



# *International Tenerife Memorial*

*Monumento Conmemorativo Internacional  
27 de marzo de 1977*

*Inaugurado el 27 de marzo de 2007 de Tenerife*

English

Nederlands

Español

# INTERNATIONAL COMMEMORATION SERVICE

*Auditorio de Tenerife in Santa Cruz March 27 2007*

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# INAUGURATION

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*DVD PROGRAM*

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### **Monumento Conmemorativo Internacional 27 de marzo de 1977**

Monument erected in memory of the 583 victims  
of the air crash at Los Rodeos airport  
Inaugurado el 27 de marzo de 2007

**17:06**

2 minutes of silence

Stairway to Heaven (Led Zeppelin)

## *CEREMONY*

Members of the board of  
the Foundation Relatives Victims Tenerife

Ana Maria A ORAMAS GONZÁLEZ-MORO  
Mayor of San Cristóbal de La Laguna

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## **International Commemoration Service**

Auditorio de Tenerife in Santa Cruz  
March 27 2007

## **Inauguration of the International Tenerife Memorial Monumento Conmemorativo Internacional 27 de Marzo de 1977**

Mesa Mota in La Laguna on Tenerife  
March 27 2007

## *EXTRA ON DVD*

### **Documentary: Never To Be Forgotten**

Los Rodeos, Tenerife 27 de Marzo de 1977

### **Photo gallery**

A photo selection made at Tenerife in March 2007

## *PASSING BY THE INTERNATIONAL MONUMENT*

# *International* Tenerife Memorial

## *Introduction*

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On March 27th, 1977, a Boeing 747 of KLM Royal Dutch Airlines collided fatally with a 747 of Pan American Airlines on the runway of Los Rodeos International Airport on the Canary island of Tenerife. Five hundred and eighty-three people lost their lives; only 61 survived the air disaster.

On March 27th, 2007, 30 years after the disaster, a first time ever official international memorial service for the largest aviation disaster in history was held on the initiative of the Foundation for the Surviving Relatives of the Tenerife Disaster.

The international commemoration consisted of two parts: a memorial service and the unveiling of an international monument. The memorial service was held at the Auditorio de Tenerife in the capital Santa Cruz; the unveiling took place on Mt Mesa Mota in the municipality of San Cristóbal de La Laguna. The ceremonies were attended by Dutch and American next of kin and survivors, as well as Spanish aid workers and others who were involved in the disaster.

Dutch Transport Minister Camiel Eurlings, who attended the ceremonies on behalf of the Dutch government, said during the memorial service: "I remember how shocked my parents were." He spoke of "a blow which to this very day makes us fall silent. The grief may fade away, but it will never disappear."

During the memorial service, KLM Chief Executive Officer Leo van Wijk said that he had a profound respect for the next of kin who had traveled to Tenerife for the ceremonies. He too was pleased with the monument: "With this monument, the people of Tenerife have been provided an opportunity to come to terms with their experiences by sharing them with people involved from elsewhere."

The monumental art work by renowned Dutch artist Rudi van de Wint, who suddenly died in May 2006, is an 18-metre spiral stair case, named Stairway to Heaven, of which the steps appear to move endlessly upward into infinity, but are cut off suddenly. The monument, situated in a breathtaking location on Mount Mesa Mota, is fitting and inspiring. It is a monument of which we can be proud, and which honors the victims.

Something terrible happened at Los Rodeos on 27 March 1977, which may have lain hidden for 30 years. It is important that justice is done to this disaster. The worst aviation disaster in history will no longer escape anybody's notice. The monument gives us, the next of kin and survivors, and also all others who were involved, an opportunity to commemorate the disaster and find inner peace. At 17.06, the exact time of the disaster, those attending the unveiling of the monument observed two minutes of silence.

The Foundation for the Surviving Relatives of the Tenerife disaster has achieved its objective: a monument for all victims, for everyone involved. Only one location is appropriate, and that is Tenerife.

We would like to thank all those - in La Laguna, on Tenerife, the Canary Islands, in Spain, the Netherlands and the United States of America - who helped make the Tenerife monument a reality.

On behalf of the Foundation Relatives Victims Tenerife,

Jan Groenewoud,  
President

## Ricardo MELCHIOR NAVARRO

*President of the "Cabildo de Tenerife", Government of the Island Tenerife.*

On this day three decades ago our island was confronted with an event that was as sad as it was unexpected. Although a long time has passed since that afternoon when Tenerife and the rest of the world had to come to terms with such misfortune, it is still alive in our memory and has left a deeply felt scar. Nobody could ever have imagined that a situation of this kind would deeply touch our hearts - least of all, the passengers who were travelling on both planes that day.

