

UPF Latin America and Caribbean Artists Share Tales of Adversity and Triumph

Mario Salinas
September 17, 2026



South and Central America – An online convocation for young artists and cultural leaders featured artist professionals as speakers, and attracted over 100 participants on September 17, 2026. The program, "From Barriers to Bridges: Challenges and Contributions of the Arts and Culture from Latin America" was organized by UPF-Latin America and the Caribbean and the International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP).

This program was part of UPF's outreach to promote channels for peace-building. The arts and culture hold great potential as vehicles for dialogue and cooperation for peace in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this region, arts and culture often face obstacles, such as limited government support for programs and initiatives dedicated to education, promotion and protection of art and culture. UPF therefore seeks to provide opportunities for artists with a positive message to perform and interact with one another.

webinar was held through Zoom with more than 60 guests, including artists, cultural educators and managers, UPF peace ambassadors, and many others in media networks. At least 40 others tuned in to the program on YouTube and other media platforms.

Mr. Eliecer Araya, regional president of UPF based in Costa Rica, explained the purpose of the program and introduced the speakers. **Ms. Elisenia Sanchez**, a UPF ambassador for peace in Panama, served as moderator.

The speakers then addressed the audience, beginning with **Mr. José Luis Costa Sifuentes**, a tenor and cultural manager from Peru, and winner of the award for best performer of Peruvian music at the National Lyric Singing Competition. He also serves as a civil society representative for the Gran Fraternidad Universal (Great Universal Brotherhood), which promotes the unity of all humanity and synthesis between art, science, philosophy and religion.

"To understand the value of bridges, we must first be honest about the chasm we are trying to cross," he said. He said that the cultural sector in the region is in a precarious situation, due to a lack of sustainable public policies, public arts budgets, and the absence of stable social safety nets. He described the pursuit of art as "an act of heroism, or profound vulnerability."

Mr. Manuel Fernández Vargaz, a graphic designer and cultural manager in Costa Rica, also elaborated on the difficulties faced by artists, especially in rural territories, but he also offered a solution. "Distance is not always measured in kilometers," he said. "It is also measured in opportunities. To attend an exhibition, participate in a call or simply talk with other creators, we often have to travel several hours to the city. That journey represents time, money, and many times, the feeling that the cultural world happens somewhere else. The result is silent isolation: artists who create believing they are alone."

Faced with this reality, in 2025, he and four other visual artists decided to meet around a table. They didn't have a gallery, a budget, or an institution, but they were determined to build a meeting space. Thus the Colectivo LienS.O.S was born – a visual arts collective that brings together local artists and hosts public art exhibitions in venues close to their communities.

Mr. Nicolás Maggi Berrueta is a teacher of vocal music and music theory in Uruguay. He described his hardships as a child from a low-income family pursuing a musical career that began by teaching himself violin from the age of six. "For ten years, I had to travel long distances to access musical training and study music – it was no easy task." However, he said, "Over time, I came to realize that ... what had been a barrier for me could one day become a bridge for someone else."

At the age of 15, he decided to create a space where other children and young people could engage with music, without being limited by their financial situation, birthplace, or prior opportunities. That idea gave birth to the Miguel de Cervantes Conservatory in his hometown of San Jacinto. In 2022, he was awarded the Luxembourg Peace Prize as an Outstanding Youth Peacemaker for founding this music institute and offering free or low-cost musical instruction to economically disadvantaged children.

Closing remarks were offered by **Mr. Mario Salinas**, UPF's regional secretary general, based in Honduras. He stressed the need to preserve the artistic and cultural legacies that sustain human memory and dignity, and encouraged the participants to work together and to engage others in this purpose.