



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you are probably aware, a major issue has recently arisen regarding our freedoms as Canadians in regard to Canada's Summer Jobs Program. The decision of our federal government to require consent to an "attestation" if a group wants to apply for a grant to hire young people for summer jobs is at the center of this issue. To date, the federal government has not listened to the concerns of many Canadians including a wide variety of different faith groups across the country.

We, as Catholics support the rights contained in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These important rights that we enjoy in our country include: the right to life; freedom of conscience and religion; freedom of thought and expression including freedom of the press; the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and; freedom of association. These rights, which are synonymous with a free country are now being challenged by the promotion of other perceived rights not found in the Charter such as "*reproductive rights*" like a right to an abortion. The Canadian government recognizes abortion as a human right that is at the "*core of the Government of Canada's foreign and domestic policies.*" In order to qualify for a Summer Job's Grant, an organization is required to express support for these so-called reproductive rights. Under this requirement no Catholic organization, parish or charity could possibly qualify for such grants. Furthermore, the government is demanding that the core mandate of any organization respect the individual human rights in the Charter plus the perceived right to an abortion. This is totally unacceptable and conflicts with the freedoms we enjoy under the Charter.

Abortion in fact, is not a right in Canada nor does the Charter of Rights and Freedoms say that it is. Unfortunately, Canada is one of the very few countries in the world that has no law governing abortion at any stage of the development of the child. The Supreme Court decision, striking down Canada's abortion laws in 1988 did not state that there was a right to abortion. In fact there was recognition among the justices that the state has a legitimate interest in protecting the unborn. The court left legislation regarding abortion up to the federal parliament which has failed in this task over the past 30 years.

The attestation demanded by the federal government represents the particular belief of the current government and Canadians should not be coerced into supporting it. I strongly advise all parishes and Catholic organizations not to sign this attestation if they desire a grant for the summer jobs program. Instead, I would recommend that they fill out the basic information required but leave blank this attestation and submit a letter expressing your opposition to it. Furthermore, I would encourage all Catholics to write to their Member of Parliament as soon as possible and express disagreement with this unreasonable policy. I include a sample letter for this purpose.

It is my hope that the government of Canada will listen to reason, hear the voices of the many Canadians who have expressed concerns about this issue and delete this attestation from the application form of the summer jobs program. We uphold each human life as sacred from conception onward and strongly support *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), which held that every member of the human family enjoys the right to life.

Yours in Christ,



✚Richard Gagnon
Archbishop of Winnipeg