

Press Release, 5th February 2013

SENATOR MARTIN McALEESE'S REPORT FINDS THAT THE IRISH STATE WAS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE MAGDALENE LAUNDRY SYSTEM

Justice for Magdalenes welcomes both Senator Martin McAleese's central findings that the State was directly and fundamentally involved in the Magdalene Laundry Institutions and also his wish that his Report brings "healing and peace of mind to all concerned, most especially the women whose lived experience of the Magdalene Laundries had a profound and enduring negative effect on their lives". (p. XI)

The Report ensures that:

- It can no longer be claimed that these institutions were private and that 'the vast majority' of the girls and women entered voluntarily as has been claimed by former Minister Batt O'Keefe and testimony before the UN Committee Against Torture given by Seán Aylward, the former principal of the Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.
- Over a quarter of the women who were held in the Magdalene laundries for whom records survived were sent in directly by the State.
- The State gave lucrative laundry contracts to these institutions, without complying with Fair Wages Clauses and in the absence of any compliance with Social Insurance obligations.
- The State inspected the Laundries under the Factories Acts, and in doing so, the State oversaw and furthered a system of forced and unpaid labour, in violation of countless legal obligations.
- The report investigated the role of the Gardaí in pursuing and returning girls and women who escaped from the Magdalene institutions. There was a statutory basis for the deployment of the Gardaí in some cases but the Report notes that: "the large majority of women who engaged with the Committee spoke of the deep hurt they felt due to their loss of freedom, they were not informed why they were there, they had no information on when they could leave and were denied contact with the outside world, including their family and friends." (p. VIII). The report also notes that the Gardaí "brought women to the Magdalene Laundries on a more ad hoc or informal basis." (p.XVI)

Justice for Magdalenes notes that the statistics compiled by the Senator omit the records of the Mercy-run Galway and Dun Laoghaire Magdalene Laundries.

- The figure of just over 10,000 girls and women confined in this system is therefore in need of significant upward revision.
- The report does not provide information on how 1,987 of the total number were referred to the Magdalene Laundries.
- Half of the girls and women incarcerated were under the age of 23.
- 40% (more than 4,000) of the girls and women spent more than a year incarcerated in the Magdalene Laundry system. 15% spent more than 5 years.
- JFM has collected testimony from survivors who attest to severe psychological and physical suffering incurred during even short stays of less than a year.

There are aspects of this report that need substantial clarification and JFM is currently in dialogue with Dr. Martin McAleese and his team on a number of his findings.

Alan Shatter said on 17th December 2009: “There is now absolutely irrefutable evidence as a consequence of court records and files that have been examined in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform that the State was directly complicit in many women being placed in these totally inappropriate circumstances.”

Kathleen Lynch said on 9th November 2010: “We can either deal with it now or in the future but, one way or the other, we will have to deal with it.”

JFM is calling on the government to issue an immediate apology to all survivors of the Magdalene Laundries on Tuesday. Moreover, we are calling on the government to establish a transparent and non-adversarial compensation process, that includes the provision of pensions, lost wages, health and housing services, as well as redress, and that is open to all survivors, putting their welfare at the forefront. Magdalene survivors have waited too long for justice and this should not be now burdened with either a complicated legal process or a closed-door policy of compensation.

[ENDS]

PRESS CONFERENCE DETAILS:

Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) will hold a press conference at **4.45pm** tomorrow **Tuesday 5th February** at the **Shelbourne Hotel**.

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