



Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas

ANNUAL REPORT

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Message From The Chair

In March 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic changed everything. WOLA's offices in Washington D.C. closed and travel to and from Latin America came to a halt. Yet WOLA did not miss a beat. As meetings, conferences, and even our annual Human Rights Awards Ceremony moved online, we greatly expanded our audiences and deepened connections with partners and policymakers.

In April, the release of WOLA's comprehensive analysis *Monitoring Anti-Democratic Trends and Human Rights Abuses in the Age of COVID-19* warned of the serious, long-term consequences of the pandemic on democracy, equality, and the rule of law. It set the urgent and determined tone for our work in the year ahead, stating,

“

We cannot wait until the pandemic passes to investigate challenges to human rights, raise questions, and hold governments accountable. ”

WOLA is no stranger to tough times and tough places—standing up for human dignity in difficult circumstances has been the essence of our work for over 45 years. This year, WOLA's Beyond the Wall campaign challenged the Trump administration's draconian migration policies and proposed more humane, regional alternatives. Our support for courageous anti-corruption fighters who are increasingly endangered in Central America, and our comprehensive monitoring of U.S. aid to the region, underscored the need for future U.S. policies that will commit to justice and governmental reforms to stem the violence, corruption, and poverty driving migration. As multiple crises continued to unfold in Venezuela, Members of Congress called upon WOLA's experts for recommendations to shift U.S. policy from unilateral saber-rattling to towards negotiated, democratic solutions.

With the U.S. reckoning on racial justice and the movements to address systemic inequities that arose not only in the United States but throughout the world, WOLA's long-standing partnerships with Afro-Colombian and Indigenous social leaders took on new meaning, as did our coalition work with women who have been incarcerated for unjust drug laws. Across all our programs and

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

communications platforms, we deepened our work with partners who are taking the lead in pursuing redress for centuries of racial injustice in the Americas.

In 2020, WOLA took the opportunity to assess the impact of recent trends and lay the foundation for more rights-respecting U.S. policies by hosting a four-part series convening experts from around the region called *Taking Stock of Trump's Legacy in Latin America*. Our board and staff also began a long-range strategic planning process to incorporate new priorities such as rising authoritarianism in the region, the impact of climate change, and the role of gender, racial, and sexual orientation inequities.

We are grateful to all of those who have joined us this year—whether it was by listening to one of our top-notch podcasts, participating with our experts and partners on online events, opening an email to a trove of research and analysis, or subscribing to our monthly newsletter *Latin America in Review*—and especially to those who have made a financial contribution that makes all our work possible.

At the close of 2020, we are hopeful at the prospect of new directions in U.S. policy and determined to stand with those across the region whose courage and commitment are critical to advancing human rights in Latin America. Regardless, WOLA's strength will continue to be our energetic defense of human rights no matter the political milieu.

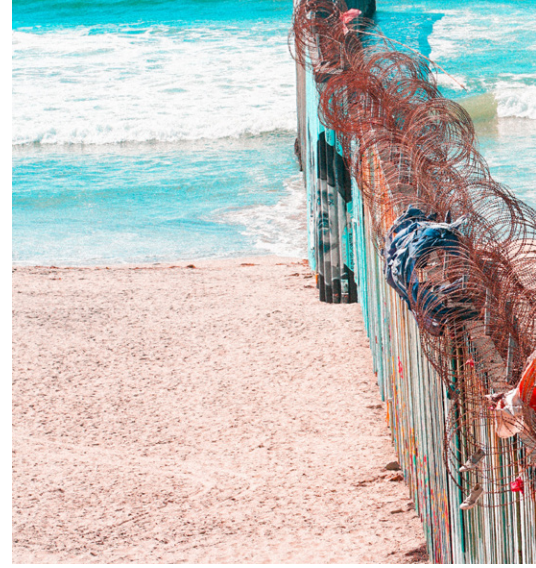


Nancy Jane Belden

Chair of the Board of Directors



Committed. Courageous. Connected.





Our Vision

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

What We Do

Research, Educate, Advocate

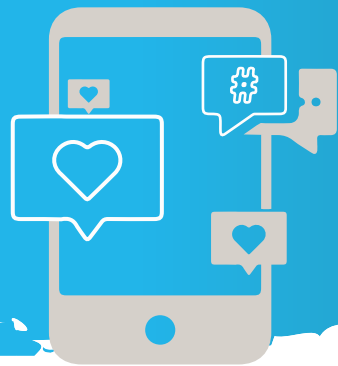
WOLA tackles problems that transcend borders and demand cross-border solutions. We create strategic partnerships with courageous people making social change—advocacy organizations, academics, religious and business leaders, artists, and government officials. Together, we advocate for more just societies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

Our Programs:

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

Our Campaigns: Beyond the Wall

Our Impact



500%
growth by
the end of
2020



46
podcasts
in 2020

70%
growth
in listeners



11,500
views



A PIVOT TO VIRTUAL ADVOCACY

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a halt to the regional travel that has been critical to WOLA and its work for over 45 years. In 2020, unable to rely on in-person connections to inform our research and advocacy, we pivoted to remote work and virtual forms of communication. Amidst this shift to virtual engagement, our long-running personal relationships with lawmakers, congressional staff, policy leaders, and human rights advocates on the ground in Latin America positioned us to better cut through the online noise.

