

## Costa Rica president says no to oil exploration

By Patrick Fitzgerald

President Oscar Arias this week has affirmed his commitment against oil exploration in Costa Rica.

Speaking in front of the Legislative Assembly Monday afternoon to promote a bill regarding rural aqueducts, the president took the opportunity to quell speculation that Costa Rica would open its land and sea up for oil exploration.

“We have to make a colossal effort to replace thermal energy with renewable sources,” Arias told lawmakers. “That is why we have stimulated investment in solar, wind, geothermal and biomass energy, and that is also why we will continue with our commitment to not permit oil exploration in our territory.”

The statement comes after years of speculation regarding Arias' intentions toward oil exploration in the country.

In 2007, Costa Rica signed an agreement with the Chinese National Oil & Gas Exploration and Development Corporation (CNODC) to expand the state-owned refinery in Moín, north of the Caribbean port city of Limón, an agreement that left the door open for CNODC to explore for oil off Costa Rica's Caribbean coast (TT, Dec. 14, 2007).

The year before, Arias announced that the Brazilian oil company Petrobras might study the possibility of petroleum exploration off the country's coasts (TT, June 2, 2006).

Neither proposal moved very far, and Arias said yesterday that he never made any final agreement to explore with either group, according to the daily La Republica.

Oil exploration has been on hold in Costa Rica since 2002, when then-President Abel Pacheco issued an executive decree banning oil exploration and certain kinds of mining. Upon taking office in 2006, however, Arias acknowledged to The Tico Times that he intended to ignore the decree, reopening the possibility of oil exploration in Costa Rican waters.