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# Zaid denies supporting sacking

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## De facto law minister: I never endorsed Lord President Salleh Abas' dismissal

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Minister-in-charge of law Datuk Zaid Ibrahim has denied ever supporting the sacking of Lord President Tun Salleh Abas in 1988.

"In fact, I say to you today that it was not right," he said.

However, as the Muslim Lawyers Association president then, he had said that it was legal, according to the Constitution, for Tun Hamid Omar, Salleh's number two, to chair the tribunal set up to try Salleh.

But while Hamid's appointment was legal, it was morally wrong and a conflict of interest for Hamid to have accepted the tribunal chairman post as he had stood to gain from

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DATUK ZAID IBRAHIM



Salleh's dismissal, said Zaid.

"Whether he used that position to benefit from it only God knows," he said yesterday at a press conference.

In 1988, Salleh as Lord President wrote to the King on behalf of all

judges expressing disappointment over the then prime minister (Tun) Dr Mahathir Mohamad's accusations against the judiciary.

Salleh was then suspended and sacked by a tribunal chaired by

Hamid who later became Lord President.

Zaid said yesterday that he had opposed the Bar Council's boycott of Hamid as Lord President then but stressed it would be wrong for anyone to construe that as his endorsement of Salleh's dismissal.

"I don't recollect ever having said that the grounds of dismissal were fair or just."

He had, in fact, gone to see Salleh just days before the tribunal commenced proceedings to express his regret over what was happening.

In the last two years, he said he had spoken many times in Parliament and elsewhere calling for judicial reforms and for an apology over the Salleh Abas episode.

"If I did something that hurt Tun

Salleh and the other judges, or written something to show that I condone that act, I apologise.

"I have already apologised in Parliament before. And I am just asking that the Government consider that now," he said.

Zaid stressed that the request for apology was not aimed at embarrassing or undoing Dr Mahathir's legacy.

He added that if the 1988 judiciary crisis was the root cause of the state of the present day judiciary, the healing process should start from there.

He said an apology was the first step towards restoring the independence of the judiciary, regaining public respect for the institution and bringing lawyers back to the fold.