

WOLA

Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2014**



*Girls at migrant shelter in Tenosique, Mexico.
Photo by Víctor M. Espinosa. CC BY-NC-ND.*

WOLA

**COMMITTED.
COURAGEOUS.
CONNECTED.**



Peaceful protestors and parents of missing students demand justice for the 43 students that were taken by police in Ayotzinapa, Mexico in September 2014.



WASHINGTON OFFICE ON **LATIN AMERICA**

DEAR FRIENDS,

Right now is a particularly exciting time to be in this line of work as U.S. policies towards Latin America take dramatic new turns. WOLA's impact in Washington and throughout the region has never been greater.

As President Obama prepared to normalize relations with Cuba, WOLA was there to help craft answers to the thorniest questions of policy and politics. As Vice President Biden called for massive investment in Central America to stem the tide of migrant children attempting to enter the United States, WOLA kept stakeholders focused on the underlying issues of violence and lack of opportunity that cause children to flee their homes. As the Colombian combatants take ever more promising steps towards ending the hemisphere's longest civil war, WOLA has helped the international community engage in the peace process in meaningful ways.

In 2014, WOLA celebrated our 40th anniversary. Since our founding, WOLA has helped define human rights in Latin America for generations of lawmakers and opinion leaders. From its earliest days, at a time of widespread crises across the hemisphere—through today, when the issues are more subtle but just as urgent—WOLA has shaped the debate on the meaning of human rights throughout the hemisphere.

The nature of human rights is changing and the guns have not fallen silent. Instead of armies, violence is perpetrated by drug cartels, human traffickers, and gangs. Weak institutions allow them to terrorize immigrants, journalists, union leaders, and the general public. WOLA is working with brave organizations and activists throughout the hemisphere to tackle these problems, putting a new face on human rights and defining the issues for a new generation.

Over the years, the issues have changed, and WOLA has changed with them. However, our commitment to working with partners to advance social justice, human rights, and respect for the rule of law never changes.

On this anniversary year, we embarked on exciting new programmatic initiatives, and we are glad you are with us at this important moment. WOLA could not have remained a high-impact operation for 40 years without the commitment and generosity of our community of supporters. Thank you.

Steven Bennett
Chair, Board of Directors

WHO WE ARE

WOLA IS A LEADING
RESEARCH & ADVOCACY
ORGANIZATION
**ADVANCING HUMAN
RIGHTS IN THE AMERICAS.**



Afro-Colombian children pose for a photo during a WOLA research trip to Chocó, Colombia in March 2014.

RESEARCH. EDUCATE. ADVOCATE.

WHAT WE DO



WOLA Executive Director Joy Olson speaks at a migrant shelter in Nogales, Mexico. The shelter provides food and housing to migrants who have been deported or are on their way north.

WE ENVISION A FUTURE WHERE PUBLIC POLICIES IN THE AMERICAS PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS AND RECOGNIZE HUMAN DIGNITY, AND WHERE JUSTICE OVERCOMES VIOLENCE.

WOLA tackles problems that transcend borders and that require both domestic and international solutions. Through strategic collaborations, we partner with courageous people working on social change—advocacy organizations, academics, religious leaders, artists, entrepreneurs, and government officials—and together, we advocate for more just societies in the Americas.

OUR IMPACT

ADVOCATING

FOR UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN

Summer 2014 saw a dramatic increase at the U.S. border in the number of unaccompanied Central American children fleeing the violence of their home countries. Senior Associate Adriana Beltrán pulled together WOLA's experts on a range of topics—migration, border security, and Central America—to coordinate a rapid response campaign focusing on the root causes of this phenomenon. Security expert Adam Isacson conducted original research at the South Texas facilities where the children were detained. Adriana Beltrán testified before Congress about violence in Central America. WOLA led a civil society coalition to produce one of the first sets of recommendations for ways Congress should protect the rights of migrant children.



Senior Associate Adam Isacson visits the Border Patrol headquarters in McAllen, Texas, where thousands of migrant children were detained in 2014.

