U.S. Presidency of the G20 –
An Opportunity to Champion Human Rights

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March 5, 2026

Good afternoon and welcome to everyone joining us today for this important hearing on U.S. Presidency of the G20. I'd particularly like to recognize and welcome several Romanian parliamentary deputies who are here with us today.

As the United States assumes the 2026 Presidency of the G20, the administration has a rare opportunity to promote human rights within the world's leading forum for international economic cooperation. The G20 rightly focuses on macroeconomic stability, financial regulation, energy policy, and trade—vital priorities that foster growth and prosperity. And President Trump has rightly stated that these issues will be the core of this year's G20 agenda.

This emphasis is essential—focus on the core issues of growth and stability rather than endless expansion into peripheral bureaucratic issues is what the world needs and wants from the G20 right now.

At the same time, focus on the core issues does not exclude all human rights issues from the G20, since several crisis issues touch on those core issues. The economy exists to promote human flourishing, and people do not flourish apart from certain respect for fundamental rights and freedoms.

That is why today's hearing will explore how human rights—especially freedom of religion or belief and freedom of speech—can be elevated during the G20 Presidency.

One of the most pressing crises today is the denial of freedom of religion — of the right to live as people of faith, free from fear and persecution. According to Open Doors, approximately 25,000 Christians have been killed for their faith, globally, in the past 5 years. Most of them were killed in situations of some connivance or complicity on the part of governments. Ancient Christian communities in Syria, Iraq, Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey, Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East and Africa have in the past twenty years been ethnically cleansed or threatened, harassed and persecuted, in many cases into near extinction, and the virus still spreads. Here I want to thank President Trump for his support for Nigerians living under the threat of jihadist violence – the great majority of those 25,000 Christians killed have been Nigerian Christians. President Trump has said, "Christianity is facing an existential threat in Nigeria… The United States cannot stand by while such atrocities are happening in Nigeria…" And President Trump is acting.

It would be a missed opportunity for the G20 to meet in the U.S. and this issue not to be raised. The G20 is the leading and perhaps only effective international forum for cooperation among leading powers both Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu at a time when broad civilizational tensions between them seem to be tragically increasing.

At the same time, cooperation and dialogue in matters touching on religion has not been on the G20 agenda since 2022.

One promising avenue for putting it on the G20 agenda is the G20 Religion Forum, known as the R20. In 2022, under Indonesia's G20 Presidency, the first R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders was incorporated into the official program of G20 Main Events. As Professor Mary Ann Glendon wrote in *First Things*, this marked the first time the G20 formally acknowledged that religion can and should function as a source of global solutions rather than merely as a source of conflict.

The R20 was organized by Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim organization, led by Yahya Staquf. Nahdlatul Ulama has undertaken significant efforts to promote a pluralistic and tolerant vision of Islam and to marginalize extremist ideologies that fuel violence and terror. The R20 communiqué in Bali called for a "global alliance founded upon shared civilizational values" and for preventing the political weaponization of identity and curtailing communal hatred.

Religious believers constitute more than 80 percent of the world's population. If the G20 is serious about inclusive and sustainable development, it cannot ignore the moral and cultural forces that shape the lives of billions, including their economic lives. The R20 offers a vehicle for engaging religious leaders and communities in addressing religious persecution, identity-based

violence, modern slavery, displacement, and threats posed by emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence.

I urge the Trump administration to consider formally recognizing the R20 as a permanent G20 Engagement Group. The R20 would strengthen the cause of human dignity, amplify voices committed to peace, pluralism, and freedom, and help counter religious extremism and defend persecuted minorities. For these reasons, it deserves serious consideration and support.

Another human right with profound economic implications that demands inclusion in the G20's core economic and policy coordination agenda is **freedom of speech**. Around the world—including in several G20 countries—regulatory pressures on media and online expression are intensifying, often under the guise of combating "misinformation" or "hate speech." In parts of Europe and elsewhere, an epidemic of state- and NGO-driven censorship has emerged, where laws ostensibly aimed at public safety are weaponized to silence dissent, suppress religious viewpoints, and marginalize political opposition. This phenomenon is amplified by a **censorship-industrial complex**—a network of governments, technology platforms, NGOs, and international bodies—that, under banners of safety or order, deplatforms, demonetizes, and stigmatizes lawful speech. Religious perspectives, especially on issues of life, family, and human identity, frequently face discriminatory treatment in content moderation practices.

As President Trump has powerfully stated, "If we don't have Free Speech, then we just don't have a Free Country. It's as simple as that." Under his

leadership, the United States has taken decisive action domestically by removing government instructions to social media companies on content, defunding NGOs that promote censorship in the name of countering "disinformation," and advancing these principles in foreign policy through funding and advocacy. When state-mandated or officially encouraged censorship undermines freedom of speech and media freedom on the internet and social media, the economy suffers deeply: businesses and financial markets cannot operate effectively or compete globally when trapped in a bubble of enforced narratives and suppressed information flows. This is a clear lesson from the collapse of communism, where controlled information stifled innovation and prosperity—yet some have failed to heed it.

During the U.S. G20 Presidency, the administration should champion the foundational democratic principle that the remedy for harmful speech is more speech, not enforced silence. This can be advanced through diplomatic engagement promoting **transparency in content moderation**, accountability for any government pressure exerted on private platforms, and robust protections for religious and political expression online.

The G20's Digital Economy Working Group and related discussions on information integrity, digital trust, and platform governance provide natural venues to elevate these issues, ensuring commitments to an open, innovation-driven digital economy align with human rights rather than enabling suppression. By encouraging Engagement Groups to prioritize principles of sovereignty, transparency, accountability, religious freedom, and free expression—and by

insisting on clarity in funding and governance for civil society participants—the United States can help shape a Leaders' Declaration that delivers not only technocratic consensus but genuine moral clarity on defending open discourse as essential to global economic vitality and human flourishing.