

ANNUAL REPORT

20
19

Two Children
Play at a Migrant
Shelter in Ciudad
Juárez.

Photo Credit:
Susan Weiss



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Committed.
Courageous.
Connected.



◀ Director for the Andes Gimena Sánchez, Colombia Program Assistant Jeronimo Sudarsky, and Director for Defense Oversight Adam Isacson visit the Bojayá church—site of the deadly and horrific 2002 Bojayá massacre—during an advocacy and research trip with partner Father Sterlin Londoño.

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

In 2019, the work of human rights became all the more challenging throughout Latin America and in Washington, as the Trump administration and authoritarian leaders across the region moved forward cruel policies. WOLA fought back with courageous partners and impactful advocacy.

WOLA's Beyond the Wall Campaign pushed back against punitive policies that endanger thousands of lives. Our reports from the border exposed the harsh realities faced by migrants. Our asylum project with legal experts at Temple University provided critical research to support asylum claims. In Central America, we worked with key Congressional leaders to restore Central American aid with tougher conditions on corruption.

Our work throughout the hemisphere was grounded in supporting civil society leaders in the face of rising authoritarianism and attacks against democratic governance. Even as anti-corruption efforts like the highly effective International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) were dismantled, WOLA doubled down on its steadfast support of the courageous judges, prosecutors, civil society activists, and journalists keeping the anti-corruption fight alive. In Colombia, where ethnic communities have borne the brunt of the government's decision to undermine the historic peace accords, WOLA strengthened our partnership with the social leaders building peace in the country. In response to the political, economic, and humanitarian crisis that's displaced millions of Venezuelans, WOLA worked with civil society partners to build support for a democratic, negotiated solution.

In countries like Bolivia, Cuba, and México, WOLA worked with partners to respond quickly to key moments and launch effective advocacy and communications campaigns. We used statements, events, and op-eds to emphasize the importance of respecting human rights during Bolivia's electoral crisis. Through congressional education, we fought to preserve bipartisan support for U.S.-Cuba relations. Using new communications advocacy techniques, WOLA helped launch a campaign with our partner EQUIS Justicia para las



Mujeres that sought progress in reforming Mexican laws that had resulted in the rising incarceration of women for low-level drug offenses.

None of this work would be possible without the hard work of WOLA's staff. Geoff Thale, our long time Vice President for Programs, became the WOLA President this year, leading a full time staff of 28, a group of distinguished senior fellows, and enthusiastic cohorts of interns. Our Vice President for Communications, Mario Moreno, and his team have enlivened our social media presence, and bolstered our impact in traditional media. Thanks to the leadership of Vice President of Development Lauren Kimball and her team, foundations and individuals continued to show overwhelming confidence in WOLA's strength and mission.

We suffered a personal loss of enormous depth in April, when our board member Sally O'Neil, died in a tragic car accident in Guatemala, along with her colleagues Ana Paula Hernández, Daniel Tuc, and Ana Velásquez. Sally was our teacher and guide for all things Honduran, and a life-long fierce advocate for human rights.

Through the challenges, victories, and tragedies this year, knowing that we have the backing of so many of you sustains and inspires all of us at WOLA.


Thank you for your generous support.

Nancy Jane Belden

Chair of the Board of Directors

Our Vision

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

A large photograph of a protest in Guatemala City. A woman dressed as the Blind Lady of Justice, blindfolded and holding a sword, is the central figure. She is surrounded by a crowd of people, including a young girl in the foreground looking up at her. A Guatemalan flag is visible in the background.

A woman dressed to depict Blind Lady of Justice performs during a protest demanding justice for the girls who perished in the youth shelter fire, in front of the National Palace in Guatemala City, Saturday, March 11, 2017.

(AP Photo/Moises Castillo)

What We Do

Research, Educate, Advocate

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.

Our programs:

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

Our campaigns:

Women and Incarceration,
Beyond the Wall

Two WOLA partners, Luz Mely Reyes from Efecto Cocuyo and Marino Alvarado from PROVEA, speak at a WOLA-Woodrow Wilson Center panel on pathways out of the Venezuelan political and humanitarian crisis



Our Impact

Beyond the Wall: Envisioning a Humane Approach to Regional Migration Policy

UNCOVERING ABUSES AT THE BORDER

WOLA made seven trips to Mexico's borders in 2019 to provide first-hand accounts of the effects of President Trump's family separation and "Remain in Mexico" policies. While images of children in cages haunted media audiences at the beginning of the year, the plummeting safety and health of the ever-growing asylum-seeking migrant population stranded in Mexican border cities garnered very little attention. At

the U.S.-Mexico border, we accompanied activist groups, shelter workers, and pro bono attorneys to publish several widely shared reports about the deteriorating conditions of life for migrants, conveying local advocates' urgent recommendations. At the Mexico-Guatemala border, WOLA helped frame the issues and provided advice and contacts to journalists visiting the area. Our reporting has helped us make concrete recommendations to Congress on how to respond and craft rights-respecting alternatives to this human rights crisis throughout the region.





