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of Toronto

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Remarks from Cardinal Thomas Collins – Interfaith Press Conference on Canada Summer Jobs – January 25, 2018

Good afternoon.

We know that with the changes to the Canada Summer Jobs guidelines application process for 2018, many organizations will be deemed ineligible because they are unable or unwilling to attest that their “core mandate” and beliefs align with the current government’s self-identified values. These groups, though their views and actions are accepted by law and by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, are being denied equal access to a government benefit solely because of their religious beliefs or conscientious objection.

Faith communities across the country make incredible contributions to strengthening our cities, provinces and country. When embracing the poor and marginalized, we do not ask for one’s background or belief. We serve them because it is our faith that motivates us to do so.

In the Archdiocese of Toronto alone, we know that at least 150 summer jobs will be impacted by the new application requirements. A summer camp for deaf children, employment for developmentally challenged young people, students cutting grass or helping with gardening, welcoming newcomers to our country.

These jobs are important for young students – but we must also remember the people who rely on the services they provide. It is deeply troubling to me that all are involved are being forced to endorse a particular set of values prescribed by the government.

In managing its programs, the government should respect and accommodate the diversity of values and beliefs within Canadian society and must itself abide by the *Charter* in its treatment of individuals and groups. The fundamental freedoms of conscience and religion, thought, belief, opinion and expression, as guaranteed in the *Charter*, must be respected and affirmed in legislation, regulations and policy.

We hope that the government will hear the voices here today and those across Canada that have respectfully asked that the attestation be removed or amended. While we may disagree on many fundamental issues, we all share the desire to live in a democratic and free nation where Canadians respect and work alongside one another, thoughtfully and peacefully.