D) in alternate timber species with commercial potential.

"In this regard, the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) has undertaken intensive R&D in this area and many species have been tested for plantation establishment," he said.

Dr Lim said among the species which might have great potential included teak, sentang, acacia mangium and hevea for timber and based on their properties and attributes, they could play an important role in the future

particularly in the development of the timber and related industries.

He said government agencies were also encouraged to participate in the development of forest plantations on available idle or vacant land, ex-mining land either on their own or in conjunction with the private sector as such joint ventures could help establish a good research network into new timber species.

The minister added that "fast growing" timbers such as meranti, jelutong, kapur, angkana and sesenduk could be adapted to plantation conditions to produce raw material for downstream processing industries and these new species could be cultivated on a commercial basis to meet the strong demand in the regional and international markets.

Currently, he pointed out, the total forested land in Malaysia was estimated to be around 18.91 million hectares or 58 per cent of the total land area as the end of 1996, out of which 14.28 million hectares were designated as permanent forest estate (PFE).

"However, out of 14.28 million hectares, only 0.19 million hectares or 1.33 per cent had been converted into forest plantations by 1996 and therefore total forested land should be increased to 65 per cent," he said.

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