SUPPORTING ASYLUM-SEEKERS WITH CRITICAL LEGAL RESEARCH

In February, WOLA launched an online set of country-condition resources in partnership with Temple University Law School, which by the end of the year had already been downloaded over 2,000 times by U.S. attorneys and others supporting Central American asylum seekers in court. With WOLA's guidance—in the form of

expert advice and front-line sources—students at Temple University Law School have created various sets of resources on country conditions in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. This research helps attorneys show “state complicity”—how government actors in the region are unable and/or unwilling to protect different social groups from persecution. By providing attorneys with structured, useful information that might be hard for them to locate on their own, the project supports attorneys as they work with clients on their asylum cases.



Credit Susan Weiss



Geoff Ramsey, WOLA's Director for Venezuela, talks with partners from the region during a trip to Brazil to investigate the treatment of Venezuelan migrants in the country.

PROTECTING U.S. AID TO CENTRAL AMERICA THAT TACKLES ROOT CAUSES

The Trump administration cut assistance to Central America in the spring of 2019 in a heavy-handed effort to force the Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Honduran governments to stem the flow of migrants from the region. WOLA countered by reaching out to policymakers and the media on the impact of cutting humanitarian and development assistance. We demonstrated the value of maintaining well-tailored assistance that focuses on governance, tackling corruption, strengthening the rule of law, violence prevention, and economic development. Our recommendations helped Congress push back against the aid cuts and reinstate some of the foreign assistance, including stronger language in the 2020 Appropriations bill to better ensure that the U.S. can continue to help address the factors driving many families and children to migrate.

SUSTAINING PEACE IN COLOMBIA

WOLA marshalled bipartisan support in Congress for the Colombian peace process during a time when the Colombian government's support for it has stalled. In the face of increasing violence toward Afro-Colombian and Indigenous leaders, we have supported the Ethnic Commission—a body formed under the Truth Commission and Special Jurisdiction for Peace—in its work carrying out the world's first consultation on how best to incorporate the needs of ethnic minorities in a truth commission report. We also continued our research and advocacy on the growing role of the military in the Colombian government and the Trump administration's support for hardline military leadership. This helped the U.S. Congress rollback Trump's cut assistance for implementing the peace accord. We also backed successful efforts to reduce military aid to about 45 percent of the overall foreign aid package for Colombia,

down from its average of more than 80 percent during the “Plan Colombia” years of the 2000s.

PRESSING FOR A DEMOCRATIC, NEGOTIATED SOLUTION TO THE VENEZUELAN CRISIS

In response to the political, economic, and humanitarian crisis that has forced over 5 million Venezuelans to flee their country, WOLA focused on building U.S. support for a democratic, negotiated solution. The country's de facto leader, Nicolas Maduro, has lacked a democratic mandate since he assumed a second term in January 2019, based on deeply flawed elections. White House threats and bellicose language exacerbated an already dire situation. WOLA worked with key U.S. Senators and contributed background for the Senate Emergency Relief, Democracy Assistance, and Development (VERDAD) Act. Signed into law in December, the VERDAD Act states definitively that it is U.S. policy to support negotiations in Venezuela. This is a crucial starting point for multilateral,

diplomatic efforts to re-establish democratic order.

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST CAMPAIGNS TO DISMANTLE ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

The success of anti-corruption and anti-impunity efforts in Central America in the last few years, especially through the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala, CICIG) and the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (Misión de Apoyo Contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad en Honduras, MACCIH) prompted a strong backlash this year. As powerful and corrupt sectors pushed hard to shut down the CICIG and MACCIH, WOLA aggressively defended these critical institutions. We worked with Members of Congress to support the people at the forefront of this fight—courageous judges, prosecutors, civil society activists, and journalists—and protect them from the targeted surge in violence and harassment.



WOLA Mexico Director Maureen Meyer and Congresswoman Veronica Escobar (D-TX) at a congressional briefing on June 25, 2019.

BUILDING A DATABASE TO TRACK PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES ON JUSTICE AND GOVERNANCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

After years of research by WOLA and our Central American partners, we completed the groundwork for the first series of reports on corruption, the justice system, transparency, human rights protections, violence reduction, and police reform in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Using a comprehensive series of quantitative and qualitative indicators, the Central America Monitor aims to measure progress and shortfalls of the policies and strategies being

implemented on the ground in eight key areas. At the same time, we hope that the Monitor can contribute to the evaluation of trends over time within and between the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America. The initial round of research will serve as a baseline and will be updated on a yearly basis.

