




Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas

ANNUAL REPORT 2016



A family on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Photo: Jorge Duenes / Reuters.

WOLA COMMITTED COURAGEOUS CONNECTED



*Senior Associate
Adam Isacson (left)
listens to local Colombian leaders
describe their experiences with the
implementation of the country's
historic peace agreement.*

MOVING FORWARD, STRONGER THAN EVER

Our Executive Director, Joy Olson, who guided WOLA for 13 years, announced in April of 2016 that it was time for her to “pass the baton.” We are grateful to Joy for her smart, principled, and innovative leadership. And we are excited to have found in Matt Clausen a new director with the vision, commitment, and track record of success in the non-profit world to continue to take WOLA forward.

WOLA emerges from 2016 stronger and better prepared for tough challenges. This annual report details many outstanding examples of our successful work over the past year. We could not predict, though, the severe threats to human rights and social justice in Latin America that were to come with Trump’s election. The prospect of massive, heartless deportations—as well as the proposed border wall and recommendations to cut support for democratic institutions in Central America—attack what we hold dear.

With Matt at the helm, WOLA is fighting back. We are continuing to work with our partners in Latin America and our many allies on Capitol Hill and in the media to get the facts out and allow reason and justice to prevail.

WOLA has launched the ambitious “Beyond the Wall” initiative to inform and advocate for human rights at the border and in Central America. WOLA’s experts have focused attention on the root causes of violence in Mexico and Central America and offered remedies. WOLA’s experts are also working to ensure sustained U.S. support for the hard-won peace process in Colombia, to develop humane alternatives to the failed “war on drugs,” and to identify paths back to democracy in Venezuela.

WOLA’s critical importance was recognized in 2016 by Ford Foundation. We are among a very select number of organizations world-wide to receive one of the Foundation’s first BUILD grants. This multi-year grant will allow WOLA to pioneer new work and invest in institutional development.

Those of us who have spent a lifetime protecting human rights in the Americas know that it is often in the darkest times that the power of commitment and courage shines brightest.

Your steadfast support is essential for the human rights advocacy of WOLA. We stand ready to face these challenges head on, together.

Best regards,



Cynthia McClintock
Chair of the Board of Directors

WHO WE ARE

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



Senior Associate Adriana Beltrán testifies before the Senate Appropriations Committee on the need for sustained and appropriate aid to Central America.

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
- Cuba
- Mexico
- Venezuela
- Citizen Security
- Migration and Border Security
- Drug Policy Reform
- Defense Oversight



As world leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York for the highest-level meeting on drug policy in nearly two decades, Senior Associate John Walsh (left) hosted an event on reforming international drug control treaties.

OUR IMPACT

SECURING AN INCLUSIVE PEACE IN COLOMBIA

On November 24, 2016, Colombia's government and the FARC guerrilla group signed a peace accord ending 52 years of fighting. During four years of negotiations, WOLA provided critical international support. This was especially evident when, hours before the signing of the first accord, Senior Associate Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli helped Afro-Colombian and indigenous leaders win a major victory. This is now the first peace agreement ever to include an ethnic chapter recognizing the distinct needs of ethnic minority groups. It will provide Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities an opportunity to address longstanding injustices. Now that the accords are in a delicate implementation phase, our work continues on the front lines. Threats against Colombian human rights defenders and social leaders have increased. WOLA is helping them get the protection they need to continue their struggle. We are also working in Washington to ensure that the U.S. government continues to play a constructive and supportive role in Colombia's new peace.



Senior Associate Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli (right) and advocates for ethnic inclusion attended the signing of Colombia's Peace Accords.

UNCOVERING ABUSES AT THE BORDER

Senior Associates Maureen Meyer and Adam Isacson broke a record number of news stories on border security and the human rights of migrants, challenging misinformation and partisan rhetoric. Over the last five years, WOLA has become a leading source of in-depth knowledge and experience from the U.S.-Mexico border and, more recently, Mexico's southern border. As threats to build a wall and rid the United States of undocumented immigrants took center stage, we supplied critical facts and a human rights perspective to policymakers. We also worked to end mistreatment and abuse at the border. We successfully pressed U.S. and Mexican border authorities to improve migrants' safety. The authorities agreed not to deport them to dangerous Mexican border cities in the middle of the night and to return migrants' essential belongings to them in the process.



Photo: Jorge Duenes / Reuters

Relatives separated by immigration hug at an open gate on the fence along the U.S.-Mexico border.

