

Tribunal Calls for Investigation Into Government's CAFTA Campaign

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Tico Times
September 11, 2007

The Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE) yesterday called for an investigation into activities by the government in its campaign to promote the Central American Free-Trade Agreement with the United States (CAFTA), whose fate will be decided in a national referendum Oct. 7.

The Tribunal asked the Internal Auditing Office at the Planning Ministry to look into whether the government has misused public funds in its campaign.

Elections officials are reacting to a recently leaked e-mail by Vice-President Kevin Casas and National Liberation Party (PLN) legislator Fernando Sánchez to President Oscar Arias and Presidency Minister Rodrigo Arias that suggests strategies to “cover our backs from the scrutiny of the TSE.”

“What was proposed in the memo...would eventually have produced an improper use of public funds,” said Tribunal president Luis Antonio Sobrado, adding that the document was “unacceptable” and “disrespectful” to the TSE.

The e-mail suggests that the government scare voters into supporting CAFTA and withhold resources from mayors whose cantons do not vote for the free-trade pact.

Rodrigo Arias, who is the President's brother, wrote to Sobrado saying he respected the Tribunal's decision and would fully cooperate with the investigation.

The minister said he and his brother do not share the opinions stated in the e-mail, and President Arias told the daily La Nación he did not implement any of the suggestions it contained.

Sánchez apologized yesterday at the Legislative Assembly to “anyone who was offended by the content of the text.”

But Sánchez and Casas also went on the offensive in an editorial published yesterday in the daily La Nación. They said their right to privacy had been violated and that whoever leaked the e-mail should be criminally punished.

“Do we consider, today, the content of the stolen e-mail a good idea? In some aspects yes, in others, evidently no,” they wrote. “But neither of us should ever give up his right

to say or write ideas in the private sphere, although what he writes or says might be wrong.”