



**WOLA**

**WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA**



**ANNUAL REPORT 2012**



## WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA

### DEAR FRIENDS,

In the Western Hemisphere, human rights issues are increasingly transcending borders. Transnational concerns—from immigration to drug policy, gun trafficking, and citizen security—are taking center stage and are gaining greater attention from policymakers here in the United States and around the Americas. Latin American leaders are calling on Washington to follow their lead in many of these areas, and, in unusual ways, the United States is responding. U.S. states like Colorado and Washington are in step with Latin American nations that are reforming marijuana laws. Similarly, in response to a domestic tragedy but also mindful of the terrible toll of gun violence in Mexico, many U.S. states are challenging the power of the NRA and passing gun control legislation.

The evolving, anomalous nature of these responses is in part a response to the evolving, anomalous nature of the problems themselves. Transnational challenges are best symbolized by the rise of non-state actors, which is the new defining characteristic of the human rights landscape in Latin America. Where weak governing institutions once allowed for state-sponsored abuses against civilians, we now see those institutions unable—or unwilling—to protect their citizens from violence by organized criminal groups. That the human rights abusers are no longer national actors requires a redefinition of the very concept of human rights and a whole new set of strategies and tactics for the promotion of human rights in the region.

In 2012, WOLA was on the leading edge of redefining what it means to promote human rights. WOLA experts have been at the forefront of the effort to address these transnational issues and have helped lawmakers, opinion leaders, and civil society in the United States and in Latin America adapt to new challenges and pioneer new methods of human rights advocacy. WOLA researchers have produced original research to promote deeper awareness and comprehension of the issues; we share this information in cutting-edge ways, and the whole WOLA community has engaged key players who can—and do—make a difference.

Nearly four decades ago, WOLA helped define human rights advocacy in Latin America and put actionable solutions on the agenda for U.S. policymakers. WOLA's analysis and advocacy are uniquely based on meaningful relationships with partners, experts, and advocates in the region, trust-based relationships cultivated by respect and results over the last 40 years.

When you lend your voice to WOLA—through your commitment of time, financial support, or expertise—you are part of the network that lets us create long-term positive change in Latin America. Thank you for standing with us.

Steve Bennett  
Chair, Board of Directors

Joy Olson  
Executive Director



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## OUR EXPERTISE AND INFLUENCE



### OUR IMPACT

Throughout the Americas, WOLA develops alternatives to policies that undermine respect for human rights. We leverage the voice of local community groups, build local institutional capacity, conduct hard-hitting research, and tell the human stories of those harmed by unjust policies. Our work strengthens civil society in the Americas and improves millions of lives by making public policies more respectful of human rights.

### OUR MISSION

WOLA promotes human rights, democracy, and social justice by working with partners in Latin America and the Caribbean to shape policies in the United States and abroad.

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## REDEFINING HUMAN RIGHTS IN A CHANGING REGION

### SEPARATING RHETORIC FROM REALITY ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

Through the release of the study *Beyond the Border Buildup* and the launch of WOLA's Border Fact Check blog, WOLA has called attention to the troubling situation on the U.S.-Mexico border. We highlighted the unprecedented security buildup on the border and the humanitarian crisis that migrants face both because of this buildup and as a result of dangerous U.S. deportation practices. Our research continues to shape the ongoing immigration debate through extensive coverage in the press, advocacy to policymakers, and an aggressive social media campaign.

### CALLING FOR AN END TO GUN TRAFFICKING

In the last six years, 60,000 people have been killed in Mexico. Troubled by this, WOLA set out to give a face to the victims of violence and find out what we could do to stop the deaths. The answer: stop the trafficking of guns from the United States to Mexico. Through a major social media effort—which included the launch of WOLA's first animated video—WOLA created a bi-national petition that urged President Obama to take executive steps to cut down on gun trafficking. As the debate around gun control laws took a major turn in December, WOLA highlighted measures that would curb gun violence both at home and abroad.