TAKING ON THE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION FROM CENTRAL AMERICA



Photo: Carlos Pérez Osorio / Scpio

WOLA interviewed a young man in a hospital in Honduras after he was shot for resisting an extortion attempt. Now he is considering migration to the United States. WOLA's video project on migration and violence in Central America tells the stories of minors who fled unthinkable violence at home, only to confront similar dangers on their journey.

WOLA targeted the complex issues of poverty, violence, and corruption in Central America that force many people to flee for safety and to seek a better life. We produced a video series based on interviews with migrant children that gives policymakers a chance to hear the voices of the humanitarian crisis in Central America. Senior Associate Adriana Beltrán successfully advocated for the second year in a row for the U.S. Congress to allocate significant levels of foreign assistance to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, with essential conditions placed on aid to ensure that governments implement human rights, rule of law, and anti-corruption reforms. Senior Fellow Claudia Paz y Paz, Guatemala's first female Attorney General and Nobel prize nominee, provided invaluable leadership in our efforts to advance the rule of law and fight corruption, and gave vital support to Central American attorneys general.

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN MEXICO

WOLA works for justice reform in Mexico and protections for Mexican human rights defenders and journalists seeking truth and transparency in an increasingly volatile situation. This year, WOLA continued to bring attention to the shocking case of 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, who were seized by local police and never heard from again. No one has been held accountable, and the case has become emblematic of the violence, corruption, and impunity in Mexico today. WOLA provided high-level international support to the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, which was named by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights to provide technical assistance to the Mexican government in the investigation. In April, the Group of Experts issued its final report, debunking the government's claim that its own investigation had brought the "historic truth" to light. The Experts' report uncovered key evidence and highlighted many credible lines of investigation that had not been explored. Senior Associate Maureen Meyer and Communications Director Kristel Muciño worked with

leading international media, including *The New York Times*, to set the record straight about the case and the Experts' findings: Mexican authorities obstructed justice, manipulated evidence, and forged a cover-up.



Then-U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Powers (left) meets with Senior Associate Maureen Meyer (right), Senior Fellow Claudia Paz y Paz (center left), and several other members of the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts about their investigation into the disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa.

ADVANCING ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN UNITED STATES AND CUBA




Five Members of the Congressional Black Caucus joined WOLA's Geoff Thale (far right) in Cuba to explore issues of race and inequality.

WOLA is one of the leading voices promoting engagement between the United States and Cuba in order to open space for greater political and economic freedoms and ensure respect for human rights. During President Obama's final year in office, Program Director Geoff Thale and Senior Associate Marc Hanson provided top U.S. policymakers with detailed recommendations on how to eliminate travel and commercial barriers. These recommendations directly informed President Obama's executive actions to strengthen ties between the people of the two countries. In Congress, WOLA helped relaunch the Cuba Working Group and energized a new set of allies across the political spectrum. This wide-ranging support will be essential to moving forward in U.S.-Cuba relations and make it harder for the Trump administration to undertake a wholesale return to the failed policies of the past.

REDUCING THE MASS INCARCERATION OF WOMEN

WOLA, the Organization of American States (OAS), and a group of organizations from around the hemisphere released an innovative advocacy guide to help reduce the mass incarceration of women for low-level drug offenses. Civil society and governments across Latin America are now using the guide to advance sentencing and other reforms. In Costa Rica, our advocacy prompted the government to make legal reforms so women could support their families and lead productive lives after serving time. The guide also helped enact an important new law that keeps low-level drug offenses off people's records, making it easier for women who have served time to find employment as an alternative to the drug trade. Also, informed by our advocacy guide, the public prosecutor's office in Costa Rica began seeking pardons for some of these vulnerable women. Sara, whose story we featured in WOLA's documentary photo essay, was the first person to receive such a pardon. By the end of 2016, our working group had launched the guide at 36 events globally.

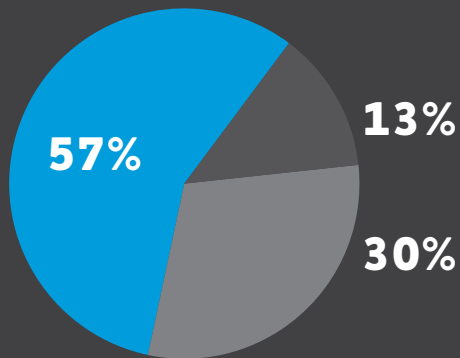


WOLA's advocacy guidelines on gender, drug policy, and mass incarceration prompted the Costa Rican government to pardon Sara, a woman who had shared her story in one of WOLA's photo essays. Women incarcerated for drug-related crimes typically have little or no schooling, live in conditions of poverty, and are heads of household responsible for the care of young and elderly dependents.

