

# WOLA

Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas

## ANNUAL REPORT 2017



A woman incarcerated at Tanviet prison in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Photo: Carlos Pérez Osorio/ -SCOPIO

A woman with blonde hair in a bun, wearing large black headphones and a white t-shirt, is kneeling on the ground. She is holding a professional video camera with a microphone, filming two young children. The children are gathered around a pink toy car with a purple seat. One child is wearing a green shirt, and the other is wearing a blue and yellow patterned shirt. The background shows a blue wall and some large metal pots or pans hanging on a wall.

# WOLA COMMITTED. COURAGEOUS. CONNECTED.

WOLA took a team of reporters from PBS Frontline to a migrant shelter in Tijuana, Mexico. Here, one of the journalists takes a video of children staying at the shelter.

*Photo: Kristel Muciño*

# HIGHLY EFFECTIVE WHEN IT MATTERS MOST

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After November 2016, WOLA expected problematic policy changes to come, and indeed 2017 ushered in a chaotic and deeply troubling agenda. The torrent of “America First” words and deeds revealed blatant racism and xenophobia, unnecessary acrimony towards allies, a retreat from global leadership on issues of democracy and human dignity, and a profound lack of humanity. The Trump administration proved worse than we feared, yet in the face of these historic threats to human rights, WOLA stood up to mitigate the damage and stop the worst from Donald Trump’s Washington.

WOLA’s Beyond the Wall Campaign is the nation’s most visible, coordinated effort to challenge the administration’s policies related to Latin American migration. WOLA has garnered unprecedented press coverage, engaged with high-level government officials, and developed crucial new resources for partners, journalists, and advocates. It has helped protect U.S. assistance that addresses the root causes of migration and has prevented bad policy proposals from becoming law. In part because of WOLA’s work, the FY2018 budget was far less damaging than the administration’s proposals, because it excluded most of the border wall funding and limited the growth of Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

WOLA is uniquely qualified to lead these efforts. For decades, it has been crucial in helping Congress, administrations, and the public understand the com-

plex dynamics of migration. WOLA’s expertise extends from its roots working on civilian insecurity in Central America, to the lived experience of migrants on a dangerous passage through Mexico, to the difficult and often deadly border crossings, and finally to the devastating human cost in the United States of incarceration, intimidation, separated families, and unaccompanied children. In recent years, WOLA’s analyses have been at the heart of some of the most widely-read stories of migration and the basis of some of the most important legislative efforts.

President Matt Clausen and the WOLA team are innovative. In 2017 they produced cutting-edge film projects and photo essays and deployed new social media strategies. They have produced usable, fact-based analysis for journalists and lawmakers. And they have pioneered partnerships with non-traditional opinion leaders, like the producers of late night comedy and television specials to shape public narratives and combat falsehoods. This puts WOLA’s messages in front of mainstream audiences to achieve even broader change.

Above all, WOLA continues to invest in people—its staff, partners, and the WOLA community—to be highly effective when it matters most. Your steadfast support makes this critical and impressive work possible. Thank you for standing with us. As we face the struggles ahead, that will make all the difference.

Best regards,



**Steven Bennett**  
Chair of the Board of Directors



# WHO WE ARE

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a red shirt, embracing a person from behind. The person being embraced is wearing a white t-shirt and a large, wide-brimmed straw hat. The woman's face is partially visible as she leans in, her eyes closed in a moment of connection. The background is a bright, outdoor setting with a building and some white chairs visible in the distance.

WOLA is a leading research and advocacy organization advancing human rights in the Americas.

**Vice President for Communications and Marketing Kristel Muciño embraces a woman she interviewed at Tanviet prison in Mexico. WOLA produced a series of videos featuring women who have been incarcerated for non-violent drug offenses.**

# WHAT WE DO

RESEARCH, EDUCATE, ADVOCATE.

**We envision a future where public policies protect human rights and recognize human dignity, and where justice overcomes violence.**


WOLA tackles problems that transcend borders and demand cross-border solutions. We create strategic partnerships with courageous people making social change—advocacy organizations, academics, religious and business leaders, artists, and government officials. Together, we advocate for more just societies in the Americas.

