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Central American Nations Begin Preparations For Free Trade Negotiations With U.S.

by Deborah Tyroler

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In statements appearing in the Aug. 27 issue of daily newspaper Panama America, Panamanian Trade and Industry Minister Roberto Alfaro said Central American nations, excepting Costa Rica, plan to negotiate a free trade agreement with the US. The purpose of such an initiative, he said, would be participation in the trilateral North American market (Canada, Mexico, US). According to Alfaro, trade ministers from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama will convene in October to commence talks aimed at establishing a trade agreement. Such an accord would permit Central American nations en bloc to negotiate terms of a free trade accord with Washington. The Costa Rican government would not participate, presumably because officials in San Jose believe that not all Central American countries are prepared to meet conditions for trade accord talks as specified by Washington. Alfaro said that if participants at the October meeting fail to reach a consensus on negotiating en bloc, his government would opt for unilateral negotiations.

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