

mosquito nets for delivery to remote medical clinics along the southwestern coast. (NANCY ELLEN LAWLER)

COSTA RICA



Area: 51,100 sq km (19,730 sq mi)
Population (2007 est.): 4,445,000
Capital: San José
Head of state and government: President Óscar Arias Sánchez

In Costa Rica's first-ever national referendum, held on Oct. 7, 2007, citizens voted in favour of the Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) with the United States, becoming the last Central American country to ratify the agreement. When the ballots were counted, 51.6% of voters supported CAFTA. The turnout of eligible voters was 60%, well above the required 40% required to make the results binding. Pres. Óscar Arias Sánchez, who spent much of his term trying to secure passage of the agreement, said that the treaty would bring long-term economic growth to Costa Rica.

During the days leading up to the referendum, massive demonstrations and riots broke out in the normally peaceful country. The pro-CAFTA side was marred by the discovery of a memo sent by a planning minister in Arias's administration that suggested that there would be a cutoff in funding to municipalities whose mayors did not support CAFTA.

Mayoral elections, traditionally conducted at the same time as legislative elections, were held months after the national elections. In December 2006 Arias's ruling National Liberation Party (PLN) scored a major victory, winning 58 of the 81 posts, though turnout was low among registered voters compared with presidential elections. The opposition Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC), which in the previous elections had won 48 races, emerged victorious in only 11 races.

On June 1 Costa Rica officially established diplomatic relations with China in an effort to promote trade and economic cooperation, meanwhile breaking off 60 years of formal ties with Taiwan. Economic growth remained strong, hovering near 7%. The U.S. can-

celed \$12.6 million of Costa Rica's debt in October in exchange for Costa Rican spending to conserve biodiversity. Also in October, Costa Rica was elected to serve as a member of the UN Security Council in 2008-09 after the Dominican Republic withdrew its candidacy.

(MITCHELL A. SELIGSON)

CÔTE D'IVOIRE



Area: 320,803 sq km (123,863 sq mi)
Population (2007 est.): 19,262,000
De facto capital: Abidjan
Chief of state: President Laurent Gbagbo
Head of government: Prime Ministers Charles Konan Banny and, from April 4, Guillaume Soro

Promising steps were taken in 2007 toward unifying Côte d'Ivoire, which had been divided after nearly five years of civil war. On March 4 at a meeting in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Ivorian Pres. Laurent Gbagbo and New Forces (FN) leader Guillaume Soro signed a peace agreement that called for a new transitional government, pending presidential and legislative elections to be held within 10 months. On March 17, in accordance with the terms of the pact, the president also created a new military command to be composed equally of government and rebel soldiers. The prime objective of the new structure would be the disarmament of all militias. The UN endorsed the agreement but said that its peacekeepers would remain in place until full security had been restored.

Soro took office as prime minister on April 4 and on April 7 announced the composition of his coalition cabinet (11 members of the presidential party, the Popular Front; 7 ministers from the FN; and 5 each from two leading opposition parties). Three days after a general amnesty was declared on April 13 for all crimes committed during the civil war, the dismantling began of barricades marking the buffer zone in the centre of the country. Pro-government militias in the western region made a symbolic gesture by handing over arms and ammunition in accordance with the Ouagadougou Agreement. At the end of May, the first steps were taken toward resolving the major source of