



Statement by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
on recent changes to government requirements
for “Canada Summer Jobs” program

Employment and Social Development Canada posted information on its website, dated 19 December 2017, announcing a major change to its requirements regarding applications for federal funding under its Canada Summer Jobs program for youth employment. Attestation must now be included that *“both the job and the organization’s core mandate respect individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as other rights. These include reproductive rights and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.”*

According to the Department, this insistence on reproductive rights (which specifically includes *“the right to access safe and legal abortions”*), sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression is intended to *“prevent youth (as young as 15 years of age) from being exposed to employment within organizations that may promote positions that are contrary to the values enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and associated case law.”*

Faith communities consider abortion, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression as major questions with ethical, moral, social and personal bearing which determine our understanding of human dignity and thus appreciation for the meaning and significance of each and every human life. This new policy conflicts directly with the right to freedom of religion and conscience which too are enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well in associated case law. It seriously undermines the right to religious freedom since the Government of Canada is directly limiting the right of religious traditions to hold, teach and practise their principles and values in public.

In addition to the obvious and regrettable infringement of freedom of conscience and religion in such matters as are raised by the new policy, there will be unfortunate consequences on the ground: summer camps will be forced to close; the services of numerous non-profit organizations will be reduced; valuable opportunities for apprenticeship will be lost. These effects, to name but a few, will be felt in Catholic dioceses and organizations as well as in many other faith communities across Canada.

Furthermore, the recently announced policy represents an attempt to restrict the voices of faith communities in Canadian democracy and to limit their participation in the public square. Moreover, it runs counter to the recommendations issued at the end of March 2017 by the Consultation Panel on the Political Activities of Charities which had been appointed by the Minister of National Revenue. These recommendations include that charities be allowed to provide information for the purpose of informing and swaying public opinion, and to advocate to keep or change law or policy, either in Canada (any level of government) or outside of Canada.

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