Many lost their lives, while those who survived, despite the magnitude of the catastrophe, have been forced ever since to live with the constant reminder of an event in which they never imagined they would be involved. The circumstances are the same for the families of the victims, who have invited us to this event to pay tribute to them and to pay our respects to them and show our consideration.

I am convinced that it is extremely difficult to face up to a destiny of this kind. Perhaps, people with less integrity would have chosen to forget in order to ease their pain and help them to carry on. However, the members of the association have chosen to keep alive the memory of their relatives, those who were dear to them and who one day disappeared forever due to a tragedy.

For this reason, today we are going to unveil a monument where justice will be done to their memory, so that from now on, when people come to see it, it will inspire them to dedicate a thought or even a prayer. This work, created with skill and affectionate dedication, represents much more than art and it transmits a message of hope to us with its stairway leading up to heaven.

The Tenerife Island Government, as the institution representing the island, has accepted with pleasure the official handing over of the sculpture to us by its promoters and was just as pleased to participate in its installation at a carefully chosen site. We are sure that Mesa Mata meets all the conditions both in location and geographical characteristics so that it will fulfil its mission as a symbol of everyone's sentiments.

On a day like this, when memories become the main protagonist, I would like to recall the response of all the people of Tenerife to the accident on 27 March 1977. Without doubt, it was a display of solidarity against adversity and altruistic devotion in an attempt to alleviate as far as possible the enormous damage produced by the catastrophe. The people of this island and its institutions did their utmost to help those who needed it most at the time and to attend as best they could to the requests that

came from beyond our frontiers.

Unfortunately Tenerife was directly implicated in one of the saddest events ever to occur and it could not remain impassive. All the resources available on the island back then were mobilised. From the people and organisations who volunteered their help to the health services, the Armed Forces, the police forces and the island's institutions, nobody hesitated to join in the common effort to restore the situation to normal, a situation which had taken us all by surprise.

It was an example that we wished we had never been forced to set but we were driven to it by the circumstances. Today we would like to repeat that kind of behaviour by paying tribute to those who unfortunately met the end of their days on the island. They remain in our memories and to their families we offer our recognition and sincere friendship.



# Antonio SIERRA LÓPEZ

*Chief of Tenerife's Public Health Authority in 1977*

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I would like to direct a few words, especially to the family and friends of the victims, and of course also to the survivors of the air crash at Los Rodeos airport.

30 years have gone by since this tragic event happened, and without any doubt it has been the single most dramatic episode of my extensive and intense professional career.

I still have a lot of memories present of those days, but today I would like to limit myself to recall, from the serenity granted by the time that has passed by, the solidarity of so many people and institutions that allowed us to fulfill our duties under such difficult circumstances.

My memories include my college forensic doctors and others that, together with the nurses and 50 volunteer medical students accomplished the embalming are part of my memories.

My memories also include the staff of the University Hospital of the Canary Islands and the University Hospital of "la candelaria" who treated the survivors  
And the local and governmental authorities (Public Health and the former Ministries of Airspace and Army) that provided us with much of the physical and sometimes human resources that we required.  
And of course the Dutch and American government delegations that were here, and with whom we had a convenient and efficient communication at all times.

The local, national and international media that allowed us to provide them with the requested information with the delicacy and respect required by the situation.

And finally I would like to express my thanks to the Foundation Victims Relatives Tenerife who, by means of this commemorative service, allow us for the first time to join and together honour the memories of the victims.  
And to you, relatives, friends and survivors, I would like to express my gratefulness, together with my deepest condolences for the losses that caused irreparable voids in your lives, because we never received any complaints or reproaches regarding the medical services we provided.  
Instead we received many statements of gratitude through various official channels.



## Karen TAFURI

*Surviving relative from the United States of America*

As a citizen of the United States of America, I would like to welcome you to the first international memorial service. The Foundation for Surviving Relatives of the Tenerife Disaster has created a program for us this week to honor those individuals involved, in any way, with what is still the deadliest plane crash in aviation history. It is so hard to believe it happened 30 years ago today--on March 27th, 1977.

I was traveling that day. Upon arriving home, I turned on the television to watch the late night news. The coverage was of nothing but total chaos, death and destruction surrounding the collision of two, fully loaded 747 jumbo jets on a fog-filled runway in the Canary Islands. I could not believe what I was seeing! My emotions ran from total shock, to extreme sadness, to confusion and uncertainty of it all because the tragedy happened at the wrong place, at the wrong airport, and it was too late in the day for me to think it could possibly involve a member of my family. The next day I was hopeful that, of the 61 survivors, we would be blessed. But, unfortunately, we were not, like many of you here today.