Faced with challenges of the pandemic, we placed a new emphasis on expanding and targeting online audiences. This enabled us to grow new digital platforms like WOLA's Instagram account by 500 percent by the end of 2020. Additionally, in response to media trends that point to significant growth in global podcast listenership, we focused on expanding the WOLA podcast *Latin America Today*, increasing our production of podcasts from 14 in 2019 to 46 in 2020, while also expanding the platforms where the podcast could be found and improving our marketing efforts. All this

resulted in a 70 percent growth in listeners.

We also saw greater reach, as our virtual events (including a **webinar series** taking stock of the Trump administration's impact on human rights in Latin America; as well as another series examining how the pandemic was pushing militaries into assuming more power over civilian life) were no longer limited by geography. WOLA's virtual events counted nearly 11,500 views in 2020, were well-attended across the policy community, and at times elicited direct responses from top-level government officials.

Because the pandemic put a stop to in-person meetings and travel, we saw a real risk that policymakers in D.C. would remain stuck in even more restricted echo chambers, losing out on opportunities to hear the perspectives of civil society leaders on the ground in Latin America. We responded with a renewed focus on working collaboratively with our partners, in order to push human rights to the forefront of policymakers' agenda and draw attention to the pandemic's consequences for human rights in the region.



From providing a platform to Afro-Colombian and Indigenous activists in Colombia who were facing additional security threats amidst COVID-19 lockdowns, to bringing family members searching for their missing loved ones to testify virtually before Congress about Mexico's disappearance

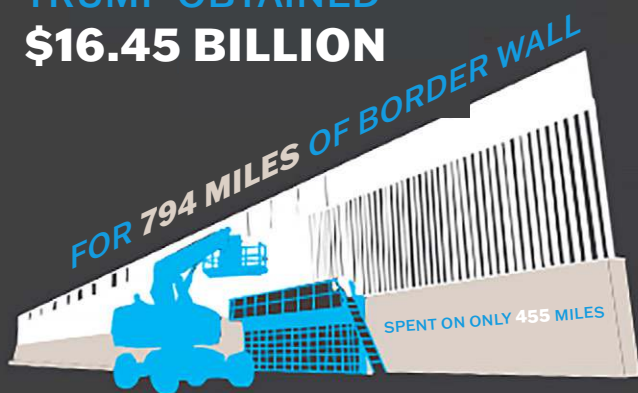
crisis, to amplifying the voices of Venezuelan civil society leaders pressing for a humanitarian accord to address the virus's spread, we brought together a powerful coalition of partners across the Americas and ensured their voices were heard.

PROMOTING A RIGHTS-RESPECTING APPROACH TO MIGRATION

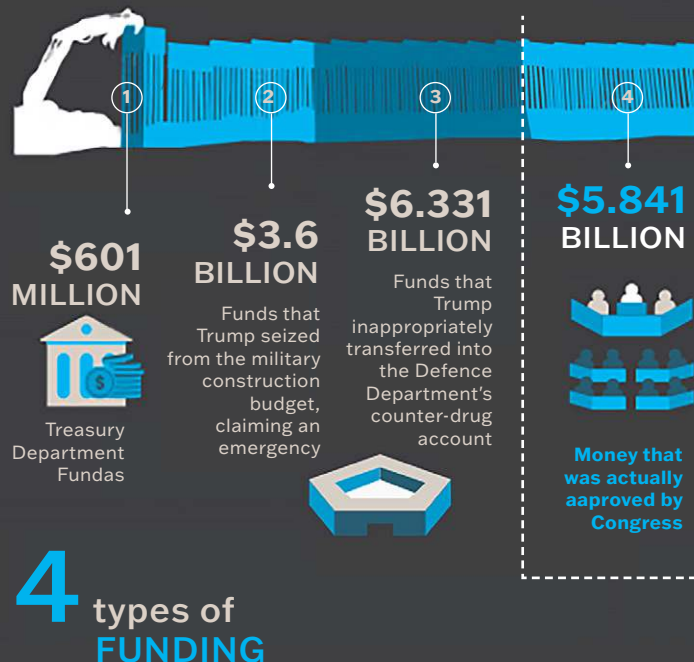
The Trump administration used COVID-19 as justification for enacting the entirety of its dark vision for U.S. immigration policy: a total shutdown of asylum, doubling down on the construction of the \$16 billion border wall without approval from Congress, ongoing deportations without proper safeguards to protect against COVID-19, and mass expulsions of asylum-seeking children and families. Through WOLA's **Beyond the Wall campaign**, we laid out an alternative vision for a humane, regional approach, reorienting the U.S. government away from the cruelties of the Trump era towards rights-respecting policies, focused on addressing the root causes driving people to migrate.

With regular online publications, timely commentary to dozens of press outlets, meticulous data tracking, and liaising with coalitions and migrant rights groups on both sides of the border, we opposed Trump's intensification of anti-migrant policies under the guise of "protecting" public health. WOLA's reputation as a source for credible analysis on the border meant that we were called on to provide affidavits to the legal advocacy groups challenging Trump's anti-migrant policies in court (including one case that was set to be reviewed by the Supreme Court).