## WOLA PROGRAMS

- Central America
- Colombia
- Citizen Security
- Cuba
- Defense Oversight
- Drug Policy
- Mexico
- Migration and Border Security
- Venezuela



**Senior Fellow David Smilde testified before Congress on the situation in Venezuela and the need for a multilateral response to stop the deterioration of democratic institutions.**



WOLA Director for Defense Oversight Adam Isacson and Director for Mexico and Migrant Rights Maureen Meyer talk with staff at the South Texas Human Rights Center by a truck full of water containers before refilling water stations in the vast desert ranches of the Rio Grande Valley. The main cause of death of migrants while crossing the border is dehydration and the Center works with local ranch owners to set up and clearly mark water stations in the area.

# OUR IMPACT

## STANDING AGAINST AN ANTI-IMMIGRANT AGENDA

WOLA fought the Trump administration's draconian, anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric by launching a strategic initiative called the **Beyond the Wall Campaign**. Its purpose is to:

- Oppose wasteful border wall spending and the harmful build-up of apprehension and deportation forces within Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE);
- Investigate and expose abuses against migrants at the border and on their journey through Mexico;
- Help asylum seekers by providing expert information to activists and attorneys; and
- Advocate for robust, transparent U.S. aid to Central America to address the root causes of migration.

WOLA's research and analysis empowered policymakers to fight for better migration and border policies, and the budget that Congress finally passed for Fiscal Year 2018 reflected our work. Instead of bowing to pressure from the White House, Congress followed WOLA's recommendations, increasing funding for the official ports of entry—not the spaces where an unnecessary wall would have been built—and refusing to authorize funds to increase Border Patrol hires or the number of detention center beds. It also maintained significant levels of foreign assistance to combat the violence and lack of economic opportunity that drive migration from Central America.

# PROMOTING A MULTILATERAL RESPONSE TO VENEZUELA'S CRISIS

As Venezuela continues its tragic slide into political, economic, and social crisis, WOLA has been instrumental in promoting a regional response with an emphasis on human rights. We convened a group of regional civil society actors to denounce and document Venezuela's authoritarian slide, promoting multilateral action that would be more effective and avoid the harms that an oil embargo or other unilateral response by the U.S. government would cause. In doing so, we helped shape the recommendations of the Lima Group, a coalition of Latin American nations that came together in 2017 to seek a peaceful, democratic solution through concerted diplomatic pressure. WOLA's *Venezuelan Politics and Human Rights* blog was more important than ever as an essential and trusted source of unbiased information and informed analysis for policymakers, journalists, and opinion-makers in Washington and the region.

# EXPOSING THE FAILURE OF JUSTICE IN MEXICO

A groundbreaking report by Director for Mexico and Migrant Rights Maureen Meyer and Assistant Director for Mexico Ximena Suárez about military impunity prompted a coordinated response from the Mexican government, demonstrating WOLA's ability to influence the human rights debate at the highest levels. As the Mexican government considered legislation that would further the role of the Mexican military in public security tasks, WOLA released *Overlooking Justice: Human Rights Violations Committed by Mexican Soldiers*

*against Civilians are Met with Impunity*. Our report revealed that the Mexican Attorney General's Office has failed to investigate almost any abuses committed by soldiers. The report attracted widespread press coverage in international media and from all of the major Mexican news outlets. Under this spotlight, Mexico's Foreign Ministry, Attorney General's Office, and Ministry of the Interior publicly acknowledged their commitment to promoting impartial and objective investigations.



Gael García Bernal (left), Diego Luna (center), and WOLA Assistant Director for Mexico Ximena Suárez (fourth from left) outside the Mexican Senate during a protest against Mexico's Internal Security Law. WOLA provided talking points for the speakers.

(From left) Representative Norma Torres speaks at the Central America Monitor launch on Capitol Hill with Seattle International Foundation Executive Director Mauricio Vivero, WOLA Director for Citizen Security Adriana Beltrán, Migdonia Ayestas, head of the University Institute for Democracy, Peace, and Security (*Instituto Universitario en Democracia, Paz y Seguridad, IUDPAS*), and WOLA Vice President for Programs Geoff Thale.