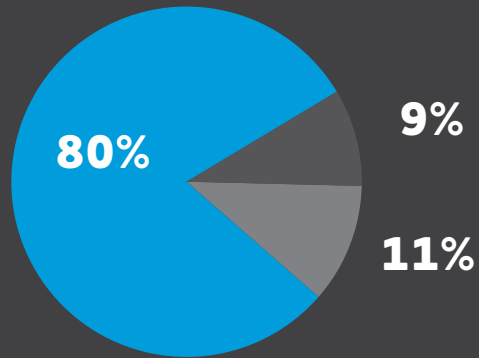
SMART STRATEGIC STRONG

**2016 BUDGET
\$3.5 MILLION**

INCOME



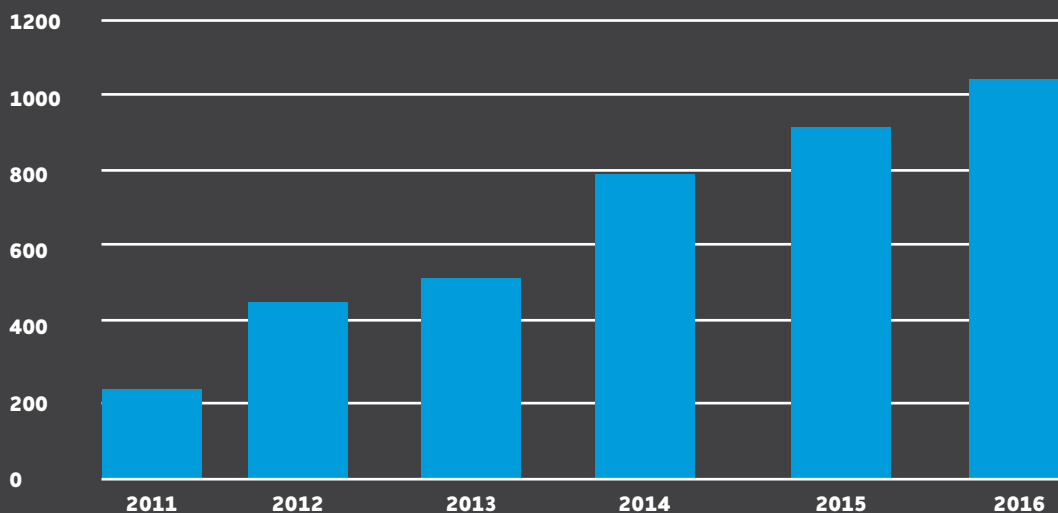
EXPENSES



In 2016, WOLA was among the first of 130 organizations around the world to receive a BUILD grant from Ford Foundation. BUILD grantees “provide the leadership and ideas that galvanize movements for change and focus these movements on the most promising solutions.” This major, multi-year award provides for our programmatic work on impunity issues in Mexico and Central America, as well as our steady institutional growth. Among other investments, BUILD will invest in WOLA’s trailblazing communications capacity.

WOLA'S MEDIA MENTIONS

*The number of times WOLA has appeared in the press



RESEARCH & ADVOCACY FUNDED BY PEOPLE LIKE YOU

Visionaries' Circle \$50,000+

Anonymous, Central America & Mexico Migration Alliance, Church World Service, Ford Foundation, Good Ventures, The John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Libra Foundation, Oak Philanthropy, Open Society Foundations, Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Seattle International Foundation, Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation, Wachs Family Fund

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

Anonymous (3), The Atlantic Philanthropies, Marc & Leonor Blum, Chicago Foods International, The David Bohnett Foundation, Herbalife, Lippincott Foundation, Ethan & Eileen Miller, The Moriah Fund

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

Alma Angotti & Bill Garcia, Anonymous (2), The Atlantic Philanthropies Director/Employee Designated Gift Fund, Matt & Margaret Balitsaris, Chris Canavan, Richard Feinberg & Diane Gotkin, Frisco Gilchrist, Louis & Nancy Goodman, Edgar James & Katherine Kinsella, Cynthia McClintock, Cheryl Morden & Reuben Snipper, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Margy Pastor, Paul & Trisha Reichler, Service Employees International Union, Stewart R. Mott Foundation, United Methodist Women, Western Union, Lee Zeigler

