

**It's OK to jump to Pakatan says ex-Umno leader**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**July 13, 2010**

Former Umno Jelutong chief Abdul Rashid Ismail said last night that Umno may not be able to continue ruling the country if it cannot solve its problems. He advised the division members that it is alright to jump to another political party if they are dissatisfied.

The embattled Umno Jelutong division held its annual general meeting in Penang last night, and found unexpected support from the former chief, who is still an Umno life member who has been involved in NGO work since his retirement. .

Abdul Rashid (left) was division leader before 2004, and was controversially suspended for money politics despite claiming the allegations were 'baseless'.

Prior to that, he went through a bitter patch when his spouse Khatijah Zainuddin was murdered in Jelutong in April 2000.

Last night, Abdul Rashid made a comeback to his former division, declaring that he merely wanted to support the members "from behind".

"When I heard sad stories of how the state leadership had disregarded the constitution (by closing the 17 Umno Jelutong branches), I felt I had to get involved again," he said.

However he denied he would ever hold a top position again.

'Fight for rights'

Abdul Rashid urged the disappointed members to protest, to be courageous and to fight for their right to maintain their branches.

Or, he suggested, they could also shift allegiance if they wished to.

"Do not be apologetic. Alternatively you can 'lompat' (jump) to other parties like PKR or PAS, there is always Pakatan Rakyat. It is acceptable as you are not jumping into another religion," he told the 60-odd members at the meeting.

This 'unofficial' division has reportedly 4,500 registered members who are also voters in Jelutong.

However, Abdul Rashid says the members are unwilling to betray the party despite the option of joining opposition parties, because they believe Umno has really contributed much to improve the lives of Malays and Malaysians.

He added that Umno has ruled the country for 50 years, but may no longer be able to do so in the future if it is continuously plagued by problems.

"Do not be disappointed; do not be sad and fed-up because the struggle is important. In my case, I have decided to help whenever I can. But do not ask me to be a leader, sorry, I do not want that.

"Let's rebuild the division; those who want to contest, do not give them too much power. Instead give that power to someone who can process the branches, to ensure that it is in

order," he added.

'Act against leaders'

He suggested an independent body to be set-up to resolve the matter of the 17 branches, whose fate is uncertain, as they have yet to be notified officially about their closure from the party's supreme council or the Registrar of Societies.

Constitutionally, only these two institutions have the right to close any branch, according to the constitution.

"No one is above the law. It is they (state leaders) who have gone against the constitution; we have very undisciplined leaders," he said.

"Action should be taken not against the 17 branches but against the state leaders, as they have gone against proper rules and regulations of the party," he added.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/137147>