## FIGHTING CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

WOLA and its civil society partners launched the Central America Monitor, a first-of-its-kind program to strengthen democratic institutions, reduce violence, and ensure accountability for human rights violations in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. The Monitor uses quantitative and qualitative metrics to track foreign assistance to the region and measure incremental progress made toward the rule of law and the reduction of corruption and impunity. Annual data from the Monitor will bolster the advocacy work of Director for Citizen Security

Adriana Beltrán, who has kept Congress apprised of the situation on the ground and the need for sustained foreign assistance. It also shows the urgency of supporting anti-impunity institutions like the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (*Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala, CICIG*) and the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption in Honduras (*Misión de Apoyo Contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad en Honduras, MACCIH*), which weathered a strong backlash in 2017.

## SAFEGUARDING A THREATENED PEACE IN COLOMBIA

A year after the historic peace accords were signed in 2016, WOLA kept the world's attention on an even more important aspect of the peace process: ensuring a successful implementation. While homicides fell to the lowest point in 42 years: 24 violent deaths for every 100,000 inhabitants (about the same rate as Washington, D.C.), assassinations and threats against social leaders from Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities skyrocketed. This was especially true in the territories previously controlled by FARC rebels where armed groups sought to assume control. Director for the Andes Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli was instrumental in establishing the first-ever High-Level Council of Ethnic Peoples (*Instancia Especial de Alto Nivel con Pueblos Étnicos*) to ensure the rights of ethnic minorities during and after implementation. She also kept in constant touch with activists and leaders on the ground and immediately reported violence and threats against them to the U.S. Department of State and Congress, triggering a chain of diplomatic communications with the Colombian government demanding protection and prosecution of the responsible parties. WOLA was able to provide political cover for hundreds of threatened activists whose work holds the key to an eventual peace in Colombia.





Former Board Chair Cynthia McClintock (second from left), President Matt Clausen (third from left), Director for the Andes Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli (right), and the WOLA Board of Directors met with the Community Action Board (*Junta de Acción Comunal*) of La Cansona in Bolivar, Colombia. A number of community leaders from the area attended the meeting to share their concerns with us.

## REDUCING THE MASS INCARCERATION OF WOMEN

WOLA and its partners have put the crisis of women’s mass incarceration on the map. Women around the region are disproportionately imprisoned for low-level, non-violent drug charges, often after becoming involved in the drug trade out of poverty or abusive relationships, and their incarceration causes a cascade of harm through their families and communities. In 2017 WOLA elevated the voices of women in this situation in Mexico, working to change the stigma they face and giving them the tools they need to become better advocates for themselves. We created three striking films of women imprisoned in Oaxaca, including one about a woman sentenced to 10 years for trafficking marijuana to pay for her son’s cerebral palsy treatment. The films received great acclaim and have been viewed online more than 35,000 times. The Mexican government took notice and is now holding high-level discussions about using the alternatives to incarceration allowed for in Mexican law.



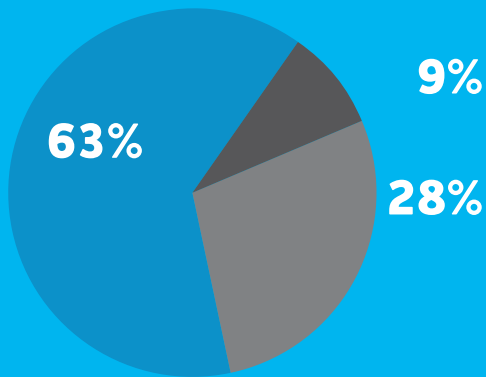
Women incarcerated at Tanviet prison in Mexico craft handmade items for sale.