**TRUMP OBTAINED
\$16.45 BILLION**



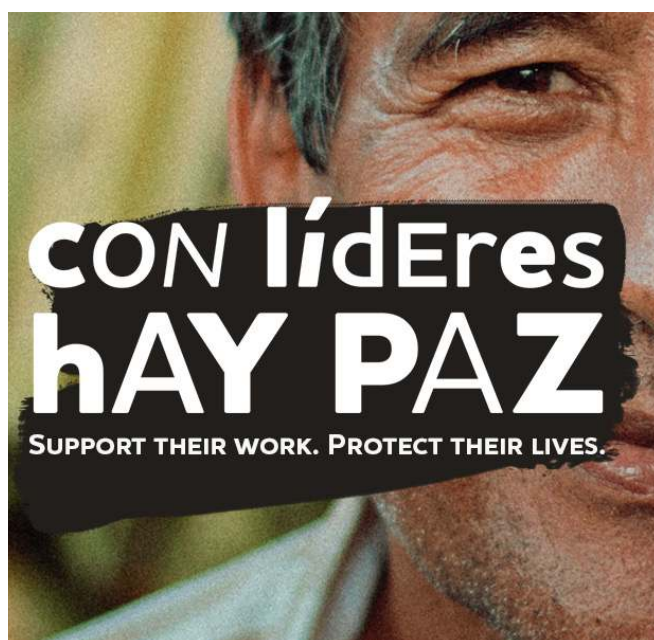
Which Came From...



We also helped ensure that Congress tightened appropriations, so that Trump's final year in office would not see a further expansion of border wall funding or the further buildup of deeply troubled agencies like Border Patrol and ICE. Our persistent coalition work facilitated passage of legislation like

the Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains Act, which provides resources to help identify the remains of missing migrants and for rescue beacons that will help save the lives of migrants and asylum seekers lost in the hostile desert environment of the U.S. borderlands.

PROTECTING BLACK AND INDIGENOUS LEADERS IN COLOMBIA



President Iván Duque's administration has failed to provide robust political support and resources to Colombia's 2016 peace accords. As a result, Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, and rural communities in Colombia are bearing the brunt of the violence that has since resurged, with more than 60 massacres registered in 2020, levels unseen since prior to the signing of the peace accords. WOLA is spearheading a communications campaign to build international pressure to end the violence and support the peace. Set to fully launch in early 2021, the campaign (**Con Líderes Hay Paz**) will showcase the stories of social leaders who risk their lives for peace and justice in their communities, and create a sense of urgency to protect them and fully implement the peace accords. WOLA has an ongoing focus on peace accord implementation, and the FY2020 U.S. aid package to Colombia set

aside funds for supporting initiatives that came out of the peace accords, including Colombia's Truth Commission.

Our policy recommendations were included in other pieces of legislation, including the annual

2020 defense spending bill, which restricts U.S. support for aerial spraying of coca crops (a policy that is ineffective in the long-run and deeply harmful to communities and the environment) and halts U.S. assistance to abusive elements in the Colombian military.

STRENGTHENING MEXICO'S FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY

Through congressional outreach, online publications, and support for the launching of a new coalition, the Collective Against the Epidemic of Impunity, WOLA has put a spotlight on the failure of Mexico's National Prosecutor's Office and state-level prosecutors to make significant progress on investigating grave human rights violations and other crimes. As noted by the collective, the "other" pandemic affecting Mexico is the lack of justice: the vast majority of reported crimes are never comprehensively investigated and never result in a conviction. The collective's advocacy helped block a proposed change which would have weakened government efforts to search for the disappeared.



AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF VENEZUELAN CIVIL SOCIETY

WOLA has been a consistent advocate for a peaceful, democratic solution to Venezuela's ongoing political crisis. We have worked to amplify and connect the voices of our Venezuelan partners in the halls of power in Washington, thus ensuring that policymakers hear perspectives that they wouldn't have accessed otherwise.

Our strategic research and advocacy alongside our partners, our repeated documentation of authoritarianism in Venezuela and

counterproductive U.S. policies, and calls for a democratic way forward, applied the pressure that helped move Trump administration officials to abandon talk of a military solution and turn (reluctantly) toward a negotiated outcome. This work will continue under the Biden administration,, which we and our partners will press to adopt a multilateral response to the crisis.

DOCUMENTING THE IMPACT OF MASS INCARCERATION ON WOMEN AND LGBT+ PEOPLE

COVID-19 exacerbated the profound crisis in Latin America's overcrowded prison systems, lending new urgency to calls to reduce the number of people in prison. We put forward and advocated for detailed policy recommendations for releasing women and protecting the lives of those still behind bars. WOLA's extensive research on the disproportionate impact of punitive drug laws on women was consolidated in our report, *Women Behind Bars for Drug Offenses in Latin America*. In addition, our collaborative groundbreaking report *Trans Women Deprived of Liberty*—the first-ever regional study of its kind—documented

the alarming absence of policies to protect trans women deprived of liberty across the Americas. Working in collaboration with Latin American trans women, we then launched a declaration, "Promoting the Rights of Trans Women Deprived of Liberty in Latin America," bringing much-needed attention to an issue that has long remained in the shadows. We also continued to accompany and support the regional network of formerly incarcerated women, "Women Resisting, Bringing Down the Bars," which was launched after our 2019 workshop of formerly incarcerated women in the Americas.



