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Wanita to seek endorsement for Puteri proposal

KUANTAN, Mon. - Wanita Umno will propose to the party leadership that membership of Puteri Umno be confined to those aged 25 and below, instead of 40 and below, as suggested earlier.

Its chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said today the lower age limit would reflect the young people's image associated with the setting up of the body.

"From our experience, we know that those who are above 25 are already mature. If they were to join Umno at the age of 18, it will mean they would have been involved in the movement for seven years," she said after chairing the Wanita Umno exco meeting.

Also present was her deputy Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

The setting up of Puteri Umno, which was agreed upon by the Umno supreme council on July 10, is to attract younger women to the party.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said that Puteri Umno was to cater to young women who were interested in joining the party, but were uncomfortable with Wanita Umno which they perceived as being made up of older members.

The proposal has caused dissension among Wanita members with some wanting it to follow the format of Umno Youth while others prefer it to function as a club.

Rafidah said if the party leadership and supreme council had no other choice but to stick to the earlier suggestion, the movement would have no objection because it was the right of the leadership.

"All we want to say is that if the party wants to reflect Puteri Umno's youthful image, the age limit should be lowered," she added.

In the counter-proposal to be submitted to Dr Mahathir and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi this Thursday, Rafidah said Wanita Umno would specifically outline what the movement felt the structure of Puteri Umno should be.

"It will have its own structure at the branch, division, State liaison and exco levels. But we will propose that each branch chief of Puteri Umno be part of Wanita Umno in that branch.

"At the divisional level, the Puteri Umno chief will be part of the divisional Wanita Umno. Similarly, it will be represented in the State Wanita Umno liaison committees and the movement's exco."

Rafidah said the move (to make Puteri Umno leaders part of Wanita Umno) was appropriate because being young, the members did not have the experience in many areas and Wanita Umno was willing to mobilise its resources to assist them.

"Puteri Umno should have a structure that links with Wanita Umno to ensure the party's strength is maintained and to pave the way for co-ordination between the two bodies, especially in the handling of election preparations."

Rafidah made it clear that the movement had never objected to the formation of Puteri Umno.

"Actually, we can complement each other. We are aware that it is appropriate to involve youths in the party machinery as the Umno constitution states that the Malays and other Bumiputeras can join the party when they reach 18.

"We also agree that there should be a body to be called Puteri Umno to cater to them. But we should also consider the negative and positive

implications of its existence, not only to Wanita Umno but also to the party as a whole."

Rafidah said the movement would back any move that could strengthen Umno.

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