Recently reunited Afro-Colombian Mother and Child, Darién Province, Panama

Photo by Gimena Sánchez, WOLA

Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli visits the Playa Nayero Humanitarian Zone in Buenaventura, Colombia.
2015: WOLA MEETS CHALLENGES AND LEVERAGES OPPORTUNITIES

In August 2015 WOLA’s Geoff Thale stood next to a flagpole in Havana, Cuba as the U.S. flag rose for the first time in more than 50 years. The ceremony marked a milestone in the normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba, an outcome WOLA has worked toward for decades.

Another policy advancement is also happening in Havana, where Cuba hosts the Colombian peace negotiations. WOLA provides counsel and analysis as the parties make their way to a final agreement and begin the hard work of implementation.

In Guatemala—a country that for decades has been synonymous with corruption—a remarkable breakthrough has led to the triumph of justice over impunity. Generals are being held accountable for war crimes, and the president himself was forced to resign on corruption charges. Setting the context for all of this was the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). WOLA’s advocacy was crucial to the formation of the CICIG eight years ago, and was vital to its renewal this year.

WOLA has been a leading advocate during the crisis of Central American migration—documenting the root causes of the violence that forces people to flee for safety—and has exposed deportation policies in both the United States and Mexico that put migrants in danger.

WOLA has met each crisis and opportunity with concrete, practical approaches. Through a combination of timely analysis, decades-long relationships with partners in Latin America, and highly effective communications strategies, WOLA addresses some of the most intractable problems in the hemisphere. WOLA’s experts are regular features in news media. WOLA’s reports are read by policymakers around the globe, and WOLA staff are routinely called upon for advice by leaders across the region.

I am honored to be a member of the WOLA family. WOLA has been on the leading edge—first defining and then redefining human rights advocacy in the Americas—for over 40 years.

WOLA is grateful to have you as a member of our community. We thank you for your support as together we face the challenges and opportunities of 2016 and beyond.

Steven Bennett
Chair, Board of Directors
WOLA is a leading research & advocacy organization advancing human rights in the Americas.
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.
2015 began with uncertainty over whether the mandate of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG)—a unique UN-backed investigative body combating impunity and organized crime—would be renewed. By September, Guatemala’s president and vice president had been arrested for massive corruption, uncovered by the CICIG and the Guatemalan Attorney General’s Office. In the intervening months, as thousands of Guatemalans mobilized for justice and accountability, WOLA collaborated with local civil society advocates to mount a strategic campaign supporting the CICIG. WOLA facilitated the Twitter campaign #CICIGSí, which became a trending topic in Guatemala, and WOLA served as a go-to source for analysis on the issue. As WOLA’s Adriana Beltrán described on PBS NewsHour: “This is a triumph of hope, of new possibilities created by those who want a different Guatemala.”
BUILDING MOMENTUM TO END THE TRADE EMBARGO AGAINST CUBA

During 2015 WOLA focused on high-impact education and advocacy aimed at ending the trade embargo and lifting travel restrictions on Cuba. Given the current Republican-controlled Congress, bipartisanship is critical to success. WOLA leveraged our decades of experience on Capitol Hill to build momentum. WOLA’s Marc Hanson provided background information and expertise. By the year’s end, Rep. Tom Emmer (R-MN) and Rep. Kathy Castor (D-FL) had led a dozen Members of Congress in launching the Cuba Working Group to support a new policy framework for U.S.-Cuba relations. Republicans and Democrats joined together and new bipartisan legislation was introduced to lift the trade embargo and the travel ban.

ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN INCARCERATED ON DRUG OFFENSES

Women across the Americas are incarcerated at an alarming rate for minor drug offenses. This year, WOLA Senior Fellow Coletta Youngers, an internationally recognized expert on drug policy reform, embarked on a new effort with partners in the region, including the OAS Inter-American Commission of Women, to provide guidelines for policy change. WOLA researchers also visited women’s prisons in San Jose, Costa Rica and Bogota, Colombia and produced a series of photo essays telling the stories of individual women caught in the cycle of poverty and imprisonment. From the United Nations to the U.S. Congress, these stories are impacting the way policymakers view and weigh the costs of unjust laws on women, families, and communities.

WOLA’s Marc Hanson heads the WOLA Cuba Initiative, a major education and advocacy effort to finally end the embargo on Cuba.

At the Buen Pastor prison in Costa Rica, WOLA’s photo essays document how harsh sentences for minor drug offenses trap women in a cycle of poverty.
INVESTIGATING ABUSES AGAINST MIGRANTS

Backed by the U.S. government, Mexico has increased security at its southern border. WOLA’s Maureen Meyer and Adam Isacson traveled to Chiapas to investigate the impact on people fleeing violence in Central America. They found a serious humanitarian crisis. The crackdown has not deterred people from coming north. Instead, it has caused migrants to take more dangerous routes, exposing them to additional violence in transit and abuse by authorities. The aggressive new enforcement has not been matched by increased capacity to screen migrants to determine if they have a legitimate claim to asylum, which many do. WOLA’s on-the-ground research became a national story, triggering coverage including a New York Times editorial that cited WOLA’s analysis.

SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE PEACE IN COLOMBIA

As peace talks progress with the hope of ending the decades-long war in Colombia, WOLA has been the go-to source of information on the potential impact of the accords. WOLA’s Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli has played a central role in supporting the creation of the Afro-Colombian Peace Council (CONPA), which has joined forces with Colombia’s 102 indigenous groups to form the Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Defense of Territorial Rights, a unified front of Afro-Colombian and indigenous territorial and traditional authorities created to offer collective proposals for the peace process. In December 2015, in recognition of her work defending the rights of these communities, Gimena was invited to witness the private reconciliation ceremony between the FARC and the survivors of the Bojaya massacre.
CHALLENGING MEXICO ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa over a year ago brought world-wide scrutiny to issues of justice and human rights in Mexico. WOLA helped to publicize the findings of the international Group of Experts that disproved the government’s account of what happened to the students. WOLA also worked with 82 U.S. Members of Congress who wrote to Secretary of State John Kerry about the “broader pattern of grave human rights violations in the country, including cases of torture, arbitrary detentions, kidnappings, and extrajudicial executions.” This year, thanks in part to WOLA’s advocacy, the United States withheld millions of aid dollars to Mexico because it had not made progress on human rights. As WOLA’s Maureen Meyer told The Washington Post: “[it] shows how concerned the U.S. is about the human rights situation in the country.”

WOLA presses for greater U.S. attention to the human rights situation in Mexico, as the families of the 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa call for justice.
**INCOME**

- **Foundations** 58%
- **Individuals** 28%
- **Other** 13%
- **Religious** 1%

**EXPENSES**

- **Programs** 83%
- **Fundraising** 11%
- **Admin** 6%

**2015 BUDGET**

$3.2 MILLION

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"**THANK YOU**...FOR BEING WITH US IN THIS NOBLE CAUSE OF FIGHTING AGAINST OBLIVION AND IMPUNITY, FOR BEING ON THE SIDE OF THE STORIES THAT ARE DENIED BY THOSE WITH POWER."

—DANilo RUEDA, National Director, Justicia y Paz / 2015 WOLA Human Rights Award Recipient
VISIONARIES’ CIRCLE
$50,000+
The Atlantic Philanthropies
Central America & Mexico Migration Alliance
The Ford Foundation
Good Ventures
The John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
The Libra Foundation
The Moriah Fund
Open Society Foundations
Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Seattle International Foundation

CHAMPIONS’ CIRCLE
$25,000–49,999
Anonymous (2)
The Christopher Reynolds Foundation, Inc.
The David Bohnett Foundation
Lippincott Foundation
Bradford Richardson
Wachs Family Fund

LEADERS’ CIRCLE
$10,000–24,999
ACDI/VOCA
Anonymous (2)
The Atlantic Philanthropies
Director/Employee Designated Gift Fund
Marc & Leonor Blum
Church World Service
Sandra Dunsmore
Foley Hoag LLP
Louis & Nancy Goodman
Edgar James & Katherine Kinsella
Cynthia McClintock
Janice O’Connell
Paul & Trisha Reichler
Stewart R. Mott Foundation
Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation
Western Union
Lee Zeigler

ALLIES’ CIRCLE
$1,000–4,999
1666 Connecticut Avenue, LLC
AFL-CIO
Amb. Francisco Altschul & Melinda De Lashmutt Altschul
American University Washington College of Law
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Grand Junction Design
Caty & Gordon Hanson
Kevin Healy
David Holiday
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Inter-American Development Bank
International Institute of Education
The International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC)
Jesuit Digital Network
Marlene Johnson
Vic Johnson
Bill Kamela
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Terry Karl
Gerald Koster & Sara Koster
The Kovler Fund
Linda & Jay Land
Lutheran World Relief
Maggio + Kattar, PC
Dana Martin & Leyda Fajardo
Jacques & Lucy Mejer
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Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
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Richard Newfarmer & Margaret Sarles
F. Miguel Noyola
Eric & Joy Olson
ONE Campaign
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Morris Panner
Partners of the Americas
Matias Pino
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Grant Priest
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Research Triangle Institute
Lars Schoultz
Louise Shelley
Kathryn Sikkink & Doug Johnson
Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth
Colin Smith & James Puzo
Starwood Hotels & Resorts
Mary Ann Stein
Ann Tickner
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
United Steelworkers
Winky Foundation
Benjamin G. Wisner & Sonia R. Kruks
World Food Program USA
Peter Zirnite
On October 28, 2015, WOLA awarded its prestigious Human Rights Awards to two recipients who have shown unwavering dedication to advancing human rights in the Americas: Tim Rieser, Foreign Policy Aide to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), and the Colombian human rights organization Justicia y Paz. Over 400 guests, including senior administration officials, Members of Congress, the diplomatic community, human rights activists, and supporters in the international community filled the historic Grand Ballroom at the Mayflower Renaissance Hotel to celebrate the progress made toward peace in Colombia and the normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba.
Top Photo:
Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) (right) presents the WOLA Human Rights Award to Danilo Rueda (left), National Director for Justicia y Paz.

Bottom Photo:
Guests at the 2015 WOLA Human Rights Awards Ceremony give award recipient Tim Rieser a standing ovation for his over 30 years of service as a congressional staffer fighting for social justice and a rights-respecting U.S. foreign policy.

Left Photo:
From left to right: 2015 WOLA Human Rights Award recipient Tim Rieser; WOLA Executive Director Joy Olson; and Justicia y Paz representatives Liliana Avila, Danilo Rueda, and Cecilia Naranjo.

Photos by Kaz+Zen Photography.

“PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW WHAT WOLA THINKS BECAUSE WOLA’S EXCEPTIONAL STAFF NOT ONLY HAVE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, BUT THEY ALSO KNOW HOW TO WORK WITH CONGRESS, WHICH IS A RARE COMBINATION.”

—TIM RIESER, Foreign Policy Aide to Senator Patrick Leahy / 2015 WOLA Human Rights Award Recipient
ONE OF WASHINGTONIAN MAGAZINE’S “50 GREAT PLACES TO WORK.”

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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 shape the next generation of human rights advocates. In 2015, her legacy lived on, as the Sally Yudelman Internship Program welcomed 21 qualified, passionate, and diverse students and the Sally Yudelman Intern Alumni Network grew. The program offers one of the most thorough, engaging, and formative human rights experiences in Washington, DC.