My brother, Danny, and I lost our beautiful and beloved Mother, Jeanne Wilder Harlow, on that terrible day. It changed our lives forever. Her traveling companion and sorority sister, Lucille Gardner, was also killed. They were both 54 years old, full of life, and living in Las Vegas, Nevada. They were really looking forward to their two-week vacation on the MS Golden Odyssey, and going on its "Mediterranean Highlights" cruise. They had been planning the trip for nearly a year. Each had close family and friends, just like the other 581 people that died that day. Like tossing a stone into a pond, the ripple affect has been enormous in terms of the numbers of people touched by this experience.

My Mother was a well-known, and very successful real estate agent. In fact, she had won a trip to Hawaii as recognition for being one of the top sales representatives for Norman Kaye Realty for eight years. Since she had been to Hawaii, she decided to exchange her prize for "the big trip to Europe," as she wrote in her last letter to us.

We held a memorial tribute for her in Las Vegas on Thursday, March 31st. Two-to-three hundred people came to support us. I was completely overwhelmed! I hope this gives you a sense of how liked, loved, and respected she was. I was very close to her, and have already lived half my life without her. I miss her terribly, and we will always be sorry that she did not have the chance to know her grandson, Christopher Dean, and her great granddaughter, Gracie Kay Harlow.

I would like to thank the workers at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. As a result of their efforts, weeks later in the mail, I received an envelope. Surprisingly, it contained the pinky ring my Mom was wearing that day. I had given it to her as a gift for Mother's Day, a few years prior. It contains her birthstone, my birthstone, and my brother's birthstone. I shall cherish it forever.

I would especially like to thank those who came to the rescue of all those in need after the mishap. From what I have read, "the spirit of the Tenerife people welled up for the survivors, and for the victims."

I would also like to recognize the Dutch artist, Rudi van de Wint, for his creative artwork for the monument. The spiral theme is a symbol of infinity. The 18-metre-high sculpture appears to move endlessly upwards, but the spiraling movement of the steps has been abruptly interrupted--cut off suddenly--like the victims' lives. And, also like Rudi's. He died unexpectedly last spring, shortly after finishing the monument. The location on Mesa Mota Mountain is breathtaking, and the monument itself is very appropriate, and inspiring.

As a tribute to my Mother, and all Mothers lost that fateful day, I'd like to recite a story from my scrapbook, whose author is unknown to me. It is called:

## 'AND WHEN GOD CREATED MOTHERS'

When the Good Lord was creating Mothers, He was into His sixth day of overtime, when the angel appeared and said, "You're doing a lot of fiddling around on this one."

And the Lord said, "Have you read the specs on this order?"

"She has to be completely washable, but not plastic. Have 180 movable parts, all replaceable. Run on black coffee and leftovers. Have a lap that disappears when she stands up. A kiss that can cure anything from a braken leg to a disappointed love affair. And, six pairs of hands."

The angel shook her head slowly and said, "Six pairs of hands-no way." "It's not the hands that are causing me problems," said the Lord. "It's the three pairs of eyes that Mothers have to have."

"That's on the standard model?" asked the angel.

The Lord nodded. "One pair that sees through closed doors when she asks, 'What are you kids doing in there?'" when she already knows.

Another here in the back of her head that sees what she shouldn't, but what she has to know. And, of course, the ones here in front so that she can look at a child when he goofs and say, 'I understand' and 'I love you,' without so much as uttering a word."

"Lord," said the angel touching His sleeve gently, "came to bed. Tomorrow ..."

"I can't," said the Lord, "I'm so close to creating something so close to myself."

Already, I have one who heals herself when she is sick...can feed a family of six on one pound of hamburger...and can get a 9-year-old to stand under a shower."

The angel circled the model of a Mother very slowly. "It's too soft," she sighed.

"But tough!" said the Lord excitedly. "You cannot imagine what this Mother can do or endure."

"Can it think?"

"Not only think, but it can reason and compromise," said the Creator.

Finally, the angel bent over and ran her finger across the cheek. "There's a leak," she pronounced. "I told You You were trying to put too much into this model."

"It's not a leak," said the Lord. "It's a tear."

"What's it for?"

"It's for joy, sadness, disappointment, pain, loneliness, and pride."

"You are a genius," said the angel.

"The Lord looked somber. "I didn't put it there."

I would like to express my gratitude to the Foundation, and to Martin Noordzij, in particular, for this extraordinary opportunity to commemorate and remember our loved ones. The common bond we share is very deep, and profound. The catastrophe has linked us together, and will keep us forever connected.

You all have stories to tell that capture our heartfelt feelings. Thank you very much for listening to mine. I invite you to share yours with me, and with others, over the next few days. By doing so, we continue to participate in the healing process, even after 30 years.



