

Tela, Honduras Committee Meeting on the International Cities of Peace

Mario Salinas and Carol Pobanz
March 2019



With city officials in Tela, Honduras: At far left is Mario Salinas, UPF director in the Honduras; in the center, wearing black slacks is Carol Pobanz, who is with UPF in the US. They have worked together on other projects

In mid-January, we made a preparatory visit to Tela, Republic of Honduras, for three days. Our plan was to organize a community group or a committee to discuss establishing Tela as an International City of Peace, to prepare for registration of Tela and then to make plans for the August 6–20, 2019 Peace Park project.

Overall, I couldn't believe that we were sitting at a table in Tela, Honduras, a country that even the Peace Corps had abandoned, with a committee of people who were inspired and determined to make their city a peaceful city -- a place where change could begin, a place that can hopefully cause a paradigm shift and a change of image. These were my thoughts at the Committee Meeting on the International Cities of Peace proposal.

Immediately upon arrival in Tela, Mario Salinas (Honduran UPF director) and I met with our Tela central contact person, Gerardo Zelaya (an architect and also the mayor's son). We offered our suggestions regarding the registration process and our opinions on how to implement a peace agenda in the city. Gerardo is in complete agreement with our suggestions.

Following our meeting with Gerardo, we moved on to the scheduled City Hall meeting with the mayor. Gerardo gave a complete explanation of the Cities of Peace network and of the history of the registration of Nutley, New Jersey in the United States as a City of Peace, including its connection to Honduras. Attending this meeting was the mayor, his son Gerardo, as well as a prominent citizen who is a doctor and is also a member of Habitat for Humanity; a community president, a representative from the Rotary Club, a lawyer, a Catholic priest, the president of the Chamber of Tourism and, finally, Mario and I.

The mayor asked each person attending the meeting to give his or her opinion regarding the City of Peace idea. The consensus was that in a country like Honduras, where one of their largest cities is termed the "murder capital of the world," surely someone must also declare the establishment of a City of Peace. All agreed that the national image of Honduras must change and that this committee would be willing to declare Tela the beginning point of that change. The citizens of the city of Tela would like to promote Tela as a friendly city, a peaceful city and as a tourist-friendly city. Discussions included implementing tourism education for local schoolchildren through character education. It is important to note that the person in charge of tourism, a committee member, is the son of a famed environmental activist who was murdered for opposing a developer whose plans would have destroyed the sensitive ecosystem on the coast of Tela, an area that has since been transformed into the beautiful nature reserve known as Punta Sal.

All attending the meeting agreed upon the Cities of Peace idea and will work to personalize the registration materials to reflect best the needs and plans of their city. These plans will be publicly presented in two weeks at a scheduled City Council meeting (usually also attended by as many as two

hundred citizens). At that time, they will make a resolution and the organizing committee members all will sign all registration papers, which are in both Spanish and English, and then submit them digitally to the International Cities of Peace organization (www.internationalcitiesofpeaceDOTorg). They made these plans with great enthusiasm and hope. Photographs were taken at the meeting and an informal commitment was signed, a copy of which was given to Mario and me. Gerardo will be the leader of this group.



The City Hall meeting with the mayor of Tela, Honduras, at which participants expressed enthusiasm for joining global network of Cities of Peace

Moving ahead on the Peace Park

The next day we met with Gerardo to visit his father's plantation. Then, after lunch, we discussed the plans for the summer project. We have agreed on plans that will involve designs being submitted by youth from each of the thirty-three nations of the Americas. These designs will be executed using stones from Honduras' beaches but also including at least one stone from each of the thirty-three nations. Local schoolchildren will collect the stones used for this project before our August project begins. Gerardo will also send design specifications for the benches to keep continuity with designs being offered by significant nations (including the United States, represented by Nutley students). Finally, we will install a sculpture that we have commissioned a young local artist to create.

The final concern to be addressed were the plans for landscaping the park. However, these were reconciled in the evening during a meeting with a Honduran woman named Sally who is a former resident of Nutley, NJ and who was, in fact, the person who originally suggested we bring our project to Tela. Sally was very excited to hear the updates and development of the work being done in her city of Tela. She knows many prominent people in the city and has begun to actively solicit their participation through pledging in-kind donations of needed goods and services.

On our last day in the city we met with our young sculptor, Nimri. This young man has pledged to donate the foundational rock for a sculpture, which will be titled "One America -- Interdependence and Co-prosperity." Nimri has also offered to create the sculpture as his free-of-charge contribution. He is requesting only the cost of materials, approximately \$1,500– \$2,000. We are planning for Gerardo to transport the foundational rocks to the park site. Once he has done that, funds will be sent so that Nimri can begin to create the sculpture in clay. Then, he will make molds to create the sculpture in resin, a more permanent material. Finally, he will transfer the parts and assemble the sculpture in the park during the August 2019 project (with the assistance of project participants). Eventually he will coat it with a rocklike material to give it the appearance of carved stone and lastly, he will apply a protective coat of sealant.