

We are blessed to have the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It establishes the following freedoms: “(a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association.”

The Charter then identifies our rights, including: “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”

Recently, Christian charities and the media have criticized the Prime Minister and the Federal Government for undermining these freedoms and rights through new criteria to qualify for youth employment funding.

The Federal Government offers public funds to groups that hire youths for the summer and for service projects. These jobs provide valuable services to the community through many small organizations, charities, and different church denominations, including several parishes in the Ottawa region.

These programs also help students gain valuable work experience and pay for their education.

To be eligible for summer student funding, an employer must attest: “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...”

This situation has provoked an uproar. On Monday, the National Post reported that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau responded, *“An organization that has as its stated goal to remove rights from Canadians, to remove the right that women have fought for to determine what happens to their own bodies, is not in line with where the charter (of Rights) is or where the government of Canada is.”*

This is a disingenuous statement. There are no Charter reproductive rights or reproductive freedoms despite the Prime Minister’s claims. Any Canadian can verify this by reading the Charter of Rights and Freedoms online. Nonetheless, Employment and Social Development Canada can now deny organizations summer job funding if they fail to attest to endorse a non-existent right.

The Canadian Catholic community is particularly dismayed. This attestation excludes any Catholic parish or charity from funding for hiring a summer student. We cannot affirm that we support a (non-existent) right to abortion, which is what the euphemism “reproductive rights” means.

Further upsetting many is the Prime Minister’s confused personal comments regarding the logically impossible coexistence of his identity as a Roman Catholic and his support of abortion. The National Post states, *“He’s a Catholic who has long had to reconcile his religious beliefs with his responsibilities as a political leader and he said the latter demands that he defend people’s rights.”*

Even if Mr. Trudeau were not a Catholic Christian, the fact remains that he cannot invent, promote or defend a non-existent right.

Do Canadians have freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, or not?

With this new qualification to access \$215 million in tax funds to finance 70,000 student summer jobs, the Federal Government is denying these freedoms on a false pretext. It is coercing a controversial attestation from pliant employers and is punishing employers who cannot, in good conscience, agree. The freshly launched \$105 million (over three years) Canada Service Corps has the same eligibility criteria with the same coercive effect.

Apparently, Canadians have the freedom to hold only the beliefs and opinions approved by the current government. Who is defending our Charter rights and freedoms in this situation?