## Jan GROENEWOUD

*Surviving relative from the Netherlands and President of the Foundation Relatives Victims Tenerife*

It was Saturday evening, March 26th 1977, and I was 20 years old.

I was sitting on the couch with both my parents, my 86-year-old grandmother, my youngest sister, and a good friend. We were watching TV, the Dutch football team was playing a match.

My parents were going to leave the next day for a short holiday in sun-drenched Las Palmas with my sister Tini, my eldest sister Marijke and her family: Kees, Kees junior and Gert-Jan. Seven people in all.

As they left, my father turned around one last time with a look in his eyes that I will never forget.

He probably would have liked me to have gone with them.

I was allowed to stay at home for two weeks to look after things on condition that I behaved myself.

That same evening, there was a phone call. An uncle, my mother's brother, rang to tell me to switch on the television because a special news bulletin was on. A bit later, a neighbour came at the door to tell me the same thing. The bulletin was about an air crash in Tenerife involving two 747 Jumbos, one belonging to KLM, the other to Pan Am.

All of a sudden, everything went dark, almost black, as if the earth under our feet had completely caved in.

All we could do was to keep breathing.

We were sitting in the living room with what was left of our family: brothers, their wives, uncles, aunts, cousins. Totally devastated. All of us numb with disbelief, grief and shock.

From one moment to the next, I was an adult who had to fend for himself. Choice had nothing to do with it. I had to make my own way in the world, like it or not.

In these difficult days, my grandmother set a wonderful example which gave me much strength.

My grandmother's faith strengthened her determination to go on living, to support the rest of the family and give them new confidence in a very uncertain future.

Days, months, years have passed, but even now, thirty years later, I still feel the loss, and think of it every single day.

But the past thirty years have also been good: I am the proud father of a son and a daughter.

I am grateful to my friends and family, but also to my faith for all the love and support I have received in the past years. Without it, I would not be here today.

I used to wonder about the silence that followed the disaster, and why no commemoration was ever held.

The years went by, and still we had not come together to pay tribute to the victims of the events of March 1977.

When I was going through a rough patch in the summer of 2001, I realised that I had an old wound that desperately needed care and attention. It was the first time that I sought professional help.

In November of that same year I understood that I should take the initiative and organise a commemoration.

Five years ago, two of my friends and I established a foundation to help the loved ones of the victims of this tragic accident to come to terms with their feelings.

This led to the first commemorative service, in Amsterdam, five years ago.

Today, thirty years after the accident, we have come together again in large numbers in the Auditorio de Tenerife in Santa Cruz to pay our respects to the victims of the tragic plane crash of 27th March 1977. This afternoon, we will witness the unveiling of a memorial monument on Mount Mesa Mota.

A monument to be proud of. A monument which honours the victims.

A special and deeply meaningful gathering of families, friends, survivors, emergency workers and all others who were involved; from the United States, Tenerife and the Netherlands.

We are here *with* each other and *to* each other. Together we must try to take another small step in coming to terms with this horrendous event.

# Leo VAN WIJK

*President and CEO of KLM Royal Dutch Airlines*

The 27th March 1977, Tenerife. A date and a place which are indelibly etched on our memories. Today, thirty years later, we came together on Tenerife itself.

Many of you met five years ago on this day in 2002, when family and friends of the victims, emergency response staff, employees and former employees of Holland International, Pan Am and KLM came together in Amsterdam to remember the terrible day on which two Boeing 747s collided - one operated by PanAm, the other by KLM.

That meeting, organized by the recently-formed Tenerife Victims Families Foundation, was a remarkable gathering. It was an extremely emotional day, but one which brought comfort to many. The president of the foundation, Jan Groenewoud, believed that it should have a sequel. The idea of placing a permanent memorial here on Tenerife was conceived.

And so we find ourselves here today, five years on and exactly thirty years since the disaster itself. Here in Santa Cruz, our thoughts once again turn to those we lost. There has never been a meeting of this nature here on Tenerife itself, and never before have we had the opportunity to remember our loved ones alongside the Spanish emergency workers and local residents. Everyone on this island was shocked and deeply affected by the events of 27 March 1977. It is therefore fitting that they should now have the opportunity to stand alongside others from all over the world, to share their experiences, and to join us in remembering the victims.

Today's gathering is partly the result of the Foundation's desire to place a permanent memorial on Tenerife itself. That desire has given you all the courage and fortitude to come so close to the exact spot at which your loved ones were taken from you. I have nothing but the deepest respect for that.

