

Several participants express support for the 2010 election at a recent political forum in Rangoon involving dissidents, politicians, former political prisoners and students.

While many international observers and Burmese dissidents have condemned the military government's plan to hold a general election this year, several veteran Burmese politicians, former political prisoners and student activists expressed support for this year's election at an informal political meeting in Rangoon on Saturday.

The individual comments came at a meeting called the "Burma Affairs Forum" which took place at the Karaweik Hotel in central Rangoon. About 50 participants discussed the pros and cons and the issues surrounding the proposed election.

The meeting was organized by a committee including student activists who were involved in the 1988 uprising and politicians who intend to contest this year's election, such as ethnic Shan politician Shwe Ohn and the daughter of late Deputy Prime Minister Kyaw Nyein, Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein.

One of the meeting organizers, Thein Tin Aung, said, "We focused the agenda on how to approach the election. The participants discussed how to ensure a smooth transition from military rule to democracy. Another item on the agenda was: 'How to deal with the military regime ...confrontation or cooperation?'

"In my opinion, the election is vital for the process of democracy," he added.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Monday, Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein said, "An election is a great chance for the politicians, for the people and for the country. For the sake of the country, we have decided to grab this opportunity.

"There is no other alternative to the election," she said.

"It doesn't mean we accept the 2008 Constitution. We hope it can be changed at some time in the future," she said, adding that Shwe Ohn, who formed the Union Democratic Alliance Party to

contest the election, brought up the issue of federalism at the forum.

Most major opposition and ethnic leaders did not attend the meeting, including those from detained Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD).

The NLD has said the military regime must allow for a review of the Constitution and the release of political prisoners before it will consider participating in the election.

To date, no electoral law or date have been announced for the election. However, the Japanese daily *Asahi Shimbun* last week claimed the election will be held on Oct. 10.

Meanwhile, Aye Lwin, a student leader in the 1988 uprising who founded his own political group in 2005 known as the Union of Burma 88 Generation Students group, said that his organization is conducting political campaigns in different townships and divisions across Burma.

"The election is a chance for change," he said. "Therefore, we have to try—even if we all have different opinions about the process."

He said that his organization is receiving a positive response from the public while in the field, but said that many people are still fearful of involvement in politics.

The pro-junta National Unity Party (NUP) is also campaigning across the country, sources said. The NUP won 10 parliamentary seats in the 1990 election while the NLD won 392 seats.

In December 2009, the Brussels-based Euro-Burma Office—which is tasked with helping the Burmese democracy movement prepare for a transition to democracy—said it will provide financial support to opposition parties and ethnic groups that will contest the general election if they need support, according to the organization's Executive Director Harn Yawngkhwe.

The aim of supporting those groups is to let them strive for democracy and ethnic rights within any political space that might be opened up by the Burmese regime, he said.

Many exiled dissidents and international observers have denounced the planned election as a “sham” designed to entrench the junta's rule and have called for a boycott of the election.