INSISTING ON STRONGER HUMAN RIGHTS AND CORRUPTION INVESTIGATIONS IN MEXICO

WOLA has pushed the new, autonomous National Prosecutor's Office for Human Rights in Mexico to improve its capacity to prosecute corruption cases, grave human rights violations, and other high-impact crimes. With other human rights defenders and experts in the Prosecutor that Works (Fiscalía que Sirva) coalition, we hosted a forum to discuss best



practices based on international experiences for Mexico's new special prosecutor's office for human rights. Although the going is slow, we saw some important movement in the emblematic Ayotzinapa case, which seeks justice for the 43 students whose disappearance gave way to a massive governmental cover-up in 2014. Our advocacy and reports kept U.S. officials in Congress and the State Department informed about Mexico's rule of law and security challenges and helped secure funding to support the Mexican government's forensic capacity and ability to address its disappearances crisis.

PRESERVING BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR U.S.-CUBA RELATIONS

WOLA has been instrumental in maintaining bipartisan Congressional support for U.S.-Cuba engagement in the face of the Trump

Administration's all out efforts to reverse course. Reps. Tom Emmer (R-MN) and Jim McGovern (D-MA) introduced the Freedom to Travel Bill after WOLA took Emmer's chief of staff to Cuba to see the damage that Trump administration restrictions have caused. Rep. Emmer continues to lead the bipartisan Cuba Working Group (CWG), which with WOLA support, convened several bipartisan briefings for Congressional staff on changes taking place in Cuba and the impact that Trump administration restrictions are having on Cuba's civil society and emerging private sector. Interfaith religious leaders working with WOLA have also started reaching out regularly to congressional offices to talk about the negative impacts current restrictions are having on the religious community in Cuba. The group used WOLA's talking points, content, and editing help to send a highly visible "heads of communion" letter, signed by 16 religious groups/organizations, to President Trump.



WOLA Senior Fellow Coletta Youngers with formerly incarcerated women at the annual #FreeHer conference.

“Our advocacy and reports kept U.S. officials in Congress and the State Department informed about Mexico’s rule of law and security challenges and helped secure funding to support the Mexican government’s forensic capacity and ability to address its disappearances crisis.”



Mexican trans activist Kenya Cuevas speaks at an event on women and incarceration in the Americas hosted by OSF and cosponsored by WOLA and Equis Justicia para las Mujeres.

FIGHTING FOR MORE JUST DRUG POLICIES

Following years of research and advocacy to reform harmful drug policies, in 2019 WOLA and its partners welcomed the results of the first modern scientific review of cannabis undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO). Cannabis is listed in the UN's 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs under the strictest controls, reserved for substances with "particularly dangerous properties" and little or no therapeutic value. But that decision taken nearly 60 years ago was based on colonialist and racist notions, not scientific evidence. Acknowledging the medical usefulness of cannabis in its 2019 report and recommendations, the WHO took a long overdue step toward correcting this historical error and injustice. WOLA and its partners raised concerns, however, that some of the WHO's other recommendations could actually make it more difficult to access cannabis for medical and therapeutic purposes. Our feedback contributed to the decision to examine the recommendations more thoroughly before

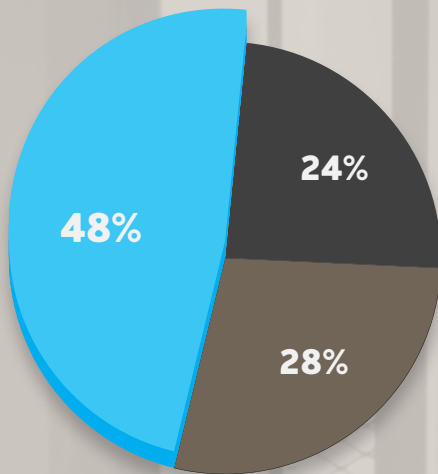
putting them to a vote at the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in late 2020.

BUILDING AND CONNECTING NETWORKS OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED WOMEN ADVOCATES

WOLA is helping to build an increasingly interconnected and effective network of formerly-incarcerated women activists. The number of women deprived of their liberty in the Americas has increased by 57 percent in the last two decades, higher than the already staggering 40 percent increase in the size of the overall prison population. WOLA's work with partners across the hemisphere has provided formerly-incarcerated women spaces to come together in solidarity and to develop alternatives to incarceration. We have also helped them secure a seat at the table to advocate on their own behalf as policies are being made. WOLA has helped change the narrative of who is behind bars. Our outreach has helped women overcome stigma and lead the "decarceration" movement going forward.