I would like to compliment Jan Groenewoud, the other committee members of the Tenerife Victims Families Foundation, and everyone else who has made today's event possible. In particular, we must thank the Spanish authorities for having permitted us to meet here and for having done so much to facilitate our visit.

This afternoon sees the official unveiling of the International Tenerife Memorial, and hence the culmination of much hard work over the past few years. For many people, the events of 27 March 1977 serve as a stark reminder of the fragility of the human existence, and of the fact that life can sometimes meet an abrupt end.

The sculpture which is now to grace Mesa Mata is in the form of a spiral staircase which itself comes to an abrupt end. However, it also stands as a symbol of endlessness.

The continuous spiral movement of the sculpture will remind us of the tragedy, of the grief, and of the fragility of our existence. But I hope that the memorial will also be a source of great comfort to you, and that this staircase will take you a step nearer to closure.



## Eduardo AGUIRRE

*United States Ambassador to Spain*

I want to thank the Foundation for organizing this tribute and for inviting me to participate in tonight's/today's program. I would like to recognize the presence of the following Spanish and Dutch government representatives:

- Ricardo Melchior, President of the Cabildo of Tenerife
- Adán Martín, President of the Canary Islands
- José Segura, Delegado de Gobierno
- Camiel Eurlings, Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management of the Netherlands
- Van Hellenberg Hubar, Ambassador of the Netherlands

I extend my deepest condolences today to the families of those who lost their lives 30 years ago. I am both honored and saddened to be here with you today as we commemorate the anniversary of this terrible accident and dedicate this beautiful and fitting memorial.

30 years ago, 583 lives were lost. These losses have not been forgotten, nor were they in vain. As a consequence of this terrible disaster, aviation laws and regulations were changed and cockpit voice protocols and procedures were updated and standardized. Untold lives have been saved by these transformative measures. But of course, such advances don't necessarily ease the very real and very personal pain of such a tremendous loss. That is why it continues to be so important that we come together and commemorate this day and honor those who lost their lives. A monument to them will now stand here on Mesa Mata Mountain. It will be a lasting tribute and a continuous reminder.

This memorial called "The Spiral Staircase" reminds me of the divine connection between those who have come before and those who will come after us. Our lives, like the steps of this sculpture, are connected and of a piece. Let us never forget the date March 27. And let us always remember our loved ones and fellow citizens who perished that day.



# Camiel EURLINGS

*Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management of the Netherlands*

Exactly 30 years ago today, there was a collision at Los Rodeos airport, here on Tenerife. It was so terrible that the memory of it silences us even today. 583 people were killed. That is an unimaginable number. 583 people wrenched from their families, their friends and their communities. There are no easy words for that. And there are certainly no words that can take away your pain and loss - you, the people who have lived with the consequences of the disaster for the past 30 years. Grief may fade, but it never disappears. Or as Mr Jan Groenewoud said in a recent interview, "the disaster is still an open wound, in need of care."

The memorial service that was held in the Netherlands 30 years ago is a permanent part of our collective memory. An aircraft hangar, lined with row upon row of coffins. Speakers groping for the right words, and finding them only with the greatest difficulty. And above all else, the grief and shock on the faces of the victims' loved ones. Who could ever forget those heartrending images? I myself was only a few years old, but even I have vivid memories of them. And above all, I remember how moved my parents were.

The impressive monument that has now been placed on the Mesa Mata is first and foremost for you, the family and friends of the victims. It is a place to commemorate, share memories and reach out beyond borders to seek comfort from each other. That is its most important purpose. But it is also there as a warning to the aviation world. A warning that safety is our permanent mission. The artist, Rudi van de Wint, calls his creation a symbol of infinity. To me, it is also a symbol of our never-ending duty to make air travel as safe as possible.

Much has changed since the disaster at Los Rodeos. Safety procedures have been tightened up, and so have the technical requirements for aircraft. But they can always be improved. And they must be improved. Because since 27 March 1977, the world has seen many more air disasters. No one in the Netherlands will ever forget 4 October 1992, when an EI AI Boeing crashed into a block of flats in Amsterdam. And who will ever forget 11 September 2001, the day the world held its breath, when planes were used as terrorist weapons? Only recently, 21 people lost their lives in Indonesia when a Garuda aircraft crashed. Though these three events are not of the same magnitude, they have one thing in common: the toll they took of innocent human lives. We cannot merely accept loss of life as inevitable. Air safety is not a matter for compromises, and never should be.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very much aware that with every new disaster old wounds are torn open again. Wounds that - in Mr Groenewoud's words - need care. That is why we are here today. That is why the Tenerife Memorial had to be built, a place of silence and encouragement.

