



## Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

### Witness Biographies

## Laws Regulating Foreign NGOs: Human Rights Implications

### Panel I



**Gina Romero**, national of Colombia, was appointed as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association and took up her functions in April 2024. Prior to her appointment, Ms. Romero led several initiatives for the promotion and defense of democracy and rule of law. She is one of the founders and served for nearly 10 years as Executive Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Democracy ([Redlad](#)). In this position, she also served as Secretariat of the Civil Society Pillar of the [Community of Democracies](#). In these capacities, she has had direct relation with multiple stakeholders (including governments, civil society, academia and private sector representatives) in 19 countries in the American Continent, and at least 35 in Europe, Africa and Asia.

In her expert capacity, Ms. Romero was involved in several actions at the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, including the request of public hearings on specific regional trends and human rights violations, the submission of inputs collectively built for reporting backslides in rights protections in specific countries and specific rights. Also, she coordinated actions to bring voices and inputs of Latin American social actors (including CSO, social movements and indigenous and afro descendant communities) to several UN mechanisms and mandate holders. Besides, Ms. Romero has been an advocate for the increase and improvement of citizen participation and engagement in intergovernmental organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS).

In the past 15 years Ms. Romero has overseen the presentation of 9 reports for the Universal Periodic Review, 450 reports on violations of civic space associated rights, a Latin American report on police repression during the Covid-19 Pandemic, and over 100 alerts on civic space shrinking and democracy backsliding in LAC and other regions.

## Panel II



**Dr. Suparna Chaudhry** is an Associate Professor in the Department of International Affairs at Lewis & Clark College. Her research interests include human rights, international law, and political violence, with a specific focus on the causes and consequences of state persecution of NGOs and activists. Her work has been published in *International Organization*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *International Interactions*, *International Studies Review*, *Journal of Human Rights*, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Global Policy*, as well as *The Washington Post* and *Foreign Policy*, and her forthcoming book *Civil Societies, Uncivil States: State Repression of NGOs* will be published in 2026 with Cornell University Press. Previously, she was a Post-Doctoral Fellow in U.S. Foreign Policy and International Security at Dartmouth College. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Yale University, and an M.A. in International Relations from the University of Chicago.



**Daniel Hegedüs** is the German Marshall Fund's regional director for Central Europe. He writes and speaks extensively on democratic backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe, and the European and foreign affairs of the Visegrad countries. He is frequently quoted in outlets such as AFP, the Financial Times, the New York Times, Euractiv, EU Observer and Der Spiegel. He has studied political science, history, and European law at the Eötvös Loránd University Budapest and Humboldt University in Berlin. Prior to joining GMF he worked in different research, lecturing, and project-management positions at Freedom House, the German Council on Foreign Relations, and the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. He has taught at the Institute for Eastern-European Studies at the Free University Berlin, Humboldt University in Berlin, and the Eötvös Loránd University Budapest.



**Ana María Méndez Dardón** is a Guatemalan lawyer specialized in international human rights law with a Master in Political Science from the University of Guelph. She is currently Director for Central America at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) where she promotes research and advocacy on strengthening democracy, human rights, rule of law and judicial independence. She served as special advisor to the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) to address corruption and structural impunity, as well as to contribute to peacebuilding efforts. In 2013, she was appointed Private and Strategic Affairs Undersecretary of the Public Prosecutor's Office of Guatemala during Claudia Paz y Paz's term. She has worked for decades to strengthen access to justice and promote human rights in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador with various civil society organizations, including think tanks and grassroots groups, the United Nations and government institutions. She is a research affiliate of the Center for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide and Crimes against Humanity at the City University of New York. She

was a columnist for *Nómada* and *El Periódico* and co-author of *Mujeres Ante los Tribunales de Fuero Especial*, an analysis of women who were illegally detained during the dictatorship of Efraín Ríos Montt in Guatemala between 1982 and 1983.



**Michael Shellenberger** is CBR Chair of Politics, Censorship, and Free Speech at the University of Austin. He is a best-selling author, a publisher of the Twitter files, and a pro-human environmentalist. He has broken a number of major stories, including San Francisco's supervised drug consumption site and cash incentives for homelessness, FBI misinformation about the Hunter Biden laptop, climate pseudoscience and climate anxiety, and more. As a leading expert on the suppression of speech who testifies and advises governments worldwide, Michael is uniquely qualified to lead UATX in its studies of Politics, Censorship, and Free Speech.



**Almut Rochowanski** is an independent activist. For the past 20 years she has collaborated with grassroots civil society organizations in Russia, especially the North Caucasus, Ukraine, the South Caucasus, Central Asia and Belarus, on a wide range of issues that were identified by grassroots activists as their priorities and/or existential needs: mobilizing resources; devising strategies and designing projects; learning; creating local and global networks; protecting themselves against threats. In the course of this work, much of it centered on women's rights and feminist peace, she has engaged in refugee protection and asylum cases in the U.S. and Europe; grant-writing, grant-making, grant proposal review and advising grant-makers; organizing local and regional conferences and workshops for activists; mentoring young activists; strategic human rights litigation; and advocacy with policy-makers in the U.S., Europe, E.U. institutions and U.N. institutions. The experience of working with grassroots NGOs depending on foreign funding and soon under pressure from so-called foreign agent laws led her explore alternative, domestic resource mobilization models to wean Russian, Kyrgyz, Moldovan etc civil society off their dependence on foreign grants. She continues to support grassroots activists in the former Soviet Union, while contributing to critical analysis of Western foreign policy and foreign aid programs.