

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing
on
US Presidency of the G20-An Opportunity to Champion Human Rights
March 5, 2026
2118 Rayburn House Office Building

STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Submitted by:

Dr. Anya Schiffrin
Senior lecturer in Practice, Columbia University's School of International and Public
Affairs
Member, Media 20 Initiative U.S. Host Committee*

The United States presidency of the G-20 is an ideal time to promote human rights as a vital pillar in the global agenda for stability and prosperity. A key human right is freedom of expression and this has been enshrined in a number of international agreements including Article 19 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#). But freedom of expression and even the right to receive, seek or impart information is not just an end in itself as an important human right but is also a means for sustaining all the other human rights. For this reason, we believe that in discussion of human rights it is important to emphasize the role of the media.

The G-20's stated aim is to promote economic growth, stability and international cooperation. These goals are intrinsically tied to a free, pluralistic and sustainable media. Information which is authoritative, reliable and factual is essential for societies to function.

Indeed, in 2024, the G-20 devoted attention to the concept of "information integrity" in part because free and fair elections rely on healthy information ecosystems. We would add that reliable journalism has a demonstrated effect in

promoting democracy, civic engagement and government accountability. All of these enhance societal trust and have important effects on the protection and promotion of human rights as well as economic development.

Economists and political scientists have for years used rigorous analysis to demonstrate the beneficial economic effects of journalism. It is well known that rigorous journalism promotes accountability, transparency and helps fight corruption. Government responsiveness is [boosted](#) by the presence of news outlets and the returns on investment in investigative journalism have been [demonstrated](#). So too it has been [shown](#) that informative media coverage of political developments, such as public debates between political candidates, builds voters' knowledge and interest and fosters accountability of public officials and companies. One shining example is the investigative series known as the [Panama Papers](#), a global journalistic collaboration that exposed corrupt criminal networks involving politicians and others who were availing themselves of public coffers in countries around the world. This is the kind of work that makes journalists a target. As data by the Committee to Protect Journalists [shows](#), since 2012 more than 150 journalists have been killed while reporting on corruption outside of war zones. Most of these killings happened in countries with [high levels](#) of public corruption.

For journalism to play a key role in helping society, journalists must be able to report freely and safely. A key element is also that journalism must be free of outside interference, government and corporate capture and be on a sound financial footing. But there are further benefits from a strong and independent media, apart from its role in promoting human rights and accountability. Economic growth, [capital markets](#) and global economic arrangements all benefit from a well-functioning media eco system that provides reliable and timely information. Without reliable signals the job of [screening](#) between, for instance, good and bad projects becomes too difficult

and credit markets will fail. Entire [schools](#) of economic thought explain the importance of information to markets. The [gatekeeper](#) function of the media is key.

And yet today, journalism is beset by difficulties, which some have termed a “[polycrisis](#)”. These include [attacks on the press](#), with some going so far as claiming it as the “enemy of the people,” rather than correctly describing its role as the *protector* of the people. Today, traditional media business models in which advertising has been central have been weakened, especially as social media and AI effectively steal their intellectual property, with little or no compensation, so that AI search can give audiences current information produced by journalists but which the AI firms have not paid for. Not surprisingly, advertisers gravitate to where the eyeballs are. But as the media sector struggles, it becomes more prone to media concentration or full [media capture](#), especially to purchase by super-wealthy, whose objectives go beyond—or should I more accurately say, sometimes are contrary to—providing the critical functions of an independent critical media, or even making money. Rather they use their control of the media to shape the societal narratives, to advance their special interests, to influence or serve politics in ways that enhance their pocketbook, but not to report on topics that may run counter to powerful interests. It is in all our interests to ensure a healthy media ecosystem that safeguards basic human rights of expression and the right to information, and that will require more than just freedom from interference. What will be required is public support for journalism, enforcement of competition laws and a framework that respects intellectual property and requires payment to help defray the cost of producing quality information. So too states must be allowed to regulate AI if the Federal government [will not](#).

The G-20 was founded on the principle that the global cooperation that it might enable could enhance global wellbeing. It was established at a moment when the need was glaringly apparent, with the threat of the collapse of the global financial system in 2008. Its success led to the realization of the need for cooperation among

many other parts of the global community, among cities, workers, think-tanks, businesses. An important addition to this roster occurred last year in South Africa with the creation of the M(media) 20. The media crisis is global. The potential consequences of the deterioration of the information ecosystem are enormous—and some are already apparent. Our democracies and our economies will suffer. All the other crises which our world faces will become worse and harder to resolve—how could it be otherwise? It is only with good, reliable information that we can find effective long-term solutions.

I have joined the international advisory board of the [M20 Initiative](#), and the US host committee, because I believe the international community, working together, can begin to address today's media crisis. This is not a second order matter, something to be put in a footnote to some communique. Anyone concerned with the functioning of our democracy, our economy, our society must realize both the importance of an independent and critical media and the media crisis that the world confronts today. The G-20 may have begun as an attempt to address, cooperatively, a global financial crisis, but in the almost two decades since, it has grown into much more than that. It is not just about finance, business, and economics. It is about how the world can work together to promote the wellbeing of all the citizens of the world. I hope my message is clear: a strong and independent media is a necessary ingredient, but there is a media crisis—in some ways deeper and more profound than the 2008 financial crisis—that needs to be attended to.

I urge the United States, and those that lead the G-20 in the following years, to begin serious discussions about what might be done and to push for the recognition of a robust, independent and pluralistic media as a vital component for societies in the G-20 final communiqué.