*Trans Women
Deprived Of
Liberty: Invisible
Stories Behind Bars*

SPEAKING OUT AGAINST CORRUPTION AND FOR THE RULE OF LAW IN CENTRAL AMERICA

WOLA's efforts to educate and engage Members of Congress and international donors helped ensure there was top-level pushback when governments across Central America took steps to debilitate rule of law and weaken democratic institutions. This created the support needed to provisionally suspend the enactment of a controversial law that would have criminalized the work of non-governmental organizations in Guatemala. In addition, WOLA worked to guarantee protections for courageous anti-corruption crusaders like Honduras's National Anti-Corruption Council and staffers

in Guatemala's Special Anti-Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity and the Human Rights Ombudsperson. We also helped ensure that U.S. policymakers paid attention to the significant backsliding of rule of law across Central America, including the stealth campaign to stack Guatemala's courts with jurists who have a history of corruption. WOLA's advocacy in the U.S. Congress guaranteed the inclusion of legislative language creating new stringent accountability mechanisms for Central American officials accused of corruption, giving the U.S. government stronger tools to sanction corruption in the region.

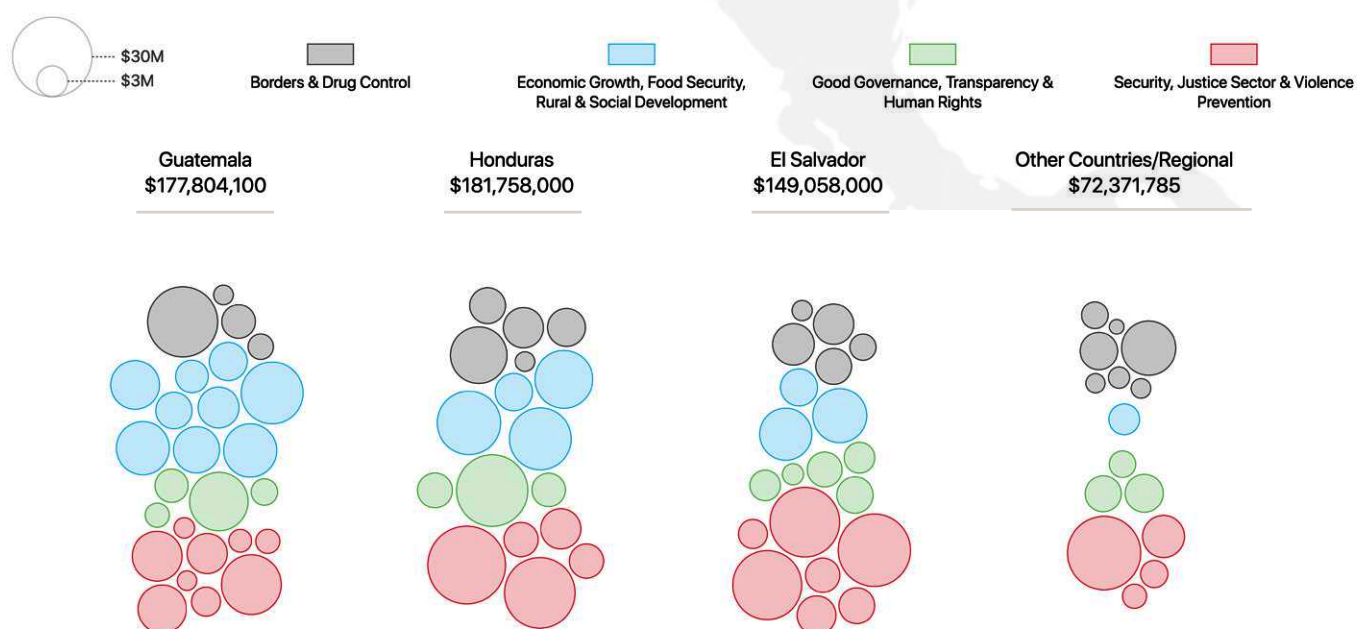


A COMPREHENSIVE TOOL TO MONITOR AID TO CENTRAL AMERICA

WOLA has long been a leader in efforts to address the violence, corruption and poor governance that are root causes of migration. With the launch of the extensive **Central America Monitor database**, WOLA and its partners (the Myrna Mack Foundation in Guatemala, the Institute for Public Opinion at José Simeón

Cañas Central American University in El Salvador, and the University Institute on Democracy, Peace and Security in Honduras) presented a wide range of data sources to assess how Central America is tackling the insecurity and broken institutions that are key push factors causing people to flee the region. The data helps reveal where these

2017 U.S. assistance to Central America:



countries are making progress in addressing these root causes of migration, while also shining a light on where further reforms are most urgently needed. Policymakers need answers to these

questions, in order to better determine how foreign aid can most strategically be invested to strengthen justice and improve governance in this region.

SUPPORTING SHIFTS AWAY FROM THE “WAR ON DRUGS”

Last year, WOLA’s engagement helped achieve drug policy reform advances on two fronts, in Washington and at the United Nations. In December 2020, a bipartisan commission created by Congress in 2016 published its recommendations for improving U.S. drug policy in Latin America. WOLA’s input—including research

on the devastating harms and failures of the U.S.-led “war on drugs” and reports on police reform in Mexico and Central America—supported the commission’s most important findings. The commission’s final report called out the huge expense and dismal results of forced crop eradication, including aerial herbicide spraying

("fumigation"); emphasized the need to bolster justice institutions and the rule of law; and urged revising the U.S. drug certification process.

