

Costa Rica Debates More Inclusive Anthem Lyrics



San Jose, May 8 (teleSUR-RHC)-- A concerned citizen has presented a petition to the Costa Rican government to change the lyrics of the country's national anthem to something less discriminatory.

According to Russian citizen Evgeny Kabanov, who is currently undergoing the process of Costa Rican nationalization, the part of the anthem that says "the tenacious battle of fruitful toil reddens a man's face" is problematic and discriminatory because a Black man's face cannot turn red.

Instead, Kabanov suggests that "reddens" be changed to "hardens" in order to be more inclusive of the Afro-Costa Rican community, which represents about 8 percent of the population.

"It is clear that the face of a person with black skin can not turn red at all," said Kabanov in a proposal submitted to the national assembly office which receives petitions from the public. Kabanov proposes to

change two characters in the word “enrojece” (meaning to redden), from “oj” to “ud” in order to read “endurece” (meaning, to harden).

In his four page proposal, the awaiting Costa Rican citizen also pointed out a number of historical facts about the arrival of Africans to the country, and the inherent racism in Costa Rica, where for years people of African descent were not recognized as citizens, even if they were born in the country.

In 1936, then President Leon Cortes passed a law that restricted people of African descent from entering the country, and limited the travel of those who were already in the country so they could not enter the areas populated by whites.

In 1948, then president Jose Figueres was encouraged to accept Costa Ricans, but it was not until 1949 “when the people of Black ethnicity obtained all rights of citizenship in the country,” wrote Kobanov.

Kobanov also added that he was not accusing the current government of being racist, but rather that “not all the groups living in the country were considered” when the lyrics for the national anthem were written in 1900.

Ann McKinley, Executive Chairperson of the Board of Port Administration and Economic Development of the Atlantic Coast, said she believes the initiative is “good” as it encourages a national debate among people who “want to change aspects of the society in which we live.”

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