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**Statement from York University President Mamdouh Shoukri on Religious Accommodation**

Many of you have no doubt seen recent media reports regarding the request of a York University student for religious accommodation in an online course. This issue is obviously of interest to the broader York community and, therefore, I feel it is important to make the University's position very clear.

York is a secular university. A clear [statement](#) on the definition of secular universities in Canada was issued the year I joined York, and it is a statement I stand behind today.

York University is committed to providing a place of study and work which upholds the democratic and pluralistic values of Canadian society. The University's policies and procedures, which include its academic rules and regulations, are designed to uphold those values and to be fully compliant with all legal requirements, including the duty to accommodate.

Like other institutions, we are on occasion faced with complex and challenging issues raised by requests for religious accommodation. Every request for accommodation is reviewed carefully and decisions are based on the individual merits of the request. In the recent case, it is important to note that the student in question was never granted the accommodation he requested. Every case comes with its individual complexities and we strive to reach decisions in a fair and reasonable manner.

Let me be clear: religious accommodation should not be our sole focus when trying to balance principles and rights that are central to the fundamentals of a secular society. Religious accommodation cannot be implemented at the expense of the infringement of the rights of others. We must always safeguard rights such as gender equality, academic freedom and freedom of expression, which form the foundation of any secular post-secondary institution. Sexism, racism and other forms of hatred and intolerance have no place on our campuses.

I believe we have an opportunity here to have a broad discussion about the complexities involved with the issue of accommodation. As evidenced by the recent media coverage, this issue is one that many people, myself included, feel passionately about. We are fortunate to live in a country where we do not cower from tough issues, but face them head on with transparent discussion and rigorous yet reasonable debate.

Throughout its history, York University has been a leader in its commitment to equity and social justice. We will continue to defend the values of diversity and the principle of equality for all students, and to foster a community that upholds the pluralistic values and principles that represent the hallmark of what it means to be Canadian.

Mamdouh Shoukri  
President and Vice-Chancellor

