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Puteri Umno irked over unfulfilled pledges to help Afghanistan

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Puteri Umno is disappointed that the global community, such as peace volunteers and aid organisations, have not made good on their promise to help Afghanistan recover.

Puteri chief Datuk Azalina Othman Said was shocked to hear that only a handful of the bodies kept their promises.

She said she would meet Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to enquire if it would be possible for Umno to ask the United Nations International Children's Fund (Unicef) to shed light on what had become of the thousands of dollars channelled to aid organisations to assist in the recovery of Afghanistan.

"What has happened to the money collected for the Afghan war victims? Why isn't the money channelled to the Afghans?"

"Puteri will also call on Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar to bring up the matter with the UN," she said in an interview yesterday.

Azalina was responding to claims made by the Afghan Ministry of Education that the global community has not fulfilled its promise to help Afghanistan.

Last week, Afghan Deputy Education Minister Ashraq Hossaini said many international aid organisations had pledged to help the interim Government to rehabilitate the country and rebuild schools which were destroyed during the Taliban regime and the US-led invasion.

He had said the return-to-school programme had attracted over three million boys and girls since March last year, but these children were now going to school under extreme conditions with many facilities lacking.

During the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance on Afghanistan held in Tokyo on Jan 21-22 last year, pledges of close to US\$5 billion (RM19 billion) over a six-year period had been made. This included humanitarian and recovery assistance and critical programmes such as the restructuring of its education system.

It was, however, reported that so far international donors have only given US\$500 million.

Ashraq also said some five million boys and girls have enrolled in schools for next year, but feared the lack of facilities might discourage them from attending school. He had said this after a Puteri Umno delegation called on him at his office during its three-day visit to Kabul early last week.

The Puteri delegation was led by the movement's international bureau chairman Rosnah Abd Rashid Shirlin, who is also Sabah Puteri chief.

The delegation was in Kabul to check on the progress of its school project in the war-torn country.

Azalina said Puteri would ensure that its school project was a success and would look into other areas in which the movement could help Afghanistan.

"The school will be built... that much is certain. We cannot do much more because Malaysia is only a small country, but we can ensure that the money collected is put to good use," she said.

She said she would visit Afghanistan sometime next year to check on the progress of the project.

"I will also propose to Dr Mahathir that we recruit some of the Puteri members to work as peace corps or teachers in Afghanistan.

"We have so many who are qualified and some do not have jobs. I do not

see why we cannot optimise their skills to help the Afghans."

The Puteri's school project in Afghanistan is expected to cost RM150,000. To date, Puteri has collected RM46,000 for the project.

Azalina said the rest of the money would be collected during a charity dinner to be held in Kota Kinabalu in December where Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak is expected to attend.

The project will be managed by the Massoud Foundation in Afghanistan, an independent, non-political organisation, whose aim is to aid the interim Government in the recovery and reconstruction of a new Afghanistan.

Construction of the school, for children aged between seven and 12, is expected to begin next year.

The site for the project has yet to be decided by the foundation, but Puteri hopes it would be built in the Guldara district north of Kabul.