2019 BUDGET:
\$3,733,784

Smart Strategic Strong

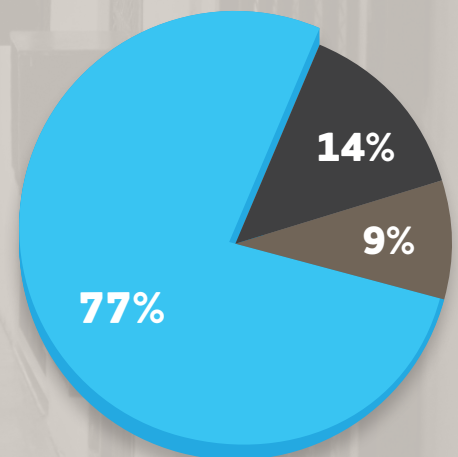


INCOME PIE CHART

- Foundations
- Individual
- Other

EXPENSES PIE CHART

- Program Expenses
- Administrative Expenses
- Fundraising



In 2019, **WOLA** reached **6 million** people on our social media channels—and we launched a new Instagram account that we're planning to grow aggressively in the coming years.



WOLA experts were also quoted in nearly **700 press clips**, including in the *Associated Press*, *The Patriot Act*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Reuters*, *Financial Times*, *NPR*, and more.

Research and Advocacy: Funded by People Like You

VISIONARIES CIRCLE \$50,000+

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MacArthur Foundation
Open Society Foundations

Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
The Ford Foundation
The Libra Foundation
Tinker Foundation

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The Moriah Fund
Wachs Family Fund

LEADERS CIRCLE \$10,000-24,999

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Human Rights Awards and Benefit Gala



Luz Mely Reyes

WOLA presented its prestigious Human Rights Awards to two recipients whose work epitomizes the defense of human rights in the Americas—the independent Venezuelan journalism site, *Efecto Cocuyo*, and a champion for human rights in the U.S. Congress, Representative Norma Torres.

At a moment when democracies are threatened by the rise of authoritarianism across the Western Hemisphere, this year's honorees have been fearless in standing against the abuse of power and for human dignity.

Venezuelan news site *Efecto Cocuyo* has persevered in covering the human cost of Venezuela's ongoing political and humanitarian crisis, despite a dangerous environment that has forced many journalists to flee the country. The



Rep. Norma Torres

“Journalists in and out of Venezuela will continue to tell the stories of our country despite efforts to censor us. But more than anything, we will continue to fight to keep democratic values alive in Venezuela to seek a future where human rights, as well as freedom of expression, are respected.”

—Luz Mely Reyes, WOLA 2019 Awardee

site produced award-winning reports, shining a spotlight on the journeys of migrants struggling to build new lives outside of Venezuela, revealing the inner workings of the illegal gold trade, and tracking the stories of children who lost their lives because of a lack of access to basic medicines.

Representative Norma Torres (D-CA) of California's 35th district is a founder of the Central America Caucus in Congress. She has led efforts to address the root causes

of migration and has challenged the Trump administration's cruel policies toward migrants and asylum seekers. In particular, her advocacy has focused on supporting anti-corruption efforts in Guatemala and calling for the protection of those in the region who fight for the rule of law. She has enacted legislation that strengthens transparency and accountability by requiring the U.S. government to report to Congress on corrupt officials in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.^z

Remembering Sally O'Neill



Sally O'Neill, a dear friend and WOLA Board Member, passed away in a tragic accident in Huehuetenango, Guatemala on April 7, 2019. The horrific accident also claimed the lives of her colleagues Ana Paula Hernández of the Fund for Global Human Rights, Daniel Tuc, and Ana Velásquez. They are all deeply mourned and missed.

Sally came to Central America in the late 1970s, and spent 37 years representing Trocaire, the Irish Catholic aid agency. During her decades of work in the region, she worked with Monseñor Romero, became one of the first people to investigate El Mozote massacre, helped bring humanitarian aid to refugees, aided reconstruction efforts after Hurricane Mitch, and supported Central American civil society groups in their advocacy for social justice and equitable development. Her ability to develop trusting, respectful relations with partners on the ground, while staying in touch with official actors, was unique and tremendously valuable.

Sally had a special commitment to the people of Honduras, where she lived for many years. She was, at the time, deeply Irish. All who knew her will remember her directness, her warmth, her sense of humor, and her passion for human rights. Sally's legacy will endure, in Honduras, and internationally.

Sally O'Neill, ¡Presente!

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ELIZABETH LEEDS

Senior Fellow

The Sally Yudelman Internship Program

Shaping the next generation of human rights leaders

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 2019, her legacy lived on as WOLA

welcomed nearly two dozen 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 2019 Sally Yudelman Summer Interns pose for a picture with WOLA founder and senior fellow Joe Eldridge.





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