

## **EC rues 'poor' response from Malaysians abroad**

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**By S Pathmawathy**

Despite loud calls to enlist over a million Malaysians residing overseas as voters, the reception has been “poor”, said Election Commission (EC) chairperson Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof.

We have been calling for all those living abroad to register at the respective embassies and high commissions and to provide us with their place of polling and their correspondence addresses.

“But the response is poor, not that good. We announced it nearly four months ago and we only have a few hundred registered, around 400 to 500,” Abdul Aziz (left) told Malaysiakini.

As of now the Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations 2002 only allows government servants, military personnel and full-time students overseas to register as absent voters.

“Even within this group (those who qualify under the legislation) their response in participating as postal voters is not good,” complained Abdul Aziz.

Granting voting rights to Malaysians overseas topped the list of the 22 pivotal recommendations in the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform’s report tabled in April.

The EC had previously refused to expand the category of absentee voters to all overseas Malaysians as well as allow them to vote early at missions abroad due to logistics and practicality considerations.

Instead, the commission suggested that postal voting facilities be provided them, subject to certain conditions - that the overseas citizens are registered as voters and have to return home at least once every five years to qualify.

As no progress had been reported earlier, Rasah DAP MP Anthony Loke yesterday lashed out at the EC for keeping mum on several short-term recommendations that were given a three-month deadline, including the recognition of overseas voters.

In midst of sorting out legal constraints

Nevertheless, Abdul Aziz told Malaysiakini that the EC has “almost completed” the process of including eligible Malaysians overseas as voters, but will be able to submit a progress report to only Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz, who is in charge of parliamentary affairs.

He said that the commission is in the midst of discussions with the Attorney-General’s Chambers on the legislation that needs to be amended to ensure that overseas voters return to the country at least once every five years.

“We've been having rounds of meetings with the Foreign Ministry and all the missions overseas since the recommendation were made by the PSC last year.

“We have appointed assistant registrars in the missions to assist with voter registration,” he said.

Asked on the recommendation allowing outstation voters, especially from Sabah and Sarawak, to vote without having to return to their constituencies as proposed by the bipartisan committee in its interim report released in November last year, Abdul Aziz stressed that it is not possible.

“We studied the law and there is no room for exceptions. Say we give leeway for those from Sabah and Sarawak, what about those from Kuala Lumpur who are in Johor or Perlis or even in Sabah?” he challenged.

In making a reference to Article 119 of the federal constitution, which stipulates that an eligible voter must be a resident in his or her voting constituency, Abdul Aziz said that “special” privileges cannot be accorded to just a select group of the electorate.

“The rule is, if you are working in Kuala Lumpur for more than three months, by right you should change your address with the National Registration Department and inform the EC to make the changes in the electoral roll,” he said.