

**Failure To Submit Returns Disqualifies Candidates From Contesting In Next General Election – EC
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KUCHING, Aug 1 (Bernama) -- Political parties have been reminded that candidates of last year's Sarawak state election will be disqualified from contesting in the next parliamentary polls in the state if they fail to submit their election expenditure returns to the Election Commission (EC).

EC deputy chairman Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar said on Wednesday it was entirely up to the political parties to check the matter with the EC to avoid nominating or selecting someone who was not eligible as stipulated under the Election Offences Act.

"Right now, we (EC) want to let the people know first if he or she fails to submit the returns, then they know the consequences," he told reporters after giving a briefing to leaders of political parties and members of the media on the 13th General Election, which can be held anytime between now and June next year.

Also present were EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusuf and other EC members.

On the appointment of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to monitor the smooth running of the next general election, he said nine NGOs in Sarawak -- four of them in Miri, three in Kuching and two in Sibu -- had been identified as they met the EC's requirement of being non-partisan in their work.

He said EC was giving priority to domestic NGOs since they were more familiar with local sensitivities and customs but foreign observers would also be invited, especially from fellow Asean member countries.

However, the EC had decided not to give accreditation to Mafrel (Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections) following numerous complaints from political parties which claimed it was not neutral, he said.

He said Mafrel had also failed to fully comply with EC's conditions, including not submitting its report after it was appointed during the 2008 general election.

Although Sarawak has 1,051,190 registered voters, making it the fourth largest by number after Selangor, Johor and Perak, it was estimated that about 300,000 eligible voters had yet to register to exercise their right at the ballot box, he said.

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