



# Women, Drug Policies, and Incarceration in the Americas



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Tuesday, February 2nd 2016  
10:00am - 12:30pm

Hall of the Americas  
Organization of American States  
17th Street and Constitution N.W. Washington, D.C

The goal of the event is to launch a new publication, **“Women, Drug Policies and Incarceration: A Guide for Policy Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean”**, developed by the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the OAS, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) and Dejusticia. The guide—the first of its kind—offers a roadmap for officials and reform advocates for implementing policy changes that could benefit the thousands of women incarcerated on drug charges across the Americas.

The use of prison as a response to drugs has had a disproportionately negative impact on women. In Argentina, Brazil, and Costa Rica, more than 60 percent of the female prison population is incarcerated for drug-related offenses. Many of them have little education, live in poverty, and are the primary caregivers of dependent persons—children, youths, older persons, and the disabled.

Even though they bear the brunt of punitive policies, these women rarely pose any threat to society; most are arrested for low-level yet high-risk tasks (small-scale drug distribution, or transporting drugs); they become involved in response to poverty, or at times due to coercion by a partner or relative. Their incarceration contributes little if anything to dismantling illegal drug markets or improving public security. To the contrary, prison tends to worsen the situation, limiting their chances of finding decent and legal employment once on the outside, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle of poverty, involvement in drug markets, and incarceration.

What role can policymakers play to improve this situation, and how can changes in drug and sentencing policies end these vicious cycles? The speakers, who include experts in drug policy, gender, human rights, and a formerly incarcerated woman, will identify more humane and effective policies that can address the root causes of participation in the drug trade and limit the harms current policies can cause.

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### AGENDA

- 10:00-10:15      Opening Remarks  
- Secretary General of the OAS, Luis Almagro
- 10:15-10:45      Presentation of “Women, Drug Policies and Incarceration: A Guide for Policy Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean”  
- Nischa Pieris, Specialist, Inter-American Commission of Women, OAS
- 10:45-11:55      Roundtable “Women, Drugs, Prisons and Human Rights”  
  
Moderator: Paulina Duarte, Secretary for Multidimensional Security, Organization of American States  
  
- Zhuyem Molina, Criminal Gender and Legislative Advocacy Unit, Public Defender’s Office, Costa Rica  
- Kemba Smith, Author of Poster Child: The Kemba Smith Story and a formerly incarcerated woman  
- Coletta Youngers, Senior Fellow, Washington Office on Latin American (WOLA) and Associate, International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC)
- 11:55-12:25      Plenary debate
- 12:25-12:30      Closing Remarks  
- Carmen Moreno, Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission of Women /OAS

**To register, please click here.**

The event will be streamed live at <http://www.livestream.com/OASenglish2>

For more information or for press inquiries, please contact:

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The event will be taped and posted at [www.oas.org](http://www.oas.org) and [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org) at a later date.