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**SAVE THE PLANET:** State Minister of the Environment Rachmat Witoelar shakes hand with executive director of the Asia-Europe Foundation Ambassador Wonil Cho (*far right*), as deputy chairwoman of Hanns Seidel Foundation Ursula Maennle, chairman of the board of directors of the Institute for Global Environment Strategies Akio Morishima and executive director the Indonesian Biodiversity Foundation KEHATI Ismid Hadad (*right to left*) look on after presiding over the Asia-Europe Environment Forum. The three-day event, held at the Bina Karna Convention Center in South Jakarta, opened on Wednesday.

# European, Asian nations talk environmental issues

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Jakarta

State Minister for the Environment and president of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) Governing Council Rachmat Witoelar urged European and Asian countries to do more to prevent further deterioration of the environment in Asia.

Rachmat said that because most environmental issues cut across national boundaries, countries in the two regions should eliminate barriers to work together to find solutions.

"Nothing should ever be non-negotiable. No matter how hard it may be to achieve, partnership is the way to go if we want to work for the benefit of all human beings, and manage the environment that nourishes and nurtures us," he said in his opening speech at the Asia Europe Environment Forum (AEEF) here on Wednesday.

The three-day forum is being attended by 250 participants from 38 Asian and European countries.

Rachmat hoped the forum would not merely be all talk but would produce practical solutions that benefited Asian countries. He highlighted the need to eradicate illegal logging in Indonesia.

"European countries do need lots of raw materials, such as wood products, from tropical countries like us. We have to warn them that if they keep consuming wood products that came from illegally cut timber, they will also bear the consequences some day. I hope this forum can urge European countries to do more to help Asia solve the problem," the minister told *The Jakarta Post* after the ceremony.

Indonesia has millions of hectares of biodiverse tropical forests.

Studies say, however, that deforestation is occurring at a rate here of more than two

million hectares a year, mostly because of illegal logging.

The latest World Wide Fund for Nature report said that millions of cubic meters of illegally logged timber from Asia, including Indonesia, were being imported as processed wood products by European countries.

"Such a problem should be solved from upstream to downstream, by the origin countries and consuming countries," Rachmat said.

AEEF coordinator and Asia-Europe Foundation director Bertrand Fort said there needed to be a two-pronged solution to tackle environmental problems like illegal logging.

"We need to tackle this issue at two ends. European consumers, companies and policy-makers that are importing timber should realize the situation in the producing countries and try to find solutions applicable in those countries of origin," Fort said.