

**Press Release: 7 October 2009**

***The Minister for Education, Mr. Batt O'Keefe, again rejects Justice for Magdalene's proposal for a distinct redress scheme for survivors of the laundries.***

Mr. O'Keefe was responding to two written Parliamentary Questions in Dáil Éireann yesterday. The first question was tabled by Mr. Tom Kitt, TD (FF). The second question was tabled by Mr. Willie Penrose, TD (Labour) [Copies Attached]. A copy of Justice for Magdalene's letter to An Taoiseach (dated 22 September 2009) was attached to both questions...

In his written reply, Mr. O'Keefe did not answer the questions asked. He asserted that under the current legislation "children who were sent to Magdalen laundries from institutions specified in the Schedule to the Act can be considered for financial redress if, as children, they were victims of abuse while resident in the laundries." Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) contends to the contrary that all children in Magdalene laundries were Irish citizens. As such, the Constitution governed the State's obligation to ensure that they receive a "certain minimum education" (Art. 42, sec. 3, sub. 2). The means by which a child ended up in a laundry — whether she was abandoned by a family member or transferred from an industrial school — is immaterial, as this did not obviate the State's constitutional obligation to protect her. That surely is what is meant by "cherishing all of the children of the nation equally."

Mr. O'Keefe's written reply continued to explain his rejection of a distinct redress scheme in the following terms: "the Magdalen laundries were privately owned and operated establishments which did not come within the responsibility of the State and were not subject to State regulation or supervision." JFM rejects this position as one that is singularly motivated by questions of the State's liability. We contend that the State was morally and constitutionally obliged to protect these women's basic human rights. And, as we document in our letter to An Taoiseach, the State routinely referred women and was complicit in referring women to these institutions.

Mr. O'Keefe concluded his written reply to both questions by reiterating his "sincere apology for any offence caused by my inadvertent use of the term 'employees' when referring to the women who worked in the laundries." JFM acknowledges the Minister's apology. However, we also contend that the substitution of one word for another — 'workers' for 'employees' — does not materially alter the content nor the intent of the Minister's earlier letter rejecting calls for a distinct redress scheme. Moreover, we direct the Minister to the State's constitutional obligation to "ensure that the strength and health of workers...and the tender age of children shall not be abused and that citizens shall not be forced by economic necessity to enter avocation unsuited to their sex, age or strength" (Article 45, sec. 4, sub. 2).

JFM again challenge the State to respond formally to our letter to An Taoiseach, to offer a meaningful apology to survivors, and to introduce legislation that establishes a distinct redress scheme for the victims and survivors of Ireland's Magdalene laundries.

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*Justice for Magdalenes seeks to promote and represent the interests of the Magdalene Women, to respectfully promote equality and seek justice for the women formerly incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries and to seek the establishment / improvements of support/advisory/re-integration services provided for survivors.*