### ENSURING RESPECT FOR LABOR RIGHTS IN COLOMBIA

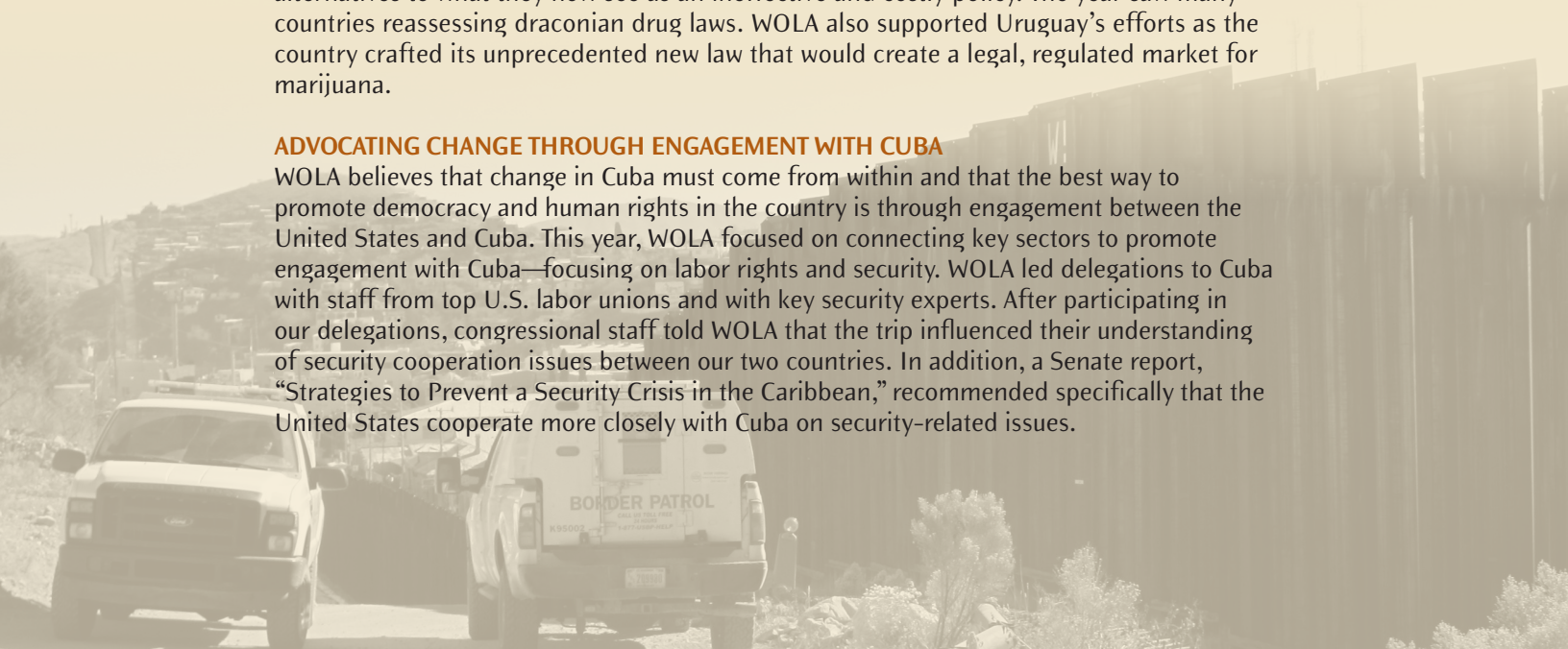
For decades, Colombia has been one of the most dangerous countries for labor unionists. Throughout the year, WOLA served as a key resource to the Congressional Monitoring Group, which examines labor rights concerns in the wake of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. WOLA hosted delegations of Colombian labor leaders, setting up key meetings in Congress and the Department of Labor to encourage U.S. support for labor rights in Colombia. WOLA's work has called particular attention to sectors with high levels of abuse, which tend to coincide with sectors with a high percentage of Afro-Colombian and indigenous workers.

### PUSHING FOR HUMANE, RIGHTS-RESPECTING DRUG POLICIES

In the 1990s, WOLA was one of the first organizations to warn of the harms caused by the U.S.-led “war on drugs” and call for drug policy alternatives that respect human rights and public health. The WOLA Drug Policy program's years of research, advocacy, and education were rewarded in 2012 as leaders throughout Latin America stepped forward to call for alternatives to what they now see as an ineffective and costly policy. The year saw many countries reassessing draconian drug laws. WOLA also supported Uruguay's efforts as the country crafted its unprecedented new law that would create a legal, regulated market for marijuana.

