

U.S. Trade Pact Is Protested in Costa Rica

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SAN JOSÉ, [Costa Rica](#), Sept. 30 Reuters — More than 100,000 Costa Ricans, some dressed as skeletons, protested a United States trade pact on Sunday that they said would flood their country with cheap farm goods and cause job losses.

Chanting “No to the free trade pact” and “Costa Rica is not for sale,” demonstrators filled one of San José’s main boulevards to show their opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement with the United States.

“We need an accord with the United States, but not this way,” said Juan Chacon, a 50-year-old computer technician.

In the searing heat, some protesters wore masks of President Bush and handed out fake dollar bills, lampooning United States trade policies.

A small contingent of pro-trade demonstrators also turned out at the rally. A government official said more than 100,000 people turned out for the demonstration, a huge protest in a country of 4 million.

Costa Rica is the only country that has not ratified Cafta — which includes Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic — and will be the only nation to decide the issue by referendum.

The coming Oct. 7 referendum has split the nation, with President Óscar Arias and some businesses saying Cafta will bring investment and jobs. Opponents say it will mean a flood of cheap rice and dairy imports and limit the country’s sovereignty by taking investment disputes to international arbitration.

Mr. Arias said it would be “collective suicide” if Costa Rica rejected Cafta.