

# Thousands Rally Against CAFTA in Costa Rica

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More than 150,000 people descended on San José yesterday to rally against the Central American Free-Trade Agreement with the United States (CAFTA).

Several blocks of Paseo Colón, the main artery leading into the capital, were packed with students, union members, teachers, politicians, toddlers and dogs, dressed in anti-CAFTA T-shirts and hats.

They cheered and chanted as musicians played and campaign leaders spoke on stages set along the streets. Balloons, quilts and banners all promoting the “no” vote waved above the crowd.

“I love Americans, but I don't like the policies that the United States wants to impose on Central America and the world,” said Arsenia Cruz, a clothing-maker who came to the march with her husband and boisterous 18-year-old daughter, Ana.

The three-hour event ended with speeches by two key anti-CAFTA leaders: Eugenio Trejos, rector of the Technological Institute of Costa Rica (TEC) and Ignacio Trejos, emeritus bishop of San Isidro de El General, a crossroads city in the Southern Zone.

“God is with the people and the people must follow God,” said Ignacio Trejos. “We are a small country but we have the moral and spiritual force to resist outside interference.”

Eugenio Trejos asked the crowd for a minute of silence to remember former Costa Rican President Juan Rafael Mora, who fought against efforts by U.S. soldier William Walker to conquer Central America in the 1850s.

“Juanito lives on in the heart of the anti-CAFTA movement,” he said.

About 150 police officers, stationed near Paseo Colón, were barely visible. Delegates from the Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE) milled through the crowd, keeping an eye out for disturbances.

The event appeared peaceful, although demonstrators did begin chanting curses when a plane circled over with a pro-CAFTA banner.

Julio Quesada, a technical expert at Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE) who came to the march with his wife, 4-year-old daughter and French poodle, said he appreciates his freedom of expression.

“Costa Rica is a marvelous country. We could come (to the rally) without any fear,” he said. “Today is a family activity.”

For others, the event was a business opportunity. Street peddlers sold drinks, snacks, pins, shirts, and compact discs.

Entrepreneur Alexander Fajardo said he expected to make \$100-200 selling anti-CAFTA pins at \$1 each during the rally. His pin business brings in about four times as much money as his day job remodeling houses.

(This report includes information from ACAN-EFE.)