

THE PEACE DAY AUSTIN INITIATIVE 2015

The Peace Day Austin initiative stands on the shoulders of the mission, vision, values and commitment of the collective organizations that are partnering together co-create a Peace Day experience that is as meaningful and real as Earth Day.¹

Many of us were already doing peace-building activities in Austin — conflict-resolution studies, anti-bullying sessions, anti-discrimination campaigns, campaigns against sexual violence, marches, meditations, prayers, concerts, and performances to awaken empathy and compassion — but not in a collaborative partnership with each other, and not always on International Peace Day.

In 2013, The Subud International Cultural Association (SICA) was given a Mayoral Proclamation for the work it was doing with its Poems for Peace initiative. That led SICA's director, Latifah Taormina, to ask, "What if we could grow this into a larger, more inclusive, collaborative city-wide celebration?"

Last year, Latifah together with Susan Thomason, Director of Instructional Technology at Austin Community College launched a set of "Peace Talks" to explore how we might create this larger and more inclusive celebration of Peace Day. Those talks prompted SICA to create the first Peace Day Austin website as a place where we could list what everyone was doing for Peace Day.

Perhaps the deeper inspiration of this initiative goes back to 2012 when Latifah came across Jeremy Gilley's story. Gilley is the UK actor-turned film director who got Peace One Day going. Peace One Day's 2012 invitation to NGOs around the world to join a coalition of NGOs working with Peace One Day and Interpeace to celebrate Peace Day inspired SICA to join that coalition. And that helped SICA launch its Poems Peace® on Peace Day 2012. But it was Gilley's story that moved her.

Gilley and Jude Law had traveled to Afghanistan in the 90s to deliver needed medicines to children. But when they got there, the real work was getting the warring factions to stop fighting for the four hours along the road they would have to travel to deliver the medicines. That gave him this "crazy idea." What if there was one day all over the world when there wasn't any fighting? One day of peace.

He knew the UN had a Peace Day — never on the same date — but what was anyone doing on Peace Day to inspire people all over the world to really work for peace and nonviolence? So he began a passionate campaign to get the UN to pass a new resolution giving Peace Day a fixed calendar date.

Finally, in 2001, the UN General Assembly passed that the resolution, and also affirmed that Peace Day should also be a day of shared community action, education and awareness-building — and always on September 21.

¹ Amala Foundation • Austin Community College • Peace & Conflict Studies Center Austin Community College • Humanities Dept., ACC • City of Austin Economic Development, Sister Cities and Friendship Program • Compassionate Austin • Compassion Games Creative Action • Global March for Peace and Unity • Interfaith Action of Central Texas • MedMob: Austin, TX • Peace Through Commerce • Peace Through Pie • Unify • United Nations Association of Austin • University of Texas, Peace Studies • Very Special Arts Austin

A press conference was then called in New York to announce the news. As Gilley and the press waited at the UN Plaza in New York for Kofi Anan to come down to ring the peace bell and make the announcement, two planes crashed into the twin towers. Yes, the public announcement of the new International Day of Peace came on 9/11. But Gilley did not fold his tent, and the Peace One Day efforts now reach billions of people worldwide.

"Institutionalizing a day of peace is just a process," says Gilley. "The real success of Peace Day comes down to individuals getting involved and taking ownership of the day.

Taking ownership is key. Taking ownership of the belief that it is up to us human beings on earth to bring peace to our fellow human beings.

Join us.