

Medellín, 26 May 2018

Esteemed leaders and participants in the First Congress of Global Peace Leaders

In my own name, and as the legal representative of the El Sol Foundation, which was organising the first Congress of Global Peace Leaders, it causes me great pain to send this letter, informing you that we have been forced to suspend the event indefinitely. In what follows I will briefly outline the circumstances surrounding this decision, which is the cause of such sorrow to me, to the team and to all those who have supported us in the mission to bring you here, to get to know you and to benefit from the wisdom you have gained whilst striving towards global peace.

1. I, Sol Mary Valencia Acavedo, have always dreamed of peace and acted to build it, and have been at the forefront of peace construction programmes rolled out in Medellín by the mayor and the president since 2003, looking at how a culture of peace can be implanted in daily life even when the basic needs of a city's inhabitants are not being met. Since then, I have come into contact with various international organisations that work for peace in contexts that are as real and gritty as those that each of you represents. It is from this basis that the idea for this project sprang; to bring together peace leaders and work collaboratively across borders to reflect and share experiences relating to global peace.
2. In 2015 efforts began to roll out the project for the first Congress of Global Peace Leaders: International Cities of Peace, and the respected leader Frederick Armet, Executive Director of International Cities of Peace, became involved. I would like to express my deepest gratitude for his unconditional support – with his help, I was able to start work on making the event a reality.
3. In 2016 the situation meant the project became possible, but personal circumstances that meant it could not be realised.
4. In 2017, other obstacles presented themselves that meant the project had to be postponed.
5. In 2018, the event was planned for March, but due to various circumstances it did not go ahead.
6. It was finally planned to take place between 4 and 8 June 2018, after a number of difficulties. All procedures were followed so that the event could take place in total security, with a focus on logistics, securing material resources, sponsorship, staff and adequate programming.

In this regard, I must express my thanks to:

1. **Vicente Simon, adviser and international consultant (Spain)**

Vicente is a respected consultant and external adviser who since 2013 has shared experience and advice in the field of peace-building

2. Dr Juliana Reymer Rodriguez (Peru)

This wonderful expert has, since 2013, helped open doors internationally in support of the project

3. Jennifer Maria Feliz Ferreras (Dominican Republic)

A lawyer and executive director general of the El Sol Foundation in the Dominican Republic, who has been at our side since 2017

4. Ines Palomeque (Argentina)

Director of Mil Milenios de Paz and a Peace Ambassador, who has been supporting the project since February of this year

5. Palmira Ubinas (United States)

President and founder of AIPEH (International Association of Hispanic Art and Culture), president of the Second World Congress of Writers – Miguel de Cervantes, Universal Ambassador of Peace to Switzerland / France, World Cultural Ambassador at ARTEPAX / ASORBAEX. Palmira is an inspirational woman who became part of the project in March of this year

6. Gaetano Brancati Luigi (Italy / Brazil)

Proponent of the inspirational and symbolic monument El Marco de la Paz del Mundo

7. His Excellency Ravi Bangar (India)

To the Indian ambassador in Colombia we express our special gratitude for the support he has offered over the past month

8. Edgar Lopez Santacruz (Colombia – Bogota)

Director of the youth office of the UN in Colombia

9. The humanitarian Luz Imelda Ochoa (Colombia – Medellin)

Physician, paediatrician and social leader

10. The whole team at the El Sol Foundation that has been involved in the project

And to all the leaders who have been invited to this wonderful meeting in the name of peace, who responded to our humble invitation and committed themselves to the dream of building peace with us.

Today, 27 May 2018, it is with the greatest pain and sadness that I have to announce to all of you, who have believed in me and in the dream of making this project a reality, that we have had to suspend this important event once again. The last thing I would wish to do is to compromise the security of any one of you. You are all invaluable to me; my life is not just mine anymore, but belongs to all of you, too. I pay tribute to each and every one of you with an embrace of brotherly love, light and peace from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for having supported and had confidence in this project, and for expressing the wish to come to our city, share ideas and work together towards a true culture of peace.

Today, the situation in Medellín has reached such a point that this event aimed at realising world peace cannot go ahead in good conscience.

Just a few days before it commences, a number of circumstances have arisen that make the event impossible. A few of those which I can mention without compromising my own security are as follows:

1. For the realisation of this event, an appropriate organisational structure was put in place
2. The correct protocols were followed with regard to the same
3. The correct processes were followed according to national and international law
4. Entities of local and departmental government bodies were invited to participate
5. Different public and private actors from civil society participated
6. The event was made public to ensure that it represented an opportunity for dialogue, reflection and analysis, and to generate ideas for peace building projects and territorial agendas for peace

Despite having fulfilled all of the obligations described above, the local government did not give us a single appointment to discuss the event in detail. Additionally, it is my duty to present to you the following facts:

