

Press Release 25th July 2012 – for immediate release

Justice for Magdalenes strongly welcomes Geoffrey Shannon’s call for redress for Magdalene survivors

Justice for Magdalenes (JFM), the survivor advocacy group, has strongly welcomed the *Fifth Report of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection*. In the report, Geoffrey Shannon has called for “acknowledgement, redress and accountability” for Magdalene Laundry survivors, whose treatment he described as “horrendous”, stating that it “constituted slavery”.

Dr. Shannon said that survivor testimony fitted the definition of slavery under Article 2.1 of the 1930 Forced Labour Convention. He went on to say that the right to redress and remedy still existed even where the State was not directly “overseeing slavery” and that “the need to deal with the matter of accountability and redress in relation to the Magdalene laundries is of vital importance to ensure compliance with international human rights law”. Dr. Shannon also called for criminal prosecutions where appropriate.

Claire McGettrick, JFM PRO said: “The majority of survivors in contact with JFM were young girls when they were incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries and therefore the acknowledgement of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection of the suffering they endured as children is especially welcome. JFM recently obtained testimony from a woman who was employed as a ‘paid hand’ at the Sisters of Mercy Laundry in Galway. This woman offered vivid accounts of the terror experienced by children in Galway – particularly poignant are her descriptions of young girls who clutched each other in fear when they arrived at the laundry, having been transferred from Ennis Industrial School.”

In addition to facilitating Magdalene survivors in giving evidence to Senator Martin McAleese’s Committee, JFM has been gathering testimonies in conjunction with and as a pilot phase of the UCD Magdalene Oral History Project which is directed by Dr. Katherine O’Donnell, Director of Women’s Studies at UCD’s School of Social Justice and JFM Advisory Committee member. The Project, which is being conducted under ethical approval from UCD’s College of Human Sciences in accordance with the highest human-subject research standards, is funded by the Feminist Review Trust and by the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Science.

JFM also welcomed Archbishop Diarmuid Martin’s comments in the MacGill Summer School where he said that “research-based investigation might better address such issues as the Magdalene Laundries or the quality of care in some mother-and-baby homes and other institutions”.

Dr. O’Donnell said: “Since its foundation, JFM has engaged in ‘research-based investigations’ and in this regard we welcome Archbishop Martin’s comments and wish to acknowledge that last summer, the Archbishop offered full and open access to the Dublin Diocesan Archives. We would strongly urge other bishops to do likewise. We would stress however that this vital research should meet the highest academic standards and that access should be offered in the spirit of openness and with a desire to uncover the true facts.”

[ENDS]

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Notes to editors:

Link to Geoffrey Shannon report:

<http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/5RapporteurRepChildProtection.pdf>

JFM website:

www.magdalenelaundries.com

JFM Follow-up report to United Nations Committee Against Torture:

http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/JFM_UNCAT_Follow%20Up_Complete.pdf