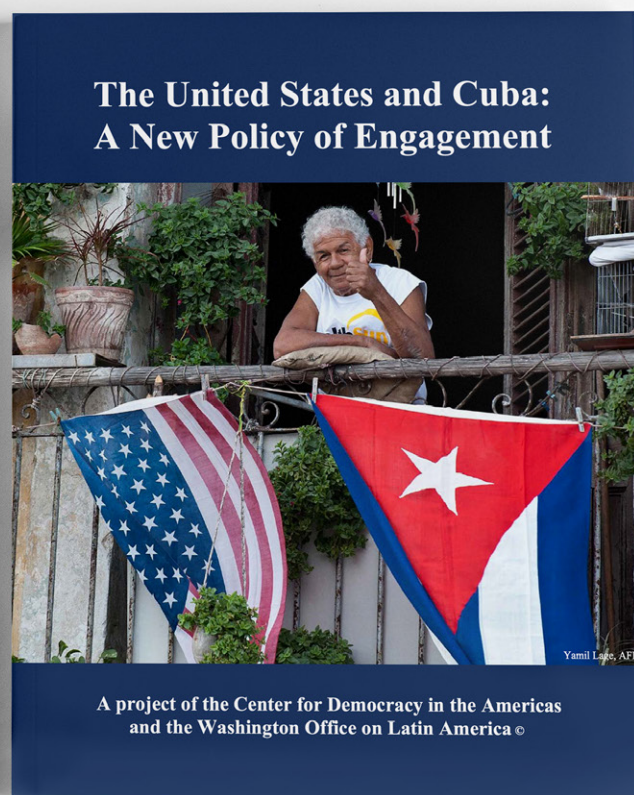
Also in December, the UN's Vienna-based Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) narrowly approved a landmark reform, voting in favor of a WHO recommendation to remove cannabis from the UN drug treaties' strictest control category. The successful vote marked a long overdue but welcome recognition by the UN that cannabis

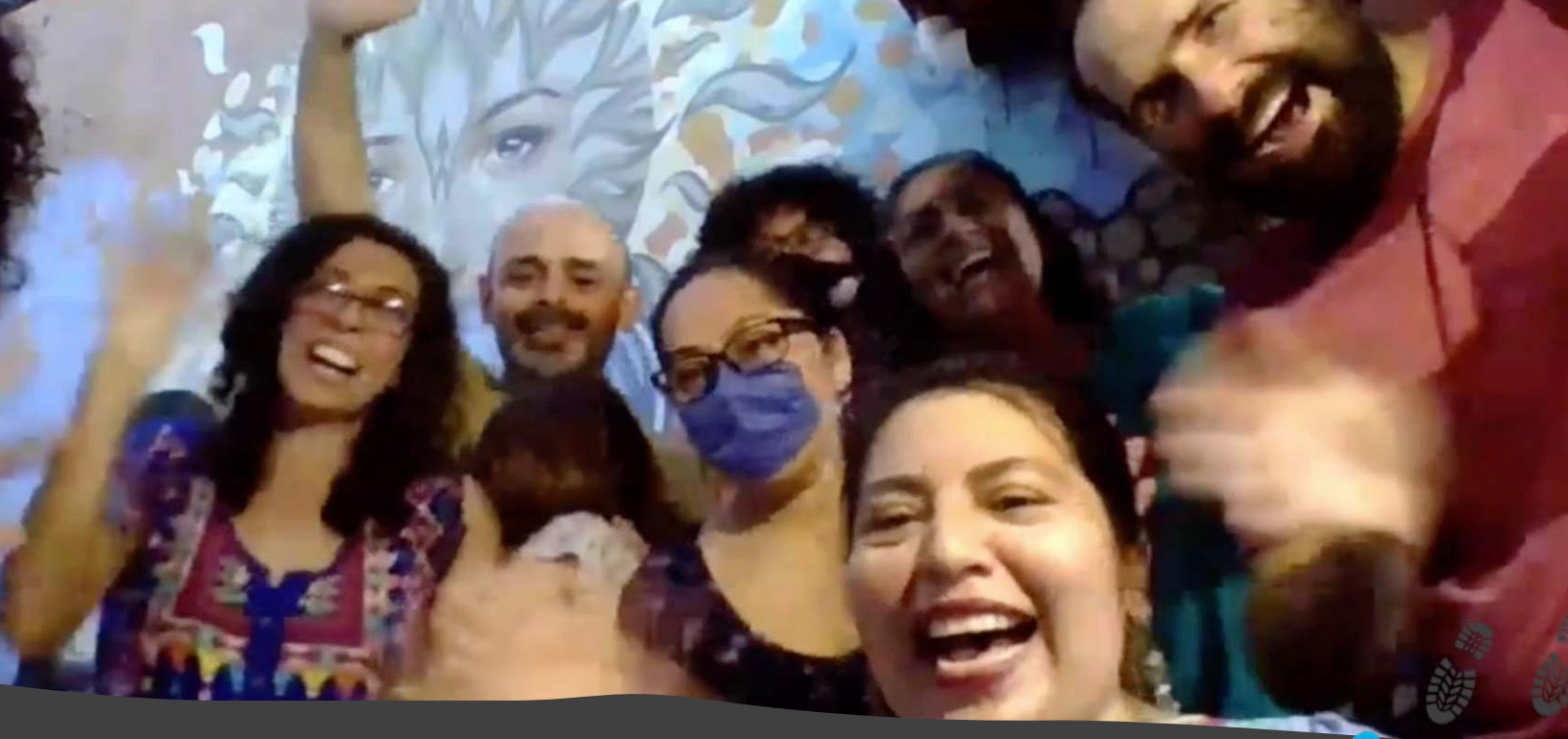
has medical and therapeutic value. The WHO recommendation to reclassify cannabis was initially issued in early 2019. Leading up to the December 2020 vote, WOLA and our international drug policy reform partners worked to educate governments and civil society about the benefits of revising the classification of cannabis, to improve patients' access to medicine, and to stimulate more scientific research on cannabis and its therapeutic potential.

