

For Immediate Release

2 June 2011

NWCI again urges women politicians to support Justice for Magdalenes

Susan McKay, CEO of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI), is writing to all women TDs, Senators, and Local Councillors encouraging them to support Justice of Magdalene's (JFM) proposed "Restorative Justice and Reparations Scheme" for all survivors of the Magdalene Laundries. McKay's letter reminds women politicians that:

"JFM is calling for; an apology from the State and the religious orders who ran the Magadalen laundries, a lump sum compensation scheme for women survivors, a statutory pension reflecting their years of work in the laundry institutions, and complete access to their records...The National Women's Council supports this call for justice."

The NWCI letter coincides with the expected announcement next week by Minister for Justice, Mr. Alan Shatter, T.D., who told the Dáil on 18 May last that he will "bring the matter before the Government by the end of the first week in June at the very latest" (<http://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2011-05-18.364.0&s=magdalene#g365.0>)

McKay's letter reminds politicians of the IHRC *Assessment* of JFM's inquiry application (9 November 2010), which recommended that the government establish a statutory inquiry into abuses at the Magdalene laundries and provide redress where appropriate. The letter also refers politicians to the UN Committee Against Torture's examination of Ireland last week, during which a number of Committee members challenged the government's position on the laundries.

Susan McKay, CEO of NWCI, said: "Women politicians throughout the country have expressed their deep concerns to us about the position of the women who continue to live with the trauma of their experiences in the Magdalene Laundries. The UN Committee against Torture has made its position clear and has repeated its requests for an independent investigation into the Magdalene Laundries and called for redress for the women who suffered" she said.

"We are again writing to all women T.D.'s Senators and Councillors calling on them as women, as public representatives and as people charged with the responsibility to ensure that justice and human rights prevail, to do what they can to bring justice and a sense of peace to the women involved. We are asking them to communicate with each other within and between their parties and political alliances at local and national levels and to exert their collective influence to bring this matter to a satisfactory conclusion" she added.

Mari Steed, Director of JFM's Coordinating Committee, said, "The world is watching to see how Ireland metes justice to its most vulnerable citizens. And a decision must be reached soon: time is not on the side of these women and we cannot abide a continued policy of 'deny til' they die'".

[ENDS]

Note to Editors: Copy of Susan McKay's Letter attached

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2nd June 2011

Dear Deputy,

Last year, I wrote to all women TDs, Senators and Councillors seeking support for the campaign for justice for women who were incarcerated in the Magdalene Laundries. This campaign is being led by one of our members, the Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) survivor advocacy group, and has received a significant amount of media coverage in recent weeks and months [Irish Examiner May 6th](#) [Irish Times May 6th](#) [Irish Times may 12th](#) [irishcentral.com](#). [Irish Times UN Committee against Torture 2011](#)

In November 2010, the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) published its [Assessment](#) of Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) inquiry application documenting human rights violations in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries. The Assessment recommended that the State should "establish a statutory mechanism to investigate the matters advanced by Justice for Magdalenes and in appropriate cases to grant redress where warranted."

The IHRC Assessment clearly highlights the failure on the part of the State to adequately protect the women and young girls involved from abusive conditions, specifically from wrongful and unlawful detention, inhuman and degrading treatment, and forced labour and servitude. It also recognizes the importance of restorative justice now for aging and elderly women.

"No one in Irish society has apologized to these institutional abuse survivors. The Laundries were not included in the Residential Institutional Redress Act 2002. These women, as a result, were excluded from the Residential Institutions Redress Board. They are, simply put, the Nation's disappeared—abandoned and forgotten in the present as in the past" (JFM) <http://itsapoliticalworld.wordpress.com/>

JFM is calling for; an apology from the State and the religious orders who ran the Magadalen laundries, a lump sum compensation scheme for women survivors, a statutory pension reflecting their years of work in the laundry institutions, and complete access to their records. They do not believe that an extension of the current redress scheme would be an appropriate approach as it would involve a stressful adversarial process incompatible with the age and vulnerable position in life of Magdalene survivors. The National Women's Council supports this call for justice.

The United Nations Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) examined Ireland for the first time on the extent to which it is meeting its human rights obligations to prevent torture, other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment on 23rd and 24th May 2011. In their [Submission](#) to the Committee, JFM drew attention to Ireland's legal duties under the Convention Against Torture to promptly and impartially investigate allegations of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and to ensure redress for the victims of such treatment. JFM's submission also included testimonies from four women who had spent time in the Laundries.

The submission highlighted the continuing degrading treatment that the women who spent time in Magdalene Laundries are suffering today because of the government's ongoing failure to apologise, investigate and compensate for the abuse.

During the UNCAT session the Irish government representative repeated his assertion to the Committee that the abuses happened a considerable time ago in private institutions. He argued that the Department had received no complaints of criminal offences from laundry survivors. He said that the majority of women entered the laundries voluntarily, and if they were minors, with the consent of parents or guardians. He added that only one institution in Dublin was used as a remand centre, and in those cases, the period of detention lasted only a matter of days in

most cases. He also claimed that this institution was subject to inspection and that there is no evidence of mistreatment in these cases. JFM challenges each of these assertions.

In her response to this statement, the Committee's Deputy Rapporteur, Myrna Kleopas, reiterated that it is the responsibility of the State to investigate abuses in the Magdalene Laundries under Articles 12 and 13 of the Convention and to find ways to ensure redress for survivors under Article 14. She said: "*in view of the evidence that we have ... I think it is the responsibility of the state party to investigate and also to find ways to ensure that these women do obtain redress within the context of Article 14.*"

Acting Committee Chairperson, Felice Gaer, asked "*Can you identify any examples of efforts by state authorities to inspect or regulate these facilities? Were they exempt from standards...? And can you tell us what means were taken to ensure that there were no acts or omissions that amount to torture...?*"

She added, "*An act of torture may also arise from an act of omission and not just a positive act. So this appears to include failure to inspect or regulate the place where acts of torture occurred*"

As a result of our correspondence with women public representatives last year at least 10 Local Authorities passed motions to support the JFM campaign demands. We thank the Councillors who worked to make this happen. At national level, women TDs gave statements of support and contacted party leaders on the matter.

This work however is on-going and we are again calling on you as women, as public representatives and as people charged with the responsibility to ensure that justice and human rights prevail, to do what you can to bring justice and a sense of peace to the women involved. Please communicate with each other within and between your parties and political alliances at local and national levels and exert your collective influence to bring this matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

I look forward to hearing from you at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

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