

West Papua declared conservation province

Ketut Sarjana Putra

JAKARTA

West Papua Governor Abraham Oetavianus Atururi deserves credit for his astounding Oct. 19 Manokwari declaration. Flanked by heads of the 12 West Papuan regions, he declared the province Indonesia's first official "conservation province".

In doing so, he has set forth a bold pathway for sustainable development that respects both the aspirations of Papuan communities and the global significance of Papua's biodiversity.

Even by Indonesian standards, the province of West Papua is unusually blessed with abundant and unique natural resources.

Almost half of Indonesia's biodiversity is contained within the two Papuan provinces. Papuan reefs

contain 75 percent of the world's coral diversity, its forests and coasts are rich in climate-stabilising carbon and untold biological resources have yet to be discovered.

The traditional wisdoms and practices of Papuan communities have kept these systems in balance for generations.

But rapid development threatens to undermine West Papua's natural wealth. If current practices continue, vast amounts of forest will be converted to oil palm plantations. Coastal-rich mangroves and productive coral reefs are at risk from unplanned upstream landscapes and coastal development.

At the heart of Governor Atururi's vision of a conservation province is the desire to balance opportunities and to mitigate the risks of development. The conservation province policy will establish three natural

thresholds that need to be protected.

These are: forests and their carbon resources, vital fresh water systems and productive coastal and marine areas.

These areas have been listed for protection so that they can continue to provide for the human populations that they support. The other critical factor is the ability of governments to apply the best available science to minimize "non-manageable risks" while securing sustainable production systems.

Through Regional Government Law No. 23/2014, the government determines which provinces will play a greater role in natural resource governance.

West Papua's new policy provides an example of how that national policy can be integrated at every level, from the district to the provincial and national levels, in a

holistic way to ensure that all of nature is conserved.

We at Conservation International believe that the conservation province approach could be applied throughout Indonesia to address land degradation and biodiversity loss in addition to the local and global challenges of climate change.

The conservation province sets a new high standard or paradigm to deal with development. This is inspirational and very much needed for a natural resource-based archipelagic country such as Indonesia.

In his declaration, Governor Atururi noted the importance of Papua's resources to future generations. Securing traditional practices and involving local people in management will help to translate nature's wealth into much-needed community prosperity.

The key challenge is how to

reconcile the business-as-usual development agenda with conservation province principles and translate this relationship into effective action.

Such a challenge will involve working out how to set bold conservation and green growth targets that make sure that most stakeholders are on the same page and support the plans, and in so doing, eventually contribute to the over-arching provincial goals.

This will require visionary leaders and good governance, including strong law enforcement mechanisms.

For example, how should we deal with issues of inappropriate land-use or concessions for certain areas that serve a critical function for ecological services?

And how can investors support the conservation province policies

by developing businesses that respect the true value of nature and the culture of a given area?

When this conservation province approach is applied to all provinces and is focused on building upon the strength and the uniqueness of each province, Indonesia will emerge as a center of excellence in translating and fulfilling global sustainable development goals.

Globally, people are becoming more and more aware that our societies need nature to thrive. This desire has been loudly heard by millions of Indonesians and this declaration by the governor is a landmark move by West Papua to recognize the value of nature to people.

The writer is vice president of Conservation International Indonesia. The views expressed are his own.

China should be concerned about The Hague Tribunal

Edsel Tupaz and Daniel Wagner

MANILA/CONCORD/CIJULI

On Oct. 29, in a unanimous decision, the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague issued its first, preliminary ruling concerning whether the Tribunal had "jurisdiction" over the issues raised by the Philippines against China's so-called "nine-dash line" in the South China Sea.

The Tribunal held that in about half of the Philippines' 15 claims, it did have jurisdiction. The other

half, it ruled that the Tribunal was not competent to hear them, ruling that The Hague court will eventually be deciding against Chinese interests.

Last week, Beijing's vice foreign minister aired similar concerns. Many observers see this as a perfect test case for a rules-based approach to managing future regional conflict.

It may well also set the stage for reigning in China's "unique" interpretation of international maritime law, which ignores nearly universally held concepts of territorial boundaries, Exclusive Economic

zones, and other bodies of water, as if they were a natural extension of China's land mass.

Surrounding littoral states would thereafter be forced to pursue a naval arms race as the next best option under concepts of self-help.

Japan did just that, in September, with a reinterpretation of the country's post-war constitution to remove limitations on over-seas combat.

The Japanese Self

Defense Forces has argued that a portion of those issues (maritime entitlement issues only) can be subject to a compulsory ruling under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

This will mean that UNCLOS, a regime which is referred to as the "constitution of the seas and oceans", will shape and inform greater regional diplomatic questions which happen

between it and other countries in other seas.

This is particularly the case with Japan regarding disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, as well as whether China can proceed with the construction of offshore gas platforms in the East China Sea.

Since the ruling, China has made no change in its posture that the South China Sea is part of its territory.

It seems clear, however, that Beijing fully understands the potential impact of international tribunals

to which it belongs, such as UNCLOS.

It looks increasingly likely that China will lose in The Hague next year. If so, it is fair to ask whether Beijing will rise to the occasion and be a graceful loser or remain obstinate in the face of overwhelming opposition to its actions in the South China Sea.

China's maritime disputes in Asian waters will ultimately prove to be a litmus test for whether China will act as a responsible member of the international community, will

The Tribunal's preliminary award on jurisdiction and admissibility should prove to be