

## E-10 1<sup>st</sup> TERM COUNTRY PROFILES

### COSTA RICA

#### General Information

<i>Official Name:</i>	The Republic of Costa Rica
<i>Capital:</i>	San Jose
<i>Population:</i>	4,133, 884
<i>Major Languages:</i>	Spanish and Mekatelyu
<i>Major Religions:</i>	Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Muslim, and Jewish
<i>Regional/Economic Organizational Membership:</i>	BCIE, CACM, ECLAC, IDB, ICO, OAS, UPEB, UN, UNSC, ECLAC, FAO, GATT, World Bank, ICAO, IDA, IFC, IFAD, ILO, IMO, IMF, ITU, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU, WHO, and the WMO, etc.

#### Governmental Structure

An important aspect about Costa Rican culture is its strong tradition for the respect of human rights and for democracy and peace. Costa Rica is a democratic republic with a strong constitution. Although there are claims that the country has had more than 115 years of uninterrupted democracy, their presidential election history shows otherwise (see List of Presidents of Costa Rica). Nonetheless, the country has had at least fifty-nine years of uninterrupted democracy, making it one of the most stable countries in the region. Costa Rica has been able to avoid the widespread violence that has plagued most of Latin America.

Costa Rica is a republic with three powers: executive responsibilities are vested in a president, legislative power is vested on the Legislative Assembly, and judicial power is vested on the Supreme Court. There also are two vice presidents as well as a cabinet designated by the president. The president, vice presidents, and fifty-seven Legislative Assembly delegates are elected for four-year terms. A constitutional amendment approved in 1969 limited presidents and delegates to one term, although delegates were allowed to run again for an Assembly seat after sitting out a term.

The Supreme Electoral Body, the Office of the Comptroller General, the Office of the Procurator General of the Republic and the Office of the Ombudsman also enjoy a lot of independence. The Supreme Court is divided into 4 chambers, one dealing with Constitutional Law, one dealing with Criminal Law and two dealing with Civil Law, Merchant Law and the like. In April 2003, the constitutional amendment ban on presidential re-election was reversed, allowing Óscar Arias (Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1987) to run for President for a second term. In 2006, Óscar Arias was re-elected in a tight and highly contested election, running on a platform of promoting free trade. He took office on May 8, 2006.

Certain autonomous state agencies enjoy considerable operational independence; they include

the telecommunications and electrical power monopoly, the nationalized commercial banks, the state insurance monopoly, and the social security agency. Costa Rica has no military by constitution.

Costa Rica is composed of seven provinces, which in turn are divided into 81 cantons, each of which is directed by a mayor. Mayors are chosen democratically every four years by each canton's people. There are no provincial legislatures. The cantons are further divided into districts (*distritos*).

## **Foreign Policy**

Costa Rica is an active member of the United Nations and the Organization of American States. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the United Nations University of Peace are based in Costa Rica. The Costa Rican State is also a member of many other international organizations related to human rights and democracy.

Costa Rica's main foreign policy objective is to foster human rights and sustainable development as a way to secure stability and growth.

Costa Rica is also a member of the International Criminal Court, without a Bilateral Immunity Agreement of protection for the US-military (as covered under Article 98).

Costa Rica also has had a lifelong disagreement with Nicaragua, its neighboring country over the San Juan River (Rio San Juan) which denotes the border between these two countries; the disagreement originates from the fact that the river, being Nicaraguan soil, is the only way of access to several communities in Costa Rica which need to be served by armed Costa Rican police forces.

On June 1, 2007, Costa Rica broke ties with the Republic of China in Taiwan, switching to the People's Republic of China in mainland China.

## **Issues Summary**

Issue 1: Environmental Protection → Costa Rica is a member of the World Biosphere Reserve. UNESCO has recently established a new world biosphere reserve called Agua y Paz (translated as Water and Peace) in northern Costa Rica. Biosphere reserves are areas of great natural wealth. Costa Rica uses areas like these not only for the preservation of its natural resources but also to promote its use economically by placing communities near the reserves. This is one of 3 major biosphere reserves in the world. Costa Rica takes great interest in its environment and natural resources. While the country has only about 0.1% of the world's landmass, it contains 5% of the world's biodiversity. Around 25% of the country's land area is in protected national parks and protected areas, the largest perceptual of protected areas in the world. The Pax Natura Foundation has started a financial aid program for the upkeep and preservation of forests by various people and companies. Pax Natura started out with 1 million dollars and has promised to increase that amount to 9 million dollars over the course of 10 years.

Issue 2: Illness and Disease → In Siquirres, a team of pediatricians set out to give a large group of children vaccinations. 320 children have been given vaccines for meningitis and over 5,000 adults have received the vaccine as well. It is speculated that by next year, the vaccine for meningitis will be available for all of the population under the age of 18 and will spread from there. Although vaccination is very important within certain areas of Costa Rica, the areas surrounding Siquirres did not show up in great numbers to the free vaccination.

Issue 3: Economic Issues → Costa Rica is still a developing country. Due to the global rise in food and fuel prices, inflation rates in Costa Rica have nearly doubled since last September. The rate was steady at 8.56%, but has risen to 15.4% in only twelve months. The country faces the fourth highest inflation rate in Latin America, lack of maintenance and new investment in infrastructure, over 16% of the people were below the poverty line (2006 estimate) and a 5.5% unemployment rate (2007 estimate). Central government offers tax exemptions for those who are willing to invest in the country.

Issue 4: Education → In Costa Rica, education is compulsory at the elementary level, between the ages of six and 13, and is free at both elementary and secondary level. State-owned and private primary and secondary schools are of a high standard and the country has one of the highest literacy rates in Latin America (up to 93 per cent). A number of foreign schools, catering to the English, French and German speaking communities, have opened in recent years. The academic year runs from March to November, with some English language schools following the US school calendar. There are six universities with a total of 77,000 students enrolled. Four other institutions offer undergraduate and master degrees in business administration. There is one correspondence university offering degrees in education, finance and administration.

### **Relationship with the United Nations**

Costa Rica strongly supports African human rights peacekeeping operations. The country has no military so contributes no military personnel to peacekeeping and making operations and the country gives little financial contributions to support to such efforts.

### **Relationships with other UN Security Council Members**

P5 Members: Costa Rica continues to be a friend of Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Costa Rican voting tends to sway with the United States and China.

United States: The United States is Costa Rica's most important trading partner. The U.S. accounts for almost half of Costa Rica's exports, imports, and tourism, and more than two-thirds of its foreign investment. The two countries share growing concerns for the environment and want to preserve Costa Rica's important tropical resources and prevent environmental degradation. In 2007, the United States reduced Costa Rica's debt in exchange for protection and conservation of Costa Rican forests through a debt for nature swap under the auspices of the Tropical Forest Conservation Act. This is the largest such agreement of its kind to date.

China: Costa Rica maintained official relations with the Republic of China (commonly known as "Taiwan") instead of the People's Republic of China (commonly known as "China") until June

1, 2007, when it opened relations with China. Taiwan then broke relations on June 7th. Strong economic ties existed between the two countries with projects having included the recent construction of a suspension bridge with Taiwanese capital to join the Costa Rican mainland with the Nicoya Peninsula. The bridge has been a boon for the tourist industry in the peninsula by reducing travel time to some locations by as much as two hours.

Middle East: Until 2006 Costa Rica was only one of two countries that had its embassy to Israel sited in Jerusalem (it has since moved its mission to Tel Aviv which almost every country in the world that recognizes Israel considers as its *de jure* capital).