

JFM says McAleese report delay should not prevent State action on Magdalenes

Justice for Magdalenes (JFM), the survivor advocacy group, is shocked and disappointed by today's announcement that the final report of the "Inter-Departmental Committee investigating State Involvement with the Magdalene Laundries" may now not appear until the end of the year and is calling on the government to act immediately.

JFM is gravely concerned for the welfare of survivors, who are mostly aging and elderly women, many of them vulnerable. They have already waited too long for an apology, for redress, and for restorative justice. Further delay is unacceptable. JFM is calling on the Irish State to issue an immediate apology and implement a reparation scheme for women incarcerated in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries.

Survivors have cooperated fully with the government's Inter-Departmental Committee. They have provided testimony and have met with Senator Martin McAleese. They did so trusting that the Committee would deliver its final report in a timely fashion.

JFM, too, has cooperated with the Committee. We recently made our principal submission, entitled "State Involvement in the Magdalene Laundries," comprising a 145 page document asserting three main categories of involvement, namely that:

- (i) the State sent women and girls to the Magdalene Laundries and ensured they remained there;
- (ii) the State provided the Religious Orders with direct and indirect financial support; and
- (iii) the State failed to supervise the Religious Orders operation of the Magdalene Laundries.

Some 795 pages of newly gathered survivor testimony and an additional 3,707 pages of archival and legislative documentation supported these contentions. JFM's submission alone constitutes overwhelming and irrefutable evidence of State complicity in the Laundries' abuses. Redacted copies of this submission will be made available to TDs and Senators.

Today's announcement further delays survivors' access to justice. Over the past year, Minister Alan Shatter has repeatedly refused to discuss an apology, redress or restorative justice until after the publication of the Inter-Departmental Committee's final report. JFM has asked Mr. Shatter to establish a threshold for State involvement short of the final report so that provisions can be put in place immediately that address survivor's entitlements, e.g., statutory pensions that reflect years of unpaid work in the Laundries. JFM's recent submission surely satisfies any such threshold. And, the women need this help now.

Survivors' entitlements can no longer be held hostage to the vagaries of the political system's inability to deliver on its promises. Australia and the UK have both recently moved forward with official apologies to victims of forced, illegal adoptions and the migrant child scheme. Will Ireland ever do the same? Will the all too familiar policy of 'deny til they die', become 'delay til they die'?

Three years into this campaign, 22 months after the IHRC recommendation, 15 months after the United Nation's Committee Against Torture recommendation, by refusing to apologise and provide redress, Ireland's government is failing some of the most vulnerable in our society. For this we should all feel shame.

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Notes to editors:

JFM website:
www.magdalenelaundries.com

JFM Summary of State Involvement with the Magdalene Laundries, submitted to the Inter-Departmental Committee in May 2012:
http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/Magdalene_Laundries_state_interaction_section_Final.pdf

JFM Follow-up report to United Nations Committee Against Torture:
http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/JFM_UNCAT_Follow%20Up_Complete.pdf

Interim Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee:
<http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/MagdelanInterimReport2011Oct.pdf/Files/MagdelanInterimReport2011Oct.pdf>