Photo: Carlos Pérez Osorio/ -SCOPIO

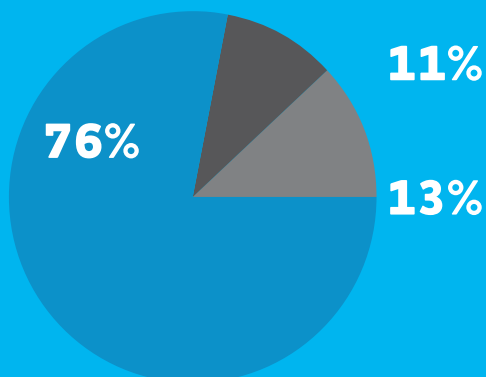
# OUR IMPACT

**SMART.  
STRATEGIC.  
STRONG.**

## INCOME



## EXPENSES



## 2017 BUDGET \$3.4 MILLION

**WOLA's communications team punches above its weight. Our communications impact in 2017 was well above the industry benchmarks.\***

In 2017 WOLA reached 947,945 people through Facebook and made 2.7 million Twitter impressions.

WOLA was mentioned in the press over 900 times, including by top news organizations like the Associated Press, ABC News, *The Atlantic*, BBC, Bloomberg, CBS News, CNN, *The Economist*, *Forbes*, *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Mother Jones*, NPR, *The Nation*, NBC News, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, PBS, Reuters, *Slate*, *Salon*, *USA Today*, *Vice*, *Vox*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

\*M+R Benchmarks 2017 Study of nonprofit digital advocacy, fundraising, social, and advertising. The organizations that participated in the M+R study on average have 5 times the budget of WOLA.

# RESEARCH & ADVOCACY FUNDED BY PEOPLE LIKE YOU

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## **Visionaries' Circle \$50,000+**

Anonymous (2), Central America & Mexico Migration Alliance, Ford Foundation, The John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Libra Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Seattle International Foundation, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

## **Champions' Circle \$25,000- 49,999**

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## **Leaders' Circle \$10,000- 24,999**

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## **Advocates' Circle \$5,000- 9,999**

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**WOLA President Matt Clausen presents the Human Rights Award to Ford Foundation President Darren Walker, who accepts it on behalf of the foundation.**



# HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS & BENEFIT GALA

**On October 24, 2017, WOLA presented its prestigious Human Rights Awards to two recipients who exemplify the fight for social justice during challenging times: Ford Foundation and the Kino Border Initiative.**

Both organizations, in their different capacities, are beacons of hope, relentlessly defending human rights and human dignity. Nearly 400 guests filled the Grand Ballroom at the Mayflower Renaissance Hotel to celebrate WOLA, the awardees, and hope for progress despite many political challenges. Inspired by the work of the Kino Border Initiative to support vulnerable migrants and the Ford Foundation's efforts to promote social justice and equality, the WOLA community left the event energized for the human rights work ahead.

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Master of Ceremonies Maria Hinojosa (left), Migrant Aid Coordinator Sister Alicia Guevara Pérez of the Kino Border Initiative, and Kino Executive Director Fr. Sean Carroll.



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**“When I think of WOLA I think not only of an organization that stands for human dignity but today in particular with what is going on in Washington, WOLA is more valuable because it stands for truth!”**  
U.S. Representative  
Jim McGovern



*Photos: Kendra Joy Photography*

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**“THE GREATEST THREAT TO OUR DEMOCRACY IS HOPELESSNESS. BUT, WHEN WE COME TOGETHER AND SEE THE INSPIRING WORK OF ORGANIZATIONS LIKE WOLA AND LEADERS LIKE MATT AND THE TREMENDOUS BOARD AND STAFF WHO SUSTAIN THIS WORK, WE FEEL HOPEFUL. WE BELIEVE IN THE POSSIBILITY OF TOMORROW, WE BELIEVE THAT WE CAN BE REDEEMED FROM THESE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR.”**

**- DARREN WALKER, PRESIDENT OF FORD FOUNDATION**

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

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Senior Fellow

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## THE SALLY YUDELMAN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM: SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES

WOLA's Sally Yudelman Internship Program is named after the late chair of WOLA's Board of Directors for her enduring commitment to shaping the next generation of human rights advocates. In 2017, her legacy lived on as WOLA welcomed 21 qualified, passionate, and diverse student interns. The program offers one of the most thorough, engaging, and formative human rights experiences in Washington, D.C.



WOLA's 2017 Summer interns during a tour of Afro-Colombian murals on U Street led by Director for the Andes Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli.



Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas



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