

Tela, Honduras Peace Park and their International City of Peace Initiative

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September 4, 2019



Tela, Honduras -- The following report is an update on the Honduras Peace Park Project, which began in January 2017 with the mobilization of volunteers to clean up and dedicate a park with a peace monument and reclaim the recreation area as a safe haven for the community. The project has received support from the New Jersey and California chapters of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, UPF-USA and Honduras, and the Women's Federation for World Peace of New Jersey.

Struggle to get to Tela

My plan from the start was to make a trip to create a promotional video for the Tela, Honduras, Peace Park project; however, my plan changed, as you will soon understand. My itinerary covered September 3–8 but, due to airplane problems (flat tires), I was forced to reschedule. I arrived instead on September 4. I was met as planned by Mario Salinas of UPF-Honduras.

Meeting Gerardo

In Tela we lost no time getting in touch with Gerardo (an architect, as well as the son of the mayor), to whom we gave a full update on the developments on the Nutley International Cities of Peace (ICP) project that Tela will also be part of, and Gerardo reported on Tela's project developments.

Meeting with the Mayor: "We came here to inspire him, but he inspired us"

Even though ICP wasn't anything more than a newspaper announcement in Tela, we hoped that we could inspire action. However, to our surprise, we discovered that the initiative had taken on a life of its own. Mayor Dario Munguia explained to us that Tela was chosen to be the host city for the 29th annual National Assembly of AMHON (Association of Municipalities of Honduras), a meeting of approximately 298 mayors from throughout Honduras and also attended by the president, Juan Orlando Hernandez, as an honored guest. Mayor Munguia, introduced Tela as an International City of Peace and expressed the intent was to rebuild the image of Tela as a "tourist city of peace." Other mayors became interested, and, consequently, a resolution was signed declaring that these mayors would also register their cities as International Cities of Peace. Mayor Munguia also indicated that Tela will be the host city for the upcoming assembly of the Association of Honduran Gulf Coast Cities, where he will again share about the ICP initiative.

We brainstormed ideas about how to promote Tela as an International City of Peace: through, for instance, adding the title "An International City of Peace" to the official city stationary, also using the ICP logo throughout the city. The ICP logo could also be added to the Welcome signs at the borders of the city. We believe that such a declaration of the vision would be the first step in creating the reality.

Furthermore, we discussed promoting an educational campaign throughout the school system, including character education, to guide the city's children from an early age in how to treat and greet tourists as guests to the city. This would be a first and foundational step in creating a community and culture of service to others. This vision can become a reality when parents, schools and community are working together toward the same goals. The mayor concluded our meeting by saying that he would arrange for other people to meet with us during our visit.

Meeting with the superintendent of schools

According to his promise, Mayor Munguia not only arranged for us to meet the superintendent of schools but also paid for the lunch with him. The mayor himself was unable to attend. Emin Vasquez, the superintendent of schools, is a young man who is responsible for the school curriculum of all Tela schools.

Mr. Vasquez is very much in favor of integrating values or character education into the school curriculum. He has basically tasked Mario and me to guide that system, that is, to suggest the curriculum, as well as workshops for the teachers, and so forth. He affirmed that the timing is correct because the national government is in the process of restructuring the education system, and he is responsible in Tela.

He assured us that the implementation of character education would be incorporated into the weekly teaching plan under the title of Moral and Civic Education, perhaps also referred to as "tourism education."

Along with character education, we discussed the importance of art education as a means to reach beyond nationality and even beyond the religious sphere. Regarding this topic, Mr. Vasquez reported that the Organization of American States recently donated musical instruments to Tela to enable the city to form a youth orchestra. This opportunity is not given to the affluent but to underprivileged youth. Mr. Vasquez is also interested in developing a children's choir/dance team as peace emissaries from the city. This cultural team would help showcase the beauty of Tela's diverse culture, emphasizing a blend of Spanish, Mayan and Garifuna (African) culture.

Finally, we contemplated an ICP youth music festival. This is something we have been discussing for a couple of years, in conjunction with the "Only One America Peace Park." The festival we have been considering would include youth from North, South, and Central America as well as the Caribbean who would compose and perform their own "Peace Music." Those who are unable to attend personally could videotape their submissions and we could include them virtually.



Minrri

Minrri is a 24-year-old artist who is working on our proposed park sculpture, titled "Interdependence and Co-prosperity – Only One America." Minrri has begun building the armature for the artwork and putting the clay onto that structure. He is encountering numerous challenges and is resolutely working to overcome them. Minrri also offered us a lunch with his humble but beautiful family. Minrri and his young family live in one of the poorer villages in the hilly area of the city.

Don Rafael

Don Rafael is the community president responsible for our park area. Don Rafael reported to us that at a meeting he had with the mayor, the mayor lamented that it took someone from outside his city to suggest improvements to Tela.

Don Rafael brought us to see his new office, which will be used for future community events. He shared plans for the development of a community and recreation center in the area where the Peace Park was built.

Chamber of Commerce meeting

Also arranged by the mayor was a meeting with representatives of the Chamber of Commerce. Included in the meeting was the president of the Chamber of Commerce and the executive secretary, along with five former Chamber of Commerce presidents, including one who was recently made the new president of Tela's Chamber of Tourism.

Mario began the meeting by giving a detailed explanation of our UPF work in Honduras, highlighting the Peace Park and then explaining that an international associate had suggested that Tela register as an International City of Peace. He continued to explain the development and advancement of the ICP initiative in Tela, including Tela's connection to ICP Nutley, New Jersey.

Questions and answers were exchanged regarding our vision of Tela as an International City of Peace. The meeting was very stimulating for all. Participants felt very hopeful that they could develop Tela as a tourist city, especially around the idea of being a city of peace. The executive secretary was especially excited as she explained that she studied marketing in college and saw the rebranding of her city as a great and joyful challenge. She, along with Hondurans in general, feels so sad and oppressed by the international community's designation of Honduras as a dangerous, murderous, drug-trafficking country.

We discussed creating signage designating Tela as a City of Peace and also creating a campaign to promote high business standards such as integrity, honesty, service, and so forth. Those businesses that would like to support this campaign would receive an indicator such as a decal or window sticker declaring them an official supporter of the International Cities of Peace program.

Both Mario and I have been completely inspired by how this community has taken ownership of this initiative, and we hope to faithfully guide the community in the ways of our Heavenly Parent.