



WOLA WEEKLY

The Latest on Latin America

Friday, August 18, 2023

(Josue Decavele/Getty Images)

Dear {{FirstName or 'WOLA Supporter'}},

This week, I am in Guatemala City to monitor electoral conditions as the country prepares to hold presidential run-off elections on Sunday.

As you may recall, on June 25, Guatemala held the first round of these elections, which led the Supreme Electoral Tribunal to announce that Sandra Torres of the Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE) and Bernardo Arévalo, an anti-corruption candidate and leader of the progressive Movimiento Semilla, would compete in a second round.

As I said in a recent [statement](#) with Human Rights Watch urging the Guatemalan authorities to hold free and fair elections: “The country is on the brink of an unprecedented social and political crisis. Robust international oversight will be key to avert this crisis and help uphold the integrity of the people’s will.”

So far, the judiciary has been weaponized by a corrupt elite, journalists and activists have been criminalized and the authorities have interfered in the electoral process.

Also with regards to Guatemala, Senior Fellow, Jo-Marie Burt, published an [op-ed in *El Faro*](#) highlighting the trial in the Rancho Bejuco massacre case, in which 25 Indigenous Mayans, including 17 children, were allegedly killed by the Guatemalan Army. On August 17, a Guatemalan court heard closing statements from the nine defendants. The verdict is expected soon.

In other sad news, last week the former Ambassador of El Salvador to the U.S., [Francisco Altschul](#), passed away. Throughout his career, Ambassador Altschul was a deeply meaningful and important part of WOLA’s history. On behalf of WOLA, he will be dearly missed.

All this and more in this week’s WOLA Weekly.

Best,



Ana María Méndez Dardón
Director for Central America

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- 🇬🇹 On Sunday, Guatemala will hold presidential run-off elections between Sandra Torres of the Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE) and Bernardo Arévalo, of the progressive Movimiento Semilla. In a [joint statement](#), WOLA and HRW urge Guatemalan authorities to hold free and fair elections.
- 🇬🇹 On August 17, a Guatemalan court heard closing remarks from nine defendants in the Guatemalan Rancho Bejuco massacre case. Learn more about the case in this [op-ed](#) published in *El Faro* by Senior-Fellow, Jo-Marie Burt.
- 🇸🇻 Last week, WOLA President, Carolina Jiménez, penned an [opinion piece](#) in *El Faro* on recent legal reforms in El Salvador that would allow mass trials of up to 900 people. These new reforms are a threat to due process and other human rights.
- 🇨🇴 From May 31 to July 31, 2023, WOLA received reports that shed light on various human rights abuses and the dire security situation many face in Colombia. These reports serve as evidence to the U.S. Congress for the need to fund foreign aid to Colombia that supports policies for comprehensive peacebuilding. [Learn more](#) about these cases.
- 🇻🇪 In a [joint statement](#), alongside 500 civil society groups and individuals, WOLA highlights the grave violations against freedom of association in Venezuela.
- 🌿 Last week, WOLA [observed](#) Indigenous Peoples Day. As they continue to advocate for climate change and human rights, we urge the UN to review the classification of the coca leaf in Schedule I of the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, which for six decades has criminalized millions of people in the Andean-Amazon region.



IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

**WOLA IS
EXCITED TO
ANNOUNCE
THE LAUNCH
OF OUR
*Honorary
Council***

 Alberto Barrera Tyszko	 Bill Shipley	 Claudia Paz y Paz	 Diego Luna
 Francisco Goldman	 Gina Chavez	 Gioconda Belli	 Mercedes Doretti
 Sergio Aguayo	 Tom Harkin		

📍 Last week, WOLA launched its [Honorary Council](#). The committed members, lend their names as ambassadors to WOLA in an effort to strengthen our mission and message. [Learn more here.](#)

FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM



STAND WITH US IN DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

AMBASSADOR FRANCISCO ALTSCHUL



Ambassador Altschul with Eileen Rosin (on the left) and Cristina Eguizabal (on the right) at the 2011 WOLA Human Rights Award Ceremony and Benefit Gala.

We were saddened to learn of the death of Francisco Altschul, former Ambassador of El Salvador to the United States.

During the painful years of oppression in El Salvador during the 1980s, Altschul represented the opposition parties in Washington, DC. As an exile himself, he played a central role in educating people in the United States on the causes of the violence and speaking out for the thousands of Salvadorans who were forced to flee the country. After the peace accords were signed, he returned to El Salvador and, drawing on his training as an architect, he worked with nonprofits dedicated to housing and local development. He was appointed ambassador to the United States in 2010 and again in 2014.

Throughout his career, we at WOLA admired his commitment to the cause of human rights and justice, and are grateful for his life of service to the people of El Salvador. We extend our sympathy to his spouse, Melinda Delashmutt Altschul, and his family.

Read our [statement](#).

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

🇨🇴 In a recent episode of [Colombia Acuerdo Paz](#), rural women of Colombia discuss their efforts in empowering themselves in their communities and the importance of supporting their efforts in order to promote and implement peace in the country.

WEEKLY BORDER UPDATE



Weekly U.S.-Mexico Border Update

WOLA Border Oversight

Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas | Monitoring Conduct and Accountability in U.S. Border Law Enforcement

In April 2022, WOLA launched its one-of-a-kind [Border Oversight Database](#), which documents hundreds of reports of human rights violations and abuses against migrants and asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border.

WOLA'S 50th ANNIVERSARY



50 Years Fighting for Human Rights Across the Americas

SAVE THE DATE

CELEBRATE WOLA'S 50th ANNIVERSARY

WOLA is turning 50! We will host our 50th Anniversary Human Rights Awards and Benefit Gala on:

May 9, 2024
The Hamilton Hotel
Washington, DC

Mark your calendars to honor human rights champions from WOLA's past, present and future.

Join us as a Gala sponsor. Partner level sponsors and above will also be invited to an intimate reception on **September 21, 2023 at the Mexican Cultural Institute** to commemorate fifty years since the Chilean coup that led to the founding of WOLA.

The September 2023 reception and the May 2024 Gala will be part of a series of events over the next year to mark WOLA's 50 years of fighting for human rights across the Americas.

www.wola.org/wola-50th-anniversary

[LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR 50th ANNIVERSARY](#)

WOLA IN THE NEWS



Laura Dib
Director for Venezuela

"If you take a look at discussions in the legislature over the past 20 years, there has been next to no discussion on matters such as sexual and reproductive rights...and protection of LGBTQI rights, [...] And this is a result of the closure of civic spaces and the persecution of human rights groups and human rights defenders."

– *Al Jazeera*, [Mass arrest at LGBTQ club in Venezuela prompts outcry over discrimination](#)

"For at least 30 years, U.S. border policy has assumed that if the migration experience is dangerous and miserable at the border, with a high likelihood of deportation, then people won't come,' Isacson said. 'That keeps being proved wrong, as migration has been increasing steadily since the early 2010s — not just in the United States, but throughout the Americas.'"

– CBS News, [Crossings along U.S.-Mexico border jump as migrants defy extreme heat and asylum restrictions](#)



Adam Isacson
Director for Defense Oversight



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