Today we are remembering the 583 victims. Today, we seek support from each other - each with our own thoughts and personal memories. But I am convinced that coming together to commemorate the dead helps us. Not to forget, because we should never forget, but to cope with our grief. May you find strength to cope with your grief.



## Adán MARTIN MENIS

*President of the 'Gobierno de Canarias', Government of the Canary Islands*

Almost 600 people perished in the most terrible air disaster in the history of civil aviation, and a tragedy such as this is difficult to forget. Those who on March 27th 1977, shortly after 5 p.m., lost a relative or a loved one, in such a dramatic, unjust and cruel manner - as in all catastrophes - will never be able to forget.

Those who were involved in one way or another, providing the sixty survivors with medical, humanitarian or psychological assistance - in record time and under extremely tough and traumatic conditions - will not be able to forget either. And the same applies to those who took part in the heart-rending task of recovering and embalming the bodies of the victims from both aircraft.

Doctors, healthcare personnel, medical and nursing students from Tenerife, experts flown in from the Netherlands and the United States - to identify the bodies - airport and Civil Aviation staff, fire fighters, the military, ordinary citizens, and officials from the islands' institutions, all responded with great solidarity and commitment to the needs of the situation. None will ever forget. And the people of Tenerife will not forget either. The disaster involving the KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and Pan American Airlines jumbos at Los Rodeos Airport will remain forever vividly embedded in the collective memory of our people as the greatest misfortune that we have ever had to face.

Thirty years have elapsed and the memory is still vivid. Today, that memory, shared by the relatives of the victims with the whole world, is at the centre of an event that is an act of both homage and hope. An act of homage, because we are here to pay our respects to those who are no longer with us, to those who lost their life on our island. And hope because that tragic accident was a watershed in airport safety for the whole world. Unfortunately, it was the death of 583 people which shook the foundations of the Civil Aviation regulations in place at the time, and the sad tribute which has led technical officials and experts the world over to ensure that disasters such as this will never happen again.

Three decades have elapsed, but even today it is still extraordinarily difficult to talk about that terrible accident. Precisely as a result of the sheer magnitude of the disaster and the commotion that it caused, it was investigated thoroughly; it was analysed and scrutinised in an attempt to determine the causes. While it is true that rules and procedures were followed, a number of fatal circumstances came together, putting to the test the most reliable statistics, namely the closure of Gando Airport in Gran Canaria, the intense traffic at Los Rodeos, the adverse weather

conditions, and a number of human or circumstantial factors which conjugated in that single, fatal second.

Today we all agree that we must never allow the tragic disaster of March 27th 1977 to fall into oblivion, in order to help ensure that it will never happen again. We also agree that the best way to move on is to maximise aircraft safety and airport security.

The monument which is being inaugurated this afternoon at Mesa Mota Mountain stands as a tribute to the victims who so tragically lost their lives that day. It will also stand as a silent reminder of what happened and of what should never ever happen again. The spiral staircase sculpture designed by the late Rudi van de Wint - who sadly passed away recently - will stand as a permanent call to remembrance.

The fortitude of many people was put to the test on March 27th 1977. That of the survivors, who were forced to face an incalculable horror, and the physical and psychological trauma that followed. The fortitude too of the victims' relatives who were forced to come to terms with the cruel loss of their loved ones. The ability of the people of Tenerife to respond to this catastrophe was also put to the test.

Tenerife and its people responded en masse, with compassion and humanity. At the time, the island had not yet achieved the economic development and standards that it enjoys today, so social services and infrastructure were still precarious. Despite these shortcomings, despite the lack of the optimum means, facilities and material resources, our people devoted their best endeavours to help and confront that devastating horror, with respect, solidarity and compassion.

To conclude, on behalf of the Regional Government of the Canary Islands and the people of the Canaries, I would like to especially acknowledge the merits of Jan Groenewoud, and his sterling work to honour the memory of the victims. His personal drama is heart-rending. The magnitude of his loss that tragic afternoon - seven family members - when he was only twenty years of age, is hard to compare with any imaginable or bearable grief, and it is hardly possible to live with it.

But his ability to overcome his loss and his unabated efforts, throughout these years, to ensure that the disaster would never be forgotten, are qualities that epitomize his courage and inner strength. Through the Foundation for the Surviving Relatives of the Tenerife Disaster - which he himself founded - he has managed to locate many of the tragedy's survivors, along with numerous relatives of those who sadly perished.

He has helped keep their memory alive and has worked incessantly to ensure that commemorative events such as are realised. It is not easy, by any means, to confront a disaster of the sheer magnitude of that occurred at Los Rodeos. But those present here today have done so, and this is admirable. You are a living testimony to the fact that human beings are capable of overcoming the greatest of tragedies, and to continue with their lives. Without a doubt, the pain, emotion and sad memories will live forever in your hearts, as will your loved ones. Believe me when I say that they will also remain forever in the memory of the people of Tenerife and the Canary Islands.



