



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

### **U.S. Presidency of the G20—An Opportunity to Champion Human Rights**

**Thursday, March 5, 2026**

**2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

**Room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building**

**Co-Chair James P. McGovern**

#### **As delivered**

Thank you very much, Co-Chair Smith. I want to welcome everybody to today's hearing on opportunities to promote human rights at the 2026 G20 Summit.

The Group of Twenty, or G20, is a forum for advancing international cooperation among the world's largest economies. This year, the presidency of the summit is held by the United States.

Parallel to the G20 process, engagement groups gather to form policy recommendations on a wide variety of topics. Five years ago, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosted the W20 Women's Summit in conjunction with its G20 presidency.

That event coincided with limited reforms by the Saudi Government to increase the freedom of women. But it did not translate into meaningful advancements in the ability of the Saudi people—men or women—to exercise the full spectrum of human rights. As I noted at a Commission hearing in 2020, hosting the W20 was part of a strategy by Muhammad bin Salman—the guy who ordered the execution of Jamal Khashoggi—to improve his country's reputation.

Engagement groups can do important work, and we will hear from witnesses involved in such efforts. But the Saudi example also reminds us that global forums can be used by governments to polish their image and whitewash serious human rights violations.

This concern is relevant as we consider proposals to recognize additional engagement groups within the G20 process, such as the Religion 20. As we will hear today, the United States is not currently well positioned to be a leader on human rights.

I worry that this G20 will be used to whitewash human rights abuses, as we saw in Saudi Arabia.

Our ability to press other countries to protect fundamental freedoms is proportional to our willingness to do that work ourselves. Yet here at home, our rights are under assault.

Freedom of expression, for example, is facing what one human rights attorney called, “the gravest assault on freedom of speech at least since the McCarthy era.”

How can this White House effectively combat supposed censorship abroad while it enables censorship at home by restricting press access to the executive branch, supporting bans on books on that don’t meet the ruling party’s ideological tests, and repressing independent media through the FCC?

Challenges to freedom of religion have taken a variety of forms. This year’s G20 Summit will be hosted in Florida, where religion is being weaponized to pass laws that infringe on bodily autonomy through extreme restrictions on reproductive healthcare.

A synagogue sued to block Florida’s 15-week abortion ban. It argued that the law codifies a specific religious view and impedes the practice of Judaism, which permits and sometimes requires abortion to protect the mother. Freedom *of* religion is not a license to *impose* religion.

Our foreign policy infrastructure for promoting human rights, including religious freedom, has also been attacked. As we will hear, key provisions of the International Religious Freedom Act remain unfulfilled: the State Department never released its 2024 IRF Report, no new Country of Particular Concern or Special Watch List designations were made beyond Nigeria, and the position of Ambassador-at-Large on International Religious Freedom remains vacant.

The preferential treatment of Christianity and demonization of Islam by Administration officials and Members of Congress severely undermine the efforts we do make to promote international religious freedom.

In a recent speech, Defense Secretary Hegseth blurred Administration policies with Christian edicts, calling them “not political” but “biblical.” And just yesterday, Speaker Mike called Iranians followers of a “misguided religion.”

By their own words, this Administration thinks human rights are optional. It imposes the language of “natural rights” and “Western values”—labels that are reinterpreted and narrowed to restrict universal rights and exclude marginalized groups.

Human rights, my friends, are not optional. They are fundamental to the protection of human dignity—and they are enshrined in the international laws, standards, and treaties which this Commission is mandated to promote and defend.

Like any international forum, the G20 Summit represents an opportunity to raise human rights issues with world leaders. The G20 Interfaith Forum already ensures that discussions on religious freedom and other rights are substantive, inclusive, and principled. I encourage those who attend to take that opportunity seriously.

But it would be irresponsible, and frankly unconvincing, for the United States to speak about moral leadership on human rights without first confronting the real concerns about our own record.

With that, I thank the panelists for being here and I look forward to your testimony.