

Jail Sentences Won't Apply to Protesters in Costa Rica



San Jose, July 9 (teleSUR-RHC)-- A new bill modified Costa Rica's criminal code so demonstrators in the streets will not be subject to prison sentences anymore after the government recently came under fire for suppressing popular mobilizations in the country.

The modification came from lawmakers of the Commission of Legal Issues, who abolished article 256.2 and added article 390.2 to the Criminal Code.

With the new bill, anyone guilty of obstructing the road or traffic on public streets with an authorization from the relevant authorities will risk a fine only. "Decriminalizing demonstrations is an important reform, as the workers' freedom to mobilize," said Lawmaker Marvin Atencio Delgado from *Accion Ciudadana*.

Lawmakers considered protests represented a natural right of all Costa Ricans and in many cases the current bill had been used to criminalize protests, wishing this reform would protect this citizen power.

The trial of six people who protested in San Jose on Nov. 8, 2012, against proposed budget cuts in the public health service and blocked one of the main avenues started on June 24.

The group "No to criminalization of social protest in Costa Rica" denounced that many protesters were then brutalized by police forces, while 35 had been arrested.

The six people facing criminal charges include political leaders, students, university professors and union leaders. While Costa Rica is one of the only country of the world with no national armed forces, it has been heavily criticized in recent years for militarizing the police under the excuse of fighting insecurity.

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