OPPOSE THE TRUMP NARRATIVE AND LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR RENEWED U.S.-CUBAN ENGAGEMENT

As the Trump administration tightened economic sanctions on Cuba, and justified its actions with distorted narratives about Cuba, WOLA provided factual information and thoughtful analysis about Cuban reality, and worked to lay the groundwork for renewed engagement. We published commentaries and provided analyses to reporters, congressional staff, and others on the emerging private sector in Cuba, on the Cuban religious community, and on continuing U.S.-Cuban cooperation on security and law enforcement issues. We commented on the debate about Cuban medical cooperation with other countries in the context of COVID-19, and we condemned the Trump administration's politically motivated decision to put Cuba back on the list of "state sponsors of terror."

On the positive side, in partnership with the Center for Democracy in the Americas, WOLA published a report, *The United States and Cuba: A New Policy of Engagement*, detailing how the Biden administration can move quickly to implement much-needed change in U.S.-Cuba policy. The report was well-received, receiving media coverage and attention from Members of Congress, and provided Biden administration officials with a roadmap for establishing a more constructive U.S.-Cuba relationship that revolves around policies of engagement.





FRAY MATÍAS DE CÓRDOVA HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER
2020 WOLA Human Rights Award Honoree



Human Rights Awards & Benefit Gala 2020:

Honoring Protectors of Migrant Rights

WOLA's 2020 Human Rights and Benefit Gala held on September 22, 2020, and chaired by Mexico border correspondent and author Alfredo Corchado, was our most inclusive program yet, as 465 people from around the globe participated online. WOLA honored the Fray Matías de Córdova Human Rights Center and U.S. Congresswoman Veronica Escobar for their leadership to protect migrants and asylum seekers.

The Fray Matías de Córdova Human Rights Center, based in Tapachula, Chiapas, received the award for its work to support and protect migrants and asylum seekers at Mexico's southern border with Guatemala. The Center's advocacy has included exposing conditions in Mexico's largest migrant detention center and urging support for public policies that provide humane treatment of migrants and asylum seekers.



This recognition from WOLA will help us continue to denounce the raw reality provoked by immigration and asylum policies that are at odds with life and dignity and which cannot be sustained much longer. ”

- Brenda E. Ochoa Ortiz
Fray Matías de Cordova Human Rights Center



CONGRESSWOMAN VERONICA ESCOBAR (D-Texas)
2020 WOLA Human Rights Award Honoree

“

Rather than divide we must unite behind a vision of humanity and hope on the border. That's my commitment. I thank you all so much for this incredible honor.

”

– Congresswoman Veronica Escobar

Congresswoman Veronica Escobar (D-Texas), who represents the border city of El Paso, received the award for her advocacy to protect and defend migrants, asylum applicants, refugees, and their families. During her time in Congress, Escobar has become a powerful national voice countering the demonization of immigrants, passing legislation for greater oversight of border enforcement agencies, while forcefully challenging the Trump administration's "Remain in Mexico" policy, which created a humanitarian disaster at the border.

Maria Hinojosa, president and founder of Futuro Media Group and Congresswoman Norma Torres (D-CA) presented the 2020 Human Rights Awards to honorees the Fray Matías de Córdova Human Rights Center and Congresswoman Veronica Escobar (D-TX).



MARIA HINOJOSA

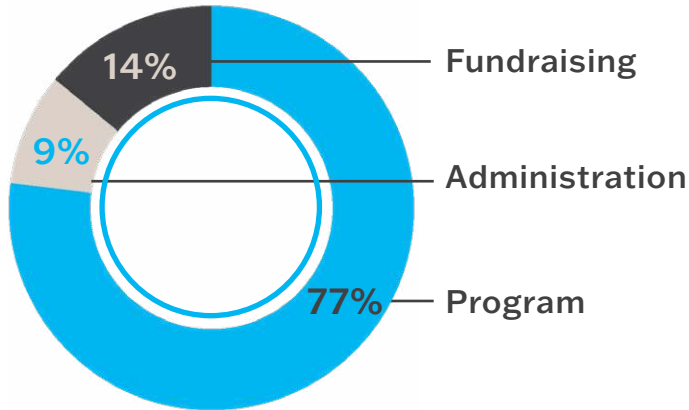
President & Founder, Futuro Media Group



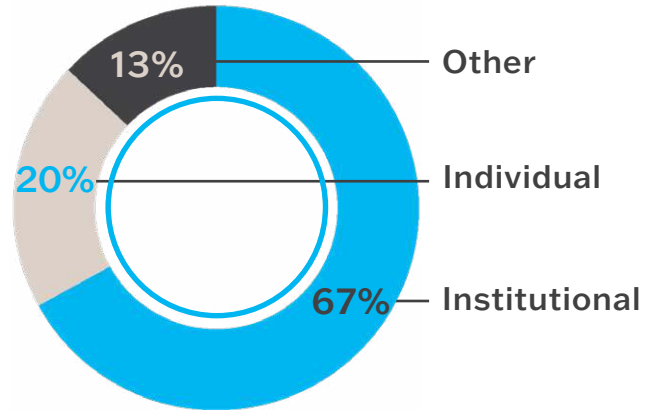
CONGRESSWOMAN NORMA TORRES (D-CA)