### ADVOCATING CHANGE THROUGH ENGAGEMENT WITH CUBA

WOLA believes that change in Cuba must come from within and that the best way to promote democracy and human rights in the country is through engagement between the United States and Cuba. This year, WOLA focused on connecting key sectors to promote engagement with Cuba—focusing on labor rights and security. WOLA led delegations to Cuba with staff from top U.S. labor unions and with key security experts. After participating in our delegations, congressional staff told WOLA that the trip influenced their understanding of security cooperation issues between our two countries. In addition, a Senate report, “Strategies to Prevent a Security Crisis in the Caribbean,” recommended specifically that the United States cooperate more closely with Cuba on security-related issues.



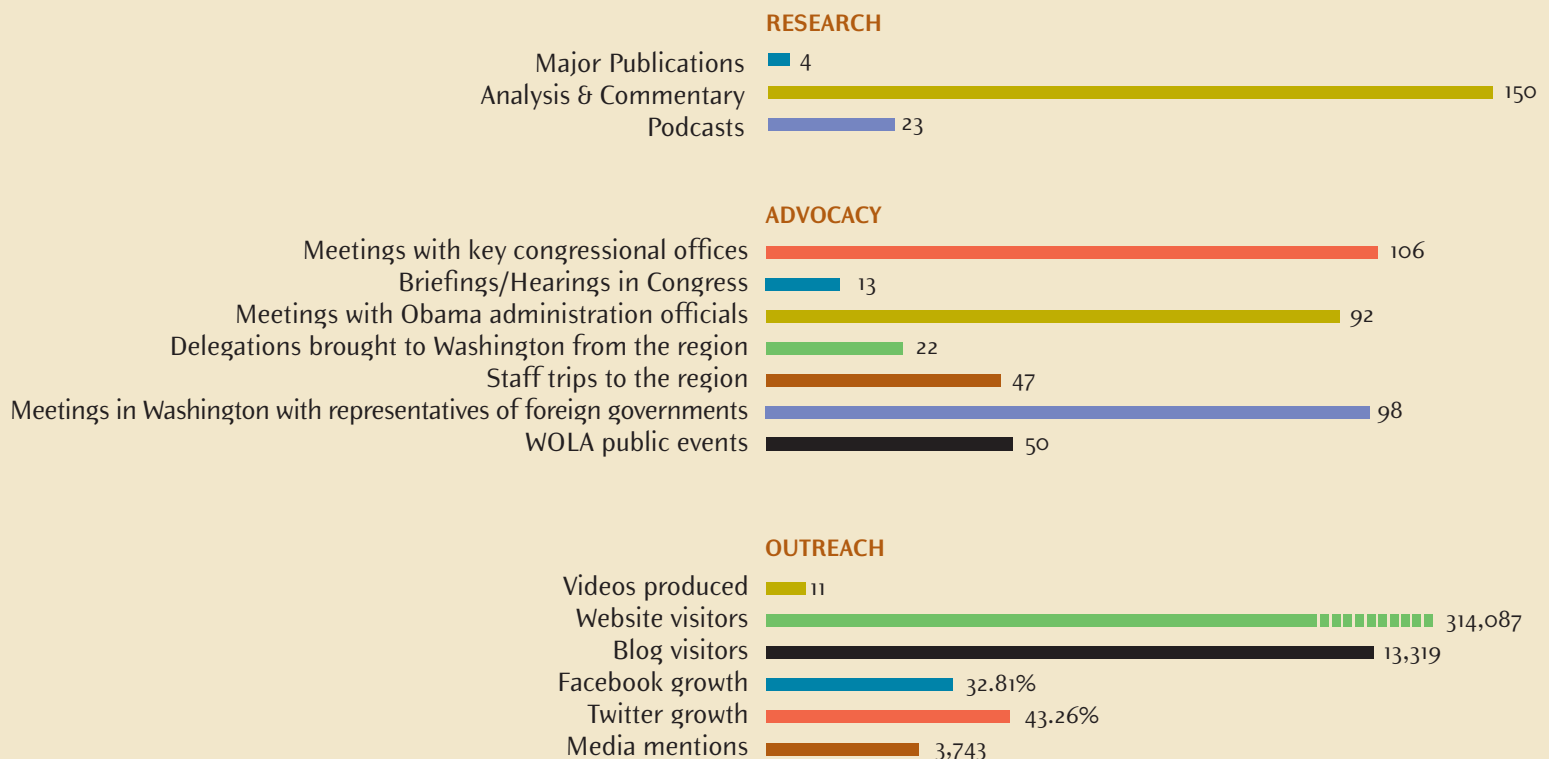
### KEEPING MILITARIES ACCOUNTABLE THROUGHOUT THE REGION

The WOLA Regional Security Policy program provides unprecedented access to information on U.S. military aid to the region. We work to increase transparency and civilian oversight of military programs and arms sales. In 2012, we generated often heated debates on issues where almost no discussion previously existed. Through our original research and timely analysis, WOLA prompted discussion on U.S. encouragement of policing roles for militaries, on the grave lessons for Mexico of past U.S. military aid to Colombia, and on the false premises on which our harsh border security policies are being constructed.