# International Tenerife Memorial

*International Monument on Tenerife in memory of the victims of the air crash at Los Rodeos March 27 1977*

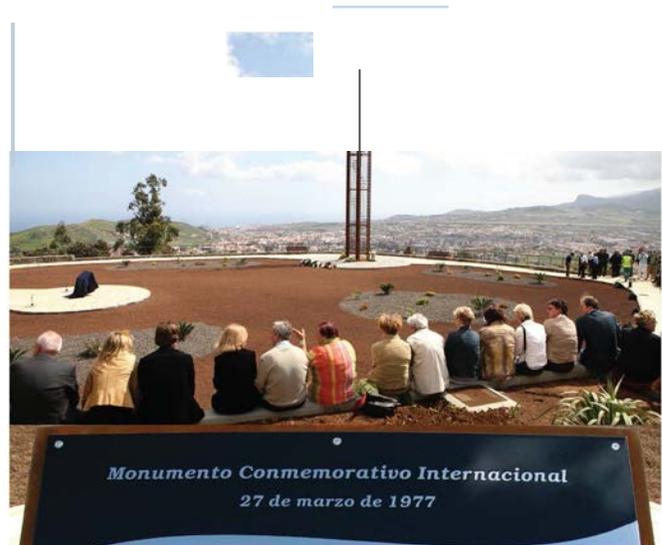
The monument built as a memorial to the victims of the air crash at Los Rodeos could be described as a sculpture which is a spiral staircase... and a spiral staircase which is in itself a sculpture. The spiral takes Infinity as its theme.

It is not instantly identifiable as such, but then nor is it immediately recognizable as a staircase, because it lacks a purpose. For example, there is no banister, and this staircase is not intended for climbing. The 18 metre sculpture is not what it appears to be. To emphasise this, a transparent 12 metre fence encases and protects it.

Rudi van der Wint once said: 'People find a monument beautiful or ugly, but it goes beyond beauty. The ritual significance of a place is very important. Monuments can represent desire, be projections of our human impotence, of the vulnerability of the human spirit, or of universal drama. This goes beyond aesthetics'.

Such a monument, expressing a wish for reconciliation, or acceptance, can never be sufficiently austere. The actual drama of what happened can never be expressed in Art, which can only make a subtle reference.

At first the sculpture seems to rise to the infinite, but then the spiral motion of its steps abruptly stoops. It can be regarded as an open end, but also a ceaseless movement. It appears to be unfinished, ending suddenly, like the lives of the victims. But the staircase, high on this mountain, makes imperceptible contact with the sky above, with that firmament which, for a moment, it almost seems to touch.



*Monumento Conmemorativo Internacional  
27 de marzo de 1977*

**Monumento erigido en memoria de las 583 víctimas  
del accidente aéreo de Los Rodeos**

**Monument erected in memory of the 583 victims  
of the air crash at Los Rodeos airport**

**Monument opgericht ter nagedachtenis aan de 583 slachtoffers  
van het luchtvaartongeval op de luchthaven van Los Rodeos**

Inaugurado el 27 de marzo de 2007



# Ana Maria A ORAMAS GONZÁLEZ-MORO

*Mayor of San Cristóbal de La Laguna*

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The history of a people is shaped by happy and sad events; is made up of sweet moments as well as bitter ones, including occasions where different emotions come to the fore in equal degrees.

This is one of these moments, because we are gathered here to commemorate the 583 victims of the tragic air disaster at Los Rodeos, the biggest in aviation history. But we are also here to honour the remarkable solidarity of the people of La Laguna, its university students, its residents and its social institutions, which, without hesitation, acted as one to lend assistance when it was required. And also to discover how an important lesson can even be learned from this tragic event: one about the solidarity of human beings.

These were moments of pain on a scale never before experienced in this city, which has had to cope with a variety of plagues and catastrophes, but has always resurfaced stronger, strengthened by adversity.

On that fateful day, 27 March 1977, La Laguna had one single heartbeat, breathing as one and working as one to restore normalcy as best it could. There was a tension in the air, and a respectful silence, that could be felt in hangars, on the streets and in hospitals. Emotions ran high, and indeed still are, emotions attributable to the suddenness of the catastrophe and the scale of the destruction it caused, which affected us like nothing before.

Children, parents, siblings and partners: they have all suffered beyond words, and it is they who want to express their eternal gratitude and respect to the people of La Laguna and Tenerife.