CHANGING

U.S. POLICY TOWARD CUBA

Leading up to President Obama’s announcement that the United States would begin normalizing relations with Cuba, WOLA led a coalition of organizations working to change U.S. policy. In 2014, Senior Associate Marc Hanson and other WOLA team members provided regular behind-the-scenes briefings to civil society, supporters, and the administration, and Program Director Geoff Thale testified before Congress. WOLA shared in-depth analyses with the media, including supplying background information for a comedic sketch on HBO’s Last Week Tonight with John Oliver. When the news broke on December 17, Program Officer Ana Sorrentino and Geoff Thale were on the ground in Cuba and were able to report on the historic moment from Havana itself.



WOLA Program Director Geoff Thale testifies at a Congressional Hearing on Cuba.

INFORMING

EFFECTIVE DRUG REGULATIONS

WOLA’s decades of research and advocacy on human rights and drug policy have contributed to a growing international effort to rethink the “war on drugs.” Having supported a new generation of reformers across the Americas, Senior Associate John Walsh has been pivotal in helping them share ideas about reforms for removing cannabis markets from the hands of criminals. Senior Fellow Coletta Youngers has also galvanized national and regional reforms centered on human rights and public health. WOLA is helping set the stage for a paradigm shift in the way the world thinks about and addresses the problems associated with drugs.



An inmate at Costa Rica’s Buen Pastor Prison reaches outside her cell. Over 60 percent of Costa Rica’s female prison population is incarcerated for drug-related crimes.

ENDING

DANGEROUS DEPORTATIONS

WOLA's on-the-ground research has revealed that several deportation practices put migrants in unnecessary danger. For instance, deporting migrants to Mexico—often to some of the most violent cities in the region—during the nighttime hours when they are more vulnerable to crime and violence at the hands of drug cartels and gangs. Senior Associates Maureen Meyer and Adam Isacson's 2012 investigative report, *Beyond the Border Buildup*, informed U.S. officials about these dangerous practices and provided guidelines on precautionary measures to keep migrants safe. As a result, the U.S. Border Patrol agreed in 2014 to restrict these deportations primarily to daylight hours. If fully implemented, this change could save lives.



Two migrant women prepare to cross the U.S.-Mexico border in Nogales, Sonora.

PROVIDING

INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS OF VENEZUELA'S POLARIZED POLITICS

When violence erupted among opposition protesters in Venezuela in early 2014, WOLA Senior Associate David Smilde was on the ground in Caracas. The international media soon recognized him as one of the few sources of credible and balanced analysis, and cited him extensively as events unfolded. WOLA's up-to-the-minute analysis has continued since then to influence coverage in key media outlets such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.



Senior Fellow David Smilde discusses protests in Venezuela at a WOLA event.

PROMOTING

PEACE & SUPPORTING VICTIMS IN COLOMBIA

In 2014, peace negotiations between Colombia's warring parties made significant progress toward ending the longest armed conflict in the hemisphere. WOLA Senior Associates Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli and Adam Isacson provided analysis and recommendations to high-level actors involved in the peace talks. Lasting peace hinges on the inclusion of marginalized Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities that have been hit hardest by the conflict. To that end, WOLA held a series of events—including with Grammy award-winning artist Carlos Vives—to ensure that these groups are taken into account in the negotiations and that the U.S. plays a constructive role during both the process and post-conflict phase.