Smart Strategic Strong

EXPENSES



INCOME



SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWER GROWTH





NOTABLE PODCAST METRICS

Total 37,470

+15,500



Podcast
Listens

Total 46

+32



Episodes Released

1000



Subscribers

NOTABLE PRESS WORK

The Washington Post



UNIVISION

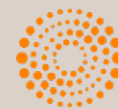
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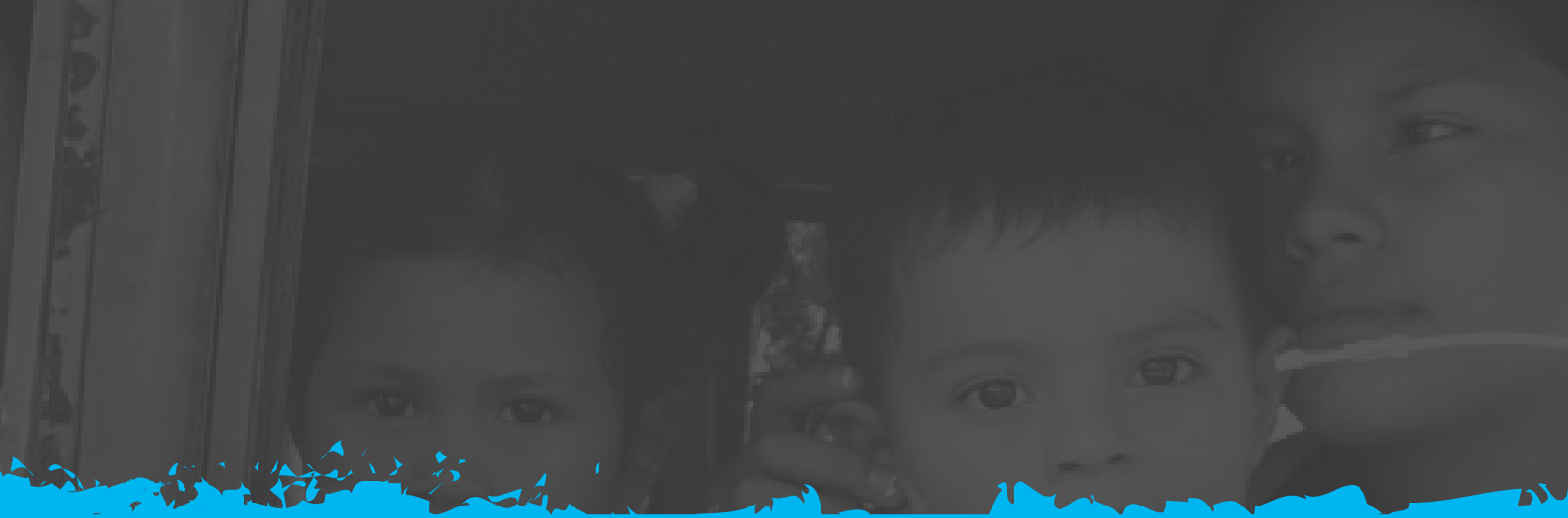
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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	Patricia Templin Castleman & Breau Castleman
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J. Ann Tickner	Sandra Conant
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James Swigert	Silvia M. Arron & David Oran
Jill Wayland	Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth
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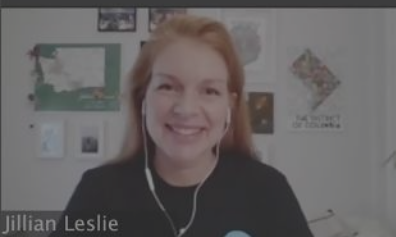
Emeritus Professor of International Relations and History, American University.
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Georgetown University
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ALEXANDER GROSS

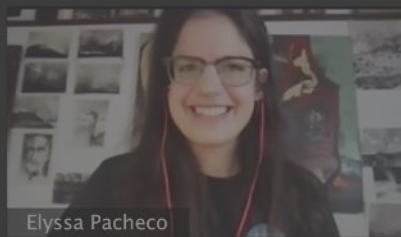
President,
Advantage Properties, Inc.,
Bethesda, MD



