

Observers to Watch over CAFTA Referendum

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At least 150 international observers are likely to be watching over the Oct. 7 referendum on the Central American Free-Trade Agreement with the United States (CAFTA), according to a statement released yesterday by the Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE).

A *reglamento* written by the Executive Branch and published in the official government daily La Gaceta yesterday opened the door for observers be present during this popular vote, the country's first referendum in modern history.

International groups including the Organization of American States, Tikal Protocol, Inter-American Union of Electoral Organisms, U.N. Development Programme, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, as well as the Carter Center and the European Union, are among those that have expressed interest in sending observers.

With the Tribunal's authorization, international observers will be able to witness the different phases of the voting process, the statement said.

The Tribunal's secretariat is responsible for accrediting observers, who must provide their reasons for wanting to observe, credentials and observation plan as well disclose who is financing their work.

Anyone deemed a threat to peace or public security will be strictly prohibited from acting as an observer, the statement said.

On Oct. 7, an estimated 2.6 million Costa Ricans are expected to vote on this controversial trade pact. The Tribunal has ruled that if 40% of eligible voters turn out, the result will be binding.

Costa Rica is the only signatory country that has not ratified CAFTA.