

Indonesian lower court rejects bid to protect prized forest

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An Indonesian court has rejected a case brought by Acehese community leaders who want one of the country's most prized tropical forests to be protected from exploitation by mining and plantation companies.

Nurul Ikhsan, chief lawyer for the plaintiffs, said the Central Jakarta District Court rejected the case on Tuesday because the Aceh province bylaw at issue caused no material losses to them.

Aceh, which has considerable autonomy under a 2005 peace deal with insurgents, introduced a land use plan in 2013 that conflicts with the Leuser forest's protection under national law.

Nine community leaders filed the lawsuit in January, asking the court to order the Home Affairs Ministry to revoke the bylaw.

They said the bylaw threatens the Leuser ecosystem by allowing diversion of the region into industrial and mining forests. The local government so far has issued 23 mining permits within the area, they said.

Conservationists say the 1.8 million-hectare (4.4 million-acre) forest, which spans Aceh and North Sumatra provinces, is the only place in the world where orangutans, rhinos, elephants and tigers share the same wild environment. Each of those four Sumatran species is endangered.

Ikhsan said the ruling would be appealed.

Indonesia has a moratorium on new licenses for logging in virgin forests but deforestation has continued largely unabated. Large swaths are burned every year for palm oil and pulp wood plantations. Illegal logging also takes a toll.

A study in the journal *Nature Climate Change* estimated that by 2012, Indonesia was clearing 840,000 hectares (2 million acres) of forests a year, more than any other country.

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