Jillian Leslie



Maureen Meyer



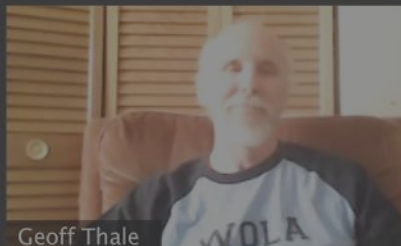
Elyssa Pacheco



Kim Durón



Lizabelt Avila



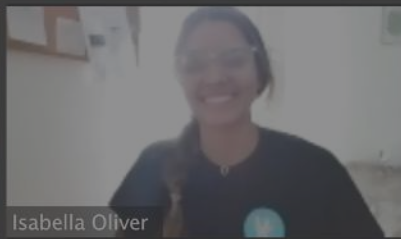
Geoff Thale



Julia Aikman-Cifuentes



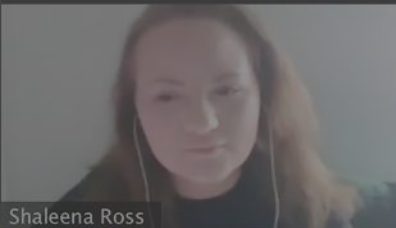
Kathy Gille



Isabella Oliver



Kristen Martinez-Gugerli



Shaleena Ross



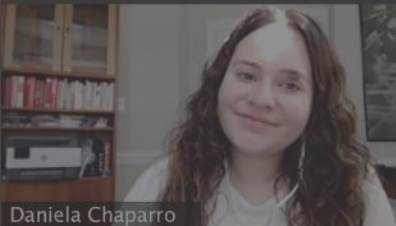
John Walsh



Gimena Sanchez-Garzoli



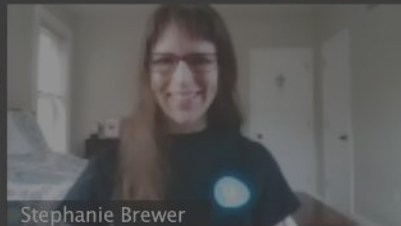
Matthew Bocanumenth



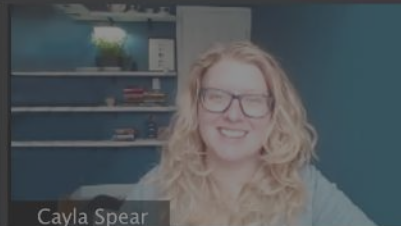
Daniela Chaparro



Adriana Beltrán



Stephanie Brewer



Cayla Spear



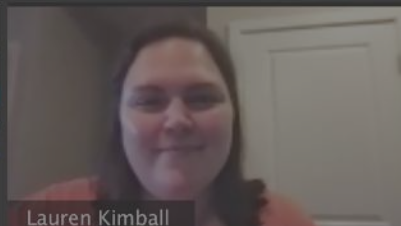
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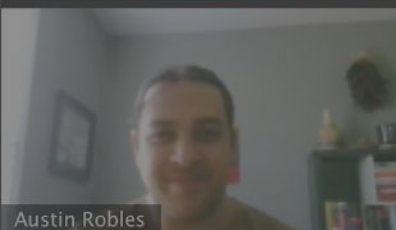
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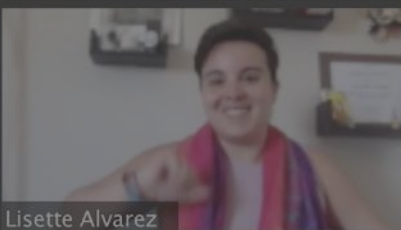
Adam Isacson



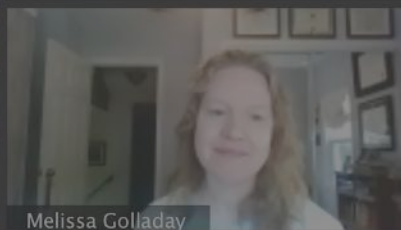
Lauren Kimball



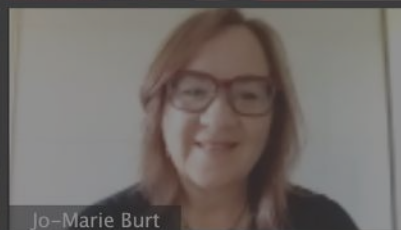
Austin Robles



Lisette Alvarez



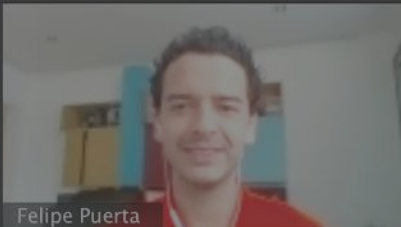
Melissa Golladay



Jo-Marie Burt



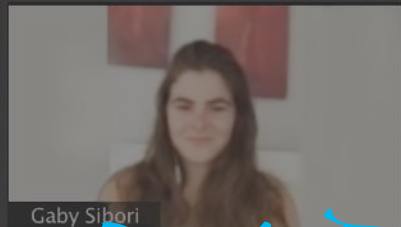
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WILLIAM LEOGRANDE

Senior Fellow



The Sally Yudelman Internship Program

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 2020, her legacy lived on as WOLA welcomed 20 qualified, passionate, and diverse student interns. Because the internship has gone virtual during the COVID-19 pandemic, this enabled us to consider a wider applicant pool, while fully incorporating the interns into WOLA's remote team. The program offers one of the most thorough, engaging, and formative human rights experiences in Washington, D.C.

Shaping the next generation of human rights leaders



Sequoia Mack



Claudia Roman



Elissa Prieto



Felipe Deidan-Fernandez



Helen Kovary



Ilana Aaquil



Jordi Amaral



Araceli Becerra



Louisa Carman



Lauren Hecht



Camila Rueda Torres



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