

For Immediate Release
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JFM welcomes IHRC call for statutory enquiry on the Magdalene Laundries

Survivor advocacy group Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) welcomes the Irish Human Rights Commission's (IHRC) validation of the evidence submitted in seeking a formal inquiry into the State's responsibility for human rights violations in the Magdalene Laundries.

JFM's submission argues that the treatment of the women and girls in the Laundries violated their constitutional rights, including the right to bodily integrity, the right not to be tortured or ill-treated, the right to earn a livelihood, the right to communicate, the right to individual privacy, the right to travel, the right to one's good name and the right to one's person.

We contend moreover that the Laundries' daily routine amounted to servitude under the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights. We also maintain that the abuse met the definition of forced or compulsory labour under the 1930 International Labour Organisation Forced Labour Convention, which committed the State to criminally punish the perpetrators of slavery and forced labour and to eradicate such practices within the national territory.

The IHRC assessment validates JFM's central arguments.

The IHRC points out that these survivors are excluded from the current Redress Scheme and that it is the State's duty to rectify the situation. JFM is especially appreciative of the comprehensive nature of the assessment, in particular that it addresses the related issues of adoption and the vaccine trials as integral components of State responsibility.

Dr. Katherine O'Donnell, Director of UCD's Women's Studies Centre and member of JFM's Advisory Committee says "In the midst of an economic crisis that seems to challenge the sovereignty of our state, Irish citizens are daily asking – what kind of social values do we want, what kind of society do we want our children to inherit? In the spirit of these concerns, JFM asks this current government to show the leadership requested by the IHRC; and to immediately apologise and begin the process of acknowledging and ultimately understanding our very recent dark history."

Maeve O'Rourke, co-author of JFM's submission and member of JFM's Advisory Committee says: "As the IHRC concludes, there is far too little public information available about the Magdalene Laundries. So far, the religious orders have refused to engage. Therefore, the State needs to lead the way. It must convince the church to acknowledge its part in this scandal and to open up its records. The state should also call upon the church to honour its moral obligation to find the money to pay its share of compensation to survivors."

Prof. James Smith of Boston College and member of JFM's Advisory Committee says: "The IHRC signals the urgent need to afford restorative justice to this community of women, an aging and vulnerable population at home and abroad. The time to act is now. The government must move beyond its 'deny 'til they die' policy. Only then will it disprove one Magdalene survivor's telling observation: 'they're hoping that in ten years we'll all be under the sod and they can relax.'"

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For background and context of JFM's campaign visit: www.magdalenelaundries.com

For a copy of the IHRC's assessment visit: www.ihrc.ie

Photos available at JFM's Flickr Page: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/45626669@N04/sets/>