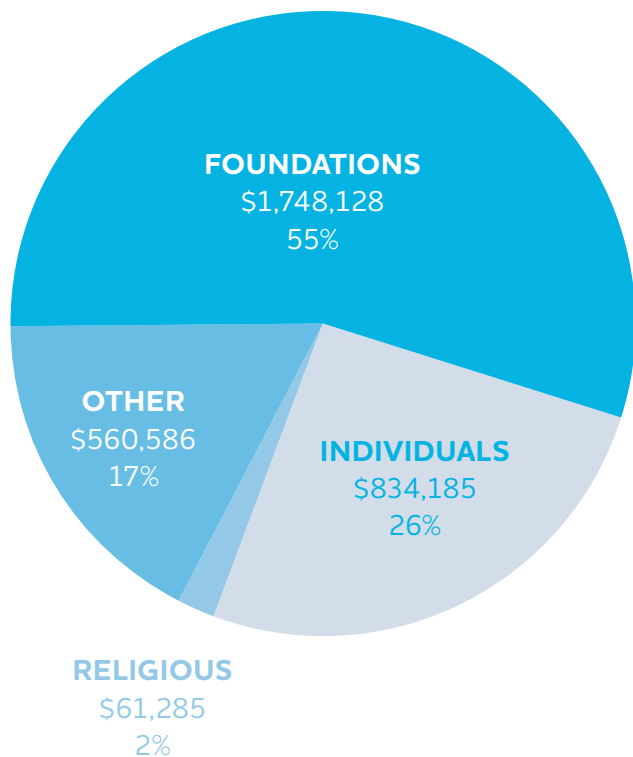


WOLA Senior Associates Adam Isacson and Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli meet with Afro-Colombian leaders in Chocó, Colombia.

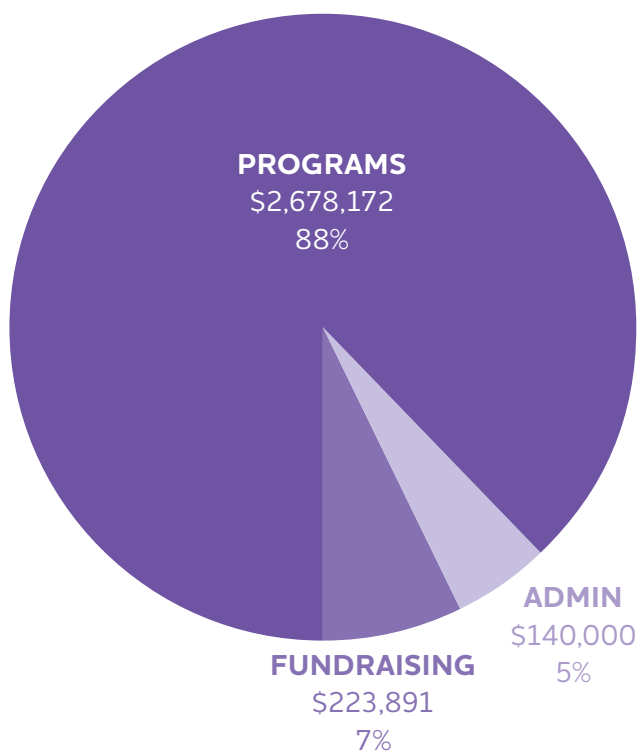
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\$3,042,063

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CONGRESSMAN GEORGE MILLER

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**THANK YOU TO ALL
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THEIR GENEROUS
CONTRIBUTIONS**



WOLA Executive Director, Joy Olson, speaks at the 2014 Human Rights Award Ceremony.

WOLA CELEBRATES 40 YEARS

IN 2014, WOLA CELEBRATED ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY WITH ITS BIGGEST HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS CEREMONY EVER.

Over 400 guests, including senior administration officials, members of Congress, the diplomatic community, human rights activists, and supporters in the international community filled Union Station's East Hall to honor Rep. George Miller and Dr. Claudia Paz y Paz for their tireless pursuit of human rights in the Americas.



Top Photo:
WOLA Human Rights Award
Honoree Representative George
Miller with Representative
Rosa DeLauro.



Bottom Photo:
Dr. Claudia Paz y Paz, Guatemala's
first female Attorney General and
Nobel Prize nominee, accepts the
2014 WOLA Human Rights Award.

Photos by Kendra Joy Photography

**“FOR FOUR DECADES, WOLA HAS STOOD BY
US—COUNTLESS ADVOCATES THROUGHOUT THE
REGION—AS WE SEEK JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS.”**

DR. CLAUDIA PAZ Y PAZ, Former Attorney General of Guatemala

ONE OF WASHINGTONIAN MAGAZINE'S “50 GREAT PLACES TO WORK.”

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THE SALLY YUDELMAN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Investing in the next generation of human rights advocates



WOLA's interns pose for a photo with Grammy award-winning Colombian singer/songwriter Carlos Vives.

WOLA's Sally Yudelman Internship Program is named after a late Chair of the WOLA Board of Directors for her enduring commitment to shape the next generation of human rights advocates. The program offers one of the most thorough, engaging, and formative human rights experiences in Washington. In 2014, WOLA welcomed 21 qualified, passionate, and diverse interns. This year also saw the launch of the Sally Yudelman Intern Alumni Network to connect the many generations of WOLA interns.

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