

Three-day preparatory visit to Tela, Honduras

January 13-17, 2019

Purpose:

- 1 Organize a community group or committee to discuss establishing Tela as a City of Peace
- 2 Make a plan for registration of Tela as an International City of Peace
- 3 Make plans for the August 6-20, 2019 PeaceIN Peace Park project

My overall reflection: I couldn't believe that we were sitting at a table in Tela, Honduras, a country that even the Peace Corps 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 where there can hopefully be a paradigm shift and change of image. *(These were my thoughts at the Committee meeting for the International Cities of Peace organizational meeting.)*

Day 1

Immediately upon arrival in Tela, Mario Salinas (Honduran UPF director) and I met with our Tela central contact person, Gerardo Zelaya (the 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 planned City Hall meeting with the Mayor. Gerardo gave a complete explanation of the Cities of Peace network and of the history of Nutley's registration as a City of Peace, including its connection to Honduras. Attending this meeting was the Mayor, and 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 myself.

The Mayor asked each attending person to give his/her opinion regarding this City of Peace idea. The general 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 city. Discussions included implementing tourism education for the school children through character education. It is important to note that the president of tourism, who was part of the committee, is the son of a famed environmental activist who was murdered for opposing a developer who planned to destroy the sensitive ecosystem on the coast of Tela, an area that has since been transformed into the beautiful nature reserve known as Punta Sal.



Figure 1 The meeting held with the Mayor of Tela and the newly formed Cities of Peace planning committee 2 Mario and Carol conferring at the meeting 3 Members of the Committee

All attending the meeting agreed upon the Cities of Peace idea and will work to personalize the registration materials to best reflect 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 150-200 citizens). At that time, a resolution will be made and all registration papers will be signed by the organizing committee in both English and Spanish, and then submitted digitally to the Cities of Peace organization. These plans are being made with great enthusiasm and hope.

Photos 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.

Day 2

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 33 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 33 nations. The stones used for this project will be collected by local school children before our August project begins. Gerardo will also send design specs for the benches to keep continuity with designs being offered by significant nations (including the USA, represented by Nutley students). Finally, we will install a sculpture, which has been commissioned to be created by a young local artist.

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.

Day 3



Figure 2 a miniature model of the proposed sculpture depicting 4 figures representing youth from North, South, and Central America and the Caribbean carving each other out of the stone. In the final sculpture the figures will be portrayed as youth, and not as an adult as portrayed in this photo

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. Plans are being made for Gerardo to transport the foundational rocks to the park site. Once that has been done, funds will be sent so that Nimri can begin to create the sculpture in clay. Then, molds will be made to create the sculpture in resin, a more permanent material. Finally, the parts will be transferred and assembled in the park during the August 2019 project (with the assistance of project participants). Eventually it will be coated with a rocklike material to give it the appearance of carved stone and lastly, a protective coat or sealant will be applied.

This report is submitted by Mario Salinas (Honduras) and Carol Pobanz (USA).