1. Initially, the event was to take place in the convention centre of Plaza Mayor. When the day came to make the payment, we were informed that "Without permission from the mayor, the event cannot take place." This permission was never given, so I continued looking for a location, and eventually found City Hall at the Rodeo Club.
2. We started proceedings to obtain logistical permission but were not able to, since the mayor demands various procedures which are difficult to realise without approval from the same.
3. The various secretaries of the mayor's office have not to date signed up to the event, despite having expressed a wish to participate. However, without approval from the mayor they have not been able to register, which has made several essential elements of the process impossible.
4. We continue insisting that the mayor should support this event in the name of peace. However, the mayor has continually said that he is too busy. An appointment was made with the Under-Secretary of Human Rights for 18 May for him to meet us. This was not received well by our sponsors, since the invitation did not come from the mayor personally and did not set out his support for the event. The letter which was given to us was signed by the Under-Secretary, which created uncertainty amongst our sponsors. At the time of writing, several have withdrawn their sponsorship and financial support.
5. One of the planned activities was the installation of the monument El Marco de la Paz del Mundo, an event that was being overseen by the great maestro William Valencia. It causes great sadness to me and to all the team involved in organising the activity to inform you that this cannot go ahead as planned. The Under-Secretary has informed us that the site where we have been given permission to put the statue is the Cementerio Universal. The majority of those buried there are unidentified, and it is situated in a location far from the centre of Medellín in an area that is one of the most violent and dangerous in the city. At the present moment it is in the middle of a violent conflict. It would be unthinkable to erect the monument there, since we would not be able to undertake the ceremony in security, and nobody would be able to enjoy it. Considering the

significance the statue has for us, to erect it in the aforementioned site would be tantamount to “burying peace.”

It is not currently logistically possible to plan a visit to the site within the programme. The location is in no way appropriate, and does not correspond to our plan to have the monument sited within the city of Medellín, which is home to various parks and plazas which would be much more appropriate sites for the public could enjoy this monument to peace.

6. The mayor’s office has not given us guarantees of security, which means going ahead with the event could involve grave risks.
7. To date, there has been no participation on the part of the mayor’s office of Medellín, which has put the brakes on the event.
8. We have experienced situations in which we have faced difficulties on the basis of our involvement in this event. This could put the image of each and every leader attending the Congress at risk, and is a cause of great concern for us. The very reason for putting the event together is yourselves, and the last thing we would wish to do is put your security or your public image in danger.
9. Colombia is currently in the middle of presidential elections, and if they go to a second round it would put the security of the event at grave risk, according to the information we have received.
10. My security has been personally affected, and I have been receiving threatening and phone calls and messages as a result of leading this event. Individuals who are opposed to peace are taking action to threaten the event and prevent it from taking place.

In an effort to find a solution to these problems I travelled to Bogota, the capital of Colombia, searching for a way to bring the event to a happy conclusion. Over several months the project has generated support there, and it has been proposed that the project be suspended pending the selection of a new date, due to the lack of support it has received from the local and regional government, and the risks that have become plain over recent days.

Very sadly, today it has been necessary to postpone the event. I trust that you understand that I will keep working with the team at the El Sol Foundation so that the project can be realised. I am already in contact with well-known figures within government in Bogota, who have given their assurance that it can take place there. However, everything will have to be put in place so that the situation I am unfortunately putting you in today, for reasons beyond my control, is not repeated.

I feel acutely ashamed at having to address you in this way today, but unfortunately there are other circumstances at play which I am unable to detail here for security reasons. I take on board this shame, as well as the costs generated in the rollout of this project which, with God’s blessing, will have a happy ending.

Just as I am addressing myself to you here, I have also contacted each individual connected to the event.

We will await the outcome of the presidential elections in Colombia, since there could be reprisals stemming from the results of these.

On previous occasions when the Congress has had to be postponed I subsequently received harsh comments from people purporting to be “leaders.” One of the characteristics of a leader, in my understanding, is the capacity for understanding, and to act in solidarity, support and comprehension in the face of setbacks such as this one. The mission is a tough one – “peace is the way,” as Gandhi said, but getting there is a great struggle, and one for which we need all of our courage and strength. We know the tough roads we have to walk to achieve our goal.

When I shared the invitation with you, I offered on behalf of the El Sol Foundation to cover your travel costs and the cost of your stay here. Our intention in doing this was to ensure that you felt treated with the utmost respect, which is what you as fighters for peace in your respective cities and countries deserve. But what has never been our intention, and what we cannot do, is put you at risk in the context of a situation in which it has not been possible to roll out this project. Even on Friday, when the obstacles that have made the event impossible became apparent, I did not receive any words of advice or support from government bodies. These did not come until today, Saturday, when it had already been necessary to take the decision.

I will be available and extremely happy to discuss this personally with each and every one of you, and can be contacted in the following ways:

Skype: Solmaryva

Email: solmaryva@hotmail.com / fundacionel-sol.presidencia@gmail.com

Telephone and WhatsApp: +(57) 311427410

Before launching the final attempt to make this Congress a reality, I will again offer to cover the costs of travel, bed and board, and will ensure that the dates are 100% fixed before sending out invitations. I will visit various countries in order to build a network of social leaders for peace. We have a great commitment, and that is to make peace a reality. I know that it’s not easy, but it’s the only truly pure battle in this life. Peace is what we can all come to know, when we learn and live in harmony, and in alignment with our personal and social spirituality.

I hope and trust that I can continue to count on your friendship and solidarity as social leaders for peace.



Sol Mary Valencia Acavedo

Founder and Legal Representative

El Sol Foundation 

Humanitarian social leader striving for world peace

fundacionel-sol.presidencia@gmail.com