

# Salvadorans Protest Trade Deal With U.S.

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SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — Thousands of street vendors, university students and labor unionists marched in San Salvador Tuesday against a regional free trade accord with the United States, which they say will hurt small businesses and organized labor.

About 4,000 protesters held marches across the country, one day before El Salvador implements its free trade agreement with the United States.

Skirmishing erupted as protesters demanded police leave guard posts at the city's main hospital with students launching rocks at officers, who responded with tear gas and rubber bullets. Five people suffered minor injuries.

Washington said last week that four other nations \_ Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic \_ would join the Central American Free Trade Agreement at a later date when they meet certain conditions. Costa Rica is also eligible but has yet to ratify the accord.

Supporters of the accord say it will help lift the region out of poverty.

But the director of the Salvadoran Social Security Workers Union, Ricardo Monge, said the agreement will destroy organized labor.

The pact has also sparked protests in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

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