

14 June 2011

PRESS RELEASE: JFM welcomes Magdalene inquiry announcement and pledges to participate

Justice for Magdalenes (JFM), the survivor advocacy group, welcomes the government's announcement this evening, in particular the establishment of an Inter-departmental Committee, chaired by an independent person, and we see this as a further positive step to bringing "Restorative Justice and Reparations" to all survivors of the Magdalene Laundries.

Much work remains to be done, however, and JFM looks forward to working with both the State and the religious congregations in the coming weeks and months to bring about a prompt and timely resolution to this "restorative and reconciliation process". JFM has already proposed a structure that might be utilized to facilitate this process, which the UN Committee Against Torture has recommended that the government examine more closely.

We note with regret that the government is not yet prepared to issue a formal apology to the women despite the fact that an apology remains their first and most important request. Survivors speaking in recent days stressed the importance of an apology as the first crucial step in restoring their dignity and sense of citizenship. We are aware of the legal implications that an apology may bring and the State's concern in that regard. But we remind the government that the UN Committee Against Torture has already found the State liable: "The Committee is gravely concerned at the failure by the State party to protect girls and women who were involuntarily confined between 1922 and 1996 in the Magdalene Laundries, by failing to regulate their operations and inspect them...."

JFM welcomes the opportunity to meet with both Minister Shatter and Minister Lynch, and as the primary voice for those not afforded one, feels it is very important that we also meet with the Inter-departmental Committee to help "clarify any State interaction with the Magdalene Laundries". Our research and our discussion with survivors helped to bring about today's announcement. JFM feel strongly that our experience and knowledge of these institutions, and the nature of their relationship to other residential institutions, can make an important contribution to the independent investigation.

Finally, on foot of the government's announcement, JFM remembers who this campaign is about—the women who spent time in the institutions and their children. Many survivors are aging and elderly. Some women feel that heretofore both Church and State have pursued a policy of "deny 'til they die." For all their sakes, we again ask that Church and State consider offering an apology immediately, and thereafter move forward to bring the work of the independent inquiry to satisfactory conclusion.

In conclusion, JFM thanks everyone who responded to our e-mail and social media campaign and contacted various ministers asking them to read our correspondence prior to today's Cabinet meeting. We appreciate your efforts on behalf of those women for whom we advocate.

[ENDS]

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Note to editor:

Government Statement on the Magdalene Laundries (below)

Justice for Magdalenes Campaign Summary

http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/jfm_campaign.pdf

Government Statement on the Magdalene Laundries

The Government today considered the circumstances of the women and girls who resided in the Magdalene Laundries. The Government welcomed the statement made last week by CORI on behalf of the four congregations, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, the Religious Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of Mercy and the Good Shepherd Sisters who indicated their “willingness” to “bring clarity, understanding, healing and justice in the interests of all the women involved”. The Government believes it is essential to fully establish the true facts and circumstances relating to the Magdalene Laundries as a first step. The following has been agreed:

1. An Inter-departmental Committee will be established, chaired by an independent person, to clarify any State interaction with the Magdalene Laundries and to produce a narrative detailing such interaction.
2. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, Alan Shatter TD and the Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People, Kathleen Lynch TD are to meet with the religious congregations and the groups representing former residents of the Magdalene Laundries. Their discussions will include addressing the following matters;
 - a. The making available by the congregations of all records maintained by them with regard to the residents of the Magdalene Laundries to enable all available information about former residents to be shared with them and also made available for appropriate research purposes.
 - b. The provision of information concerning the number of persons currently residing with or in the care of the religious congregations who originally commenced such residence in the Magdalene Laundries and who have remained in their care.
 - c. To discuss the putting in place of a restorative and reconciliation process and the structure that might be utilised to facilitate such process.

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence together with the Minister of State for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People, will now be following up on this Government decision with the relevant parties. Consideration is being given to the appropriate independent person to appoint to chair the Inter-departmental Committee. It was agreed by government that an initial report should be made to Cabinet on the progress being made by the Inter-departmental Committee within 3 months of its establishment.