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Wanita Umno to get feedback on Puteri

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Wanita Umno will get feedback from the grassroots before deciding on the structure of the proposed Puteri Umno, whose membership is open to women below 35.

Wanita chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said she had instructed the branches to meet and submit written resolutions on Puteri Umno within a week.

"All these resolutions will be submitted to the party headquarters which will come out with a detailed report.

"It will then be passed on to the party's disciplinary and management committee, which is chaired by party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi," said Rafidah, who is also International Trade and Industry Minister.

She was speaking to reporters after attending a meeting with Wanita division leaders and the movement's exco members.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had in July, after chairing the supreme council meeting, announced that Umno would set up a new wing, Pasukan Puteri Umno, which would be equivalent to Umno Youth.

He said the wing was to cater for young women who were interested in joining the party, but were quite uncomfortable with Wanita Umno which they perceived as being made up of older members.

However, Rafidah announced early this month that Puteri Umno would co-exist as a club and would not have a formal structure of a political wing.

She argued that having a formal structure was not feasible and that it might cause division within the movement.

Asked about the movement's stand if many of its members voted for Puteri Umno to function as a political wing, Rafidah said: "This is a very serious issue for all Wanita members to decide and not the exco alone."

Umno currently has 2,819,088 members, out of whom 1,284,862 are women. There are 743,944 Umno Youth members and 790,284 male members above 40.

"We believe that a big portion of our members are those below 40. But we will get the exact figure from the branches and divisions.

"We have never stopped young women from becoming members. In fact, during our meeting today, many of those present said they had started at a very young age, mostly in their 20s."

Rafidah said Wanita Umno would also propose to the special committee, set up to review the party's constitution, to make it a ruling that all Wanita branch heads and their deputies automatically become branch committee members.

Meanwhile, Wanita deputy head Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, who was present at the meeting, said while Puteri Umno was an interesting concept, "what is important to consider is its structure and how it will be implemented".

"The claims that Wanita Umno is not open to young women are not true. I joined the movement when I was 29 and progressed from holding minor posts to what I am now.

"One must have a strong foundation before playing an active role in politics. Young women can gain experience from the senior ones by joining Wanita Umno and this would be beneficial for them when they hold higher positions later."

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