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## **Panama: Criminal Charges Filed Against Oscar Arias For Interfering In Internal Affairs**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On Sept. 25, the National Front for a No Vote (Frente Nacional por el No, FRENNO) filed criminal charges in Panamanian courts against former Costa Rican president Oscar Arias for committing offenses against Panama's international image (atentar contra la personalidad internacional de Panama). As part of the suit, FRENNO called on Attorney General Rogelio Cruz to order the arrest of Arias should he enter the country. In recent weeks, Arias has repeatedly issued public calls for a Yes vote in the referendum, scheduled for Nov. 15, in which Panamanians will vote on ratification of a package of about 50 amendments to the constitution proposed by the administration of President Guillermo Endara. Proposed amendments include formal abolishment of the institution of the armed forces. In addition, the Arias Peace Foundation (Fundacion Arias por la Paz), set up by Arias after he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987, has reportedly been financing and advising groups in Panama which are involved in the campaign for a Yes vote. The National Lawyers Guild (Colegio Nacional de Abogados) of Panama figures prominently among the 12 civic, professional and political groups affiliated with FRENNO. Guild president, Jose Alberto Alvarez, said that instead of the constitutional reforms, FRENNO is promoting convocation of a National Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution. Alvarez said FRENNO opposed the proposed constitutional reforms not only because they would abolish the institution of the armed forces, but also because they would give too much power to the legislature. On Sept. 26, Arias arrived in Panama and attended a seminar on journalism. No incidents were reported in connection with his brief visit. On Oct. 6, the Attorney General's office announced it had formally accepted the suit against Arias and would send the case to the public prosecutor's office for further review. Under Panamanian law, Arias could be sentenced to up to 20 years in prison if the case were actually prosecuted and he were found guilty. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 09/22/92, 09/29/92; Inter Press Service, 09/24/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 09/24/92; 10/06/92)

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