This is why we have chosen this location, with its pristine and restful nature one of the most beautiful in our municipality, to build a staircase reaching from the ancient mountains of La Laguna to heaven. It is intended to express the bond that exists between this location, its residents and the spirits of the victims, who live on in the hearts of their next of kin, but also live here and are present among us.

I want to heartily thank the Foundation for the Surviving Relatives of the Tenerife Disaster, represented here today by its chairman, for the way it approached the municipality of which I am mayor, and for the consideration it has shown.

When this sad accident occurred, San Cristóbal de La Laguna proved it could face the tragedy, and today this monument unites the victims with

those who, without hesitation, sprang to the rescue and, in doing so, gave new meaning to the word solidarity at a time when it had become a rare commodity.

A solidarity that the people of the Canary Islands have displayed time and again in the course of its history, a solidarity that represents the empathy of an entire community.

For the past 30 years, the next of kin have had to learn how to live with their losses. We, the islands, Tenerife and La Laguna have tried to ease the pain through an emotive and loving monument to the victims, but also through looking at the future and so come to terms with an event which we never wanted to occur on this island, renowned for its harmonious society.

Today, just like 30 years ago, we share the burden of grief with the next of kin, opening our arms to comfort and support them during this commemoration, which builds a bridge between this community, the first Western city of peace and the places of origin of all.

May this commemoration serve as an expression of gratitude for remembering the people of La Laguna, and to remind us that human beings, who are weak and imperfect by nature, can learn from adversity which brings out the best in us in times of crisis. San Cristóbal de la Laguna, which is now your home, reaches out to you, and considers itself honoured by your presence.

## Words of Gratitude

### *The Foundation Relatives Victims Tenerife*

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The accident at Los Rodeos claimed many victims. This is what has brought us together today.

Many lives have been torn apart. This monument at this place lends dignity to the horrific events of that day.

Our endeavors to realize this monument have brought us a sense of kinship, which has a palliative effect and which -we hope- is shared by everyone.

This commemoration would never have come about without the support of sponsors, Rudi van de Wint, the authorities in the Netherlands, Spain and Tenerife, and countless volunteers. We are deeply indebted to them all.

I hope that the warmth and affection which grew during the preparations will spread like the ripples from a pebble thrown into a lake. Love is growing between people and countries.

That is the way to overcome grief.



# *Internationaal* Tenerife Memorial

## *Credits*

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This DVD has been exclusively produced by the Foundation Relatives Victims Tenerife.  
Special thanks to all individuals and organizations involved who made this possible.

### **International Commemoration Service**

Auditorio de Tenerife, Santa Cruz March 27 2007

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### **INAUGURATION**

Monumento Conmemorativo Internacional 27 de Marzo de 1977

Mesa Mota in San Cristóbal de La Laguna on Tenerife, March 27 2007

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**Documentary Om Nooit Te Vergeten | Never To Be Forgotten | PARA NO OLVIDAR JAMÁS**

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### **Photo gallery**

A photo selection made at Tenerife in March 2007

photography: José Sergio Méndez Dorta

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### **NOS JOURNAAL**

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Foundation Relatives Victims Tenerife

Fundación de Parientes de las Víctimas del Accidente Aéreo de Los Rodeos

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This DVD is part of a special remembrance book titled: **International Tenerife Memorial Monumento Conmemorativo Internacional 27 de Marzo de 1977.**

<http://www.tenerife-memoria.org> <http://www.herdenking-tenerife.org>

*The Foundation for the Surviving Relatives of the Tenerife Disaster has published a commemorative booklet and a special DVD as a keepsake of the international commemoration and the unveiling of the International Tenerife Memorial on 27th March 2007. In addition to footage of the official part of the program, the DVD includes a photo gallery and the documentary **Never To Be Forgotten**.*

*De Stichting Nabestaanden Slachtoffers Tenerife heeft als herinnering aan de Internationale herdenkingsbijeenkomst en de onthulling van het International Tenerife Memorial op 27 maart 2007 een herinneringsboekje en een speciale DVD samengesteld. Naast beeldmateriaal van het officiële gedeelte van het programma zijn er verder op de DVD een fotoalbum, de nieuwsuitzendingen van 26 en 27 maart 2007 en de documentaire 'Om Nooit Te Vergeten' te vinden.*

*En recuerdo de la Reunión Conmemorativa Internacional y la inauguración del Monumento Conmemorativo Internacional, el 27 de marzo del 2007, la Fundación de Parientes de las Víctimas del Accidente Aéreo de Tenerife ha editado un libro conmemorativo y un DVD. Además de imágenes de la parte oficial del programa, el DVD contiene un álbum de fotografías y el documental 'Para no olvidar jamás'.*