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

Anonymous, Belden Russonello Strategists, Medea Benjamin, David & Judy Bonior, Darryl Chappell, Pat Davis & Wes Callender, Joe Eldridge & Maria Otero, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Patricia Weiss Fagen, Foley Hoag LLP, Lisa Fuentes & Thomas M. Cohen, David Holiday, Marlene Johnson, Bill LeoGrande & Marty Langelan, Jack Marco, Marco Consulting, Matthew G. Norton Co, Rachel Neild & George McCabe, Janice O'Connell, Pontifical Mission Societies, Samuel Rubin Foundation, Kathryn Sikkink & Doug Johnson, George Vickers, Katrin Wachs & Ramón Estevanell, Alexander Wilde & Anne Pérotin-Dumon, George Withers, World Justice Project

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**“WOLA is a great tool to find compassion in the hearts of people on both sides of the border. Its existence matters and gives me hope.”
-Diego Luna**

Diego Luna, actor, director, producer, and WOLA Board Member, presided over the 2016 Human Rights Awards.

Photos by Kendra Joy Photography

ANNUAL WOLA HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS CEREMONY & BENEFIT GALA

On October 13, 2016, WOLA awarded its prestigious Human Rights Awards to two recipients who have shown unwavering dedication to advancing human rights in the Americas: Bill and Paula Clapp, the founders of Seattle International Foundation, for their visionary and catalytic commitment to human rights and economic development in Central America; and Casa Alianza, a network of shelters for youth at risk in Honduras, for their critical and courageous work to protect and empower children and adolescents. More than 400 guests, including senior policymakers, members of the diplomatic community, human rights activists, and supporters in the international community, filled the Grand Ballroom at the historic Mayflower Renaissance Hotel to celebrate the achievements of WOLA and the 2016 honorees in addressing the issues of violence, poverty, and impunity in Central America.



José Guadalupe Ruelas, the national director of Covenant House (Casa Alianza) in Honduras, accepts the 2016 WOLA Human Rights Award.



Philanthropist Bill Clapp receives the 2016 WOLA Human Rights Award from WOLA Senior Fellow Claudia Paz y Paz, former Attorney General of Guatemala and a 2014 recipient of the same award.

OUR PEOPLE

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JOY OLSON

Executive Director through 2016, WOLA

PAUL REICHLER

Partner, Foley Hoag LLP

JAY SCHWARTZCOFFEY

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ROBERT VARENIK

Director of Programs, Open Society Justice Initiative

KATTI WACHS

HSE/ABE Instructor, LaGuardia Community College

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

JOY OLSON

Executive Director

GEOFF THALE

Program Director

KRISTINA DEMAIN

Director of Philanthropy and Partnerships

KRISTEL MUCIÑO

Communications and Marketing Director

KRYSTAL WUBBEN

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Senior Fellow

KATHY GILLE

Senior Fellow

ELIZABETH LEEDS

Senior Fellow

CLAUDIA PAZ Y PAZ

Senior Fellow

DAVID SMILDE

Senior Fellow

COLETTA YOUNGERS

Senior Fellow

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 2016, her legacy lived on as WOLA welcomed 21 qualified, passionate, and diverse students. As a social justice organization, paying our interns has become a key institutional priority, and we took steps toward that goal by offering a stipend to all interns, funded by generous individual supporters. In the years to come we will work to provide minimum wage to these talented young people as a way of incorporating a wider range of voices into human rights advocacy.

TRANSITIONS: JOY OLSON LEAVES A LEGACY OF INSPIRATION AND IMPACT

After 13 years as WOLA's Executive Director, Joy Olson stepped down at the end of 2016. Under her leadership, WOLA's budget more than doubled, the staff increased by 60 percent and program areas expanded to address the most daunting challenges facing the region—such as violence and organized crime, engagement with Cuba, the peace process in Colombia, and border security and the rights of migrants. Matt Clausen, who took over as Executive Director in January 2017, brings decades of experience in non-profit leadership and commitment to building partnerships for social change throughout Latin America. WOLA is fortunate to be guided by such remarkable individuals—past and present—who are dedicated to pioneering work for human rights in the Americas.





Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas



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