### CREATING AN INNOVATIVE TOOL TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

Over the past few years, WOLA identified an astonishing lack of coordination by international funders in their violence prevention efforts in Central America. This lack of coordination meant that billions of dollars were being invested in programs that were ineffective and duplicative of other efforts. So WOLA decided to follow the money. In 2012, working with the Inter-American Development Bank, WOLA launched an interactive database charting international assistance to citizen security projects throughout Central America. The study has been praised by governments and civil society groups as a major tool for advancing coordination and effectiveness on violence prevention in one of the most violent regions in the world.

## WOLA BY THE NUMBERS





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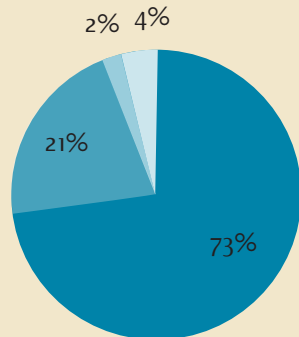
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SENIOR FELLOW, REGIONAL SECURITY POLICY

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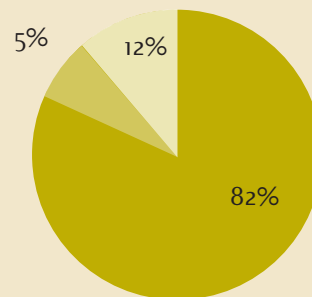
### INCOME

Foundations:	\$1,537,140
Individuals:	\$441,928
Religious Organizations:	\$48,000
Other:	\$81,367
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$2,108,435</b>



### EXPENSES

Program:	\$1,708,428
General & Administrative:	\$109,811
Fundraising:	\$239,838
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$2,058,077</b>



## WOLA HISTORIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**1970s** WOLA helps draft the landmark Harkin Amendment, prohibiting U.S. military aid to governments that abuse human rights, particularly in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil.

WOLA begins organizing delegations to Latin America. As early as 1976, then-WOLA director Joe Eldridge accompanies then Rep. Tom Harkin to Chile; in 1978, WOLA organizes the first of many electoral observation missions, assessing conditions in Bolivia.

**1980s** WOLA issues the first major report documenting human rights abuses by the Nicaraguan contras in the mid-1980s.

WOLA provides essential support for the peace accords in El Salvador.

**1990s** WOLA helps to expose the human rights abuses and corruption of Peru's Fujimori regime.

WOLA's advocacy leads to the end of the food and medicine ban to Cuba.

WOLA plays a key role in urging Congress and the White House to approve large-scale emergency aid for Central America after Hurricane Mitch's devastation.

WOLA's work leads to the creation of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), an independent, UN-supported agency with special powers to investigate and prosecute organized criminal groups and high profile cases—the first of its kind in the region.

**2000s**

WOLA succeeds in shifting U.S. aid for Colombia, Mexico, and Central America away from military assistance and toward economic and social development programs.

WOLA's advocacy leads to major easing in travel restrictions to Cuba through an easing of regulations for Cuban Americans and for people-to-people exchange.



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## BE A PART OF WOLA'S IMPACT

Help us ensure that WOLA continues to be the standard bearer in Washington for human rights and justice in the Americas by joining the dedicated group of individuals that provide support to our organization. Individual donors provide funding that allows WOLA to impact the most pressing issues facing Latin America. We invite you to be a part of WOLA's work by becoming a donor today.

### FROM OUR DONORS: "WHY I GIVE"

*"I am confident that there is a lot more hope and much less suffering in the region because of the work of the determined WOLA staff."* – Joe Eldridge

*"I give to WOLA because it provides a voice to the voiceless."* – Gordon Hanson

*"WOLA has been strategic in making its voice heard in Congress and in speaking truth to power in Latin America."* – Patrick and Patricia Ahern

### FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

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