

PRESS RELEASE

Department of Education acknowledges its awareness of children in Magdalene laundries

Senior officials in the Department of Education have confirmed the Department's awareness of children being confined in Magdalene laundries as late as 1970. The admission came during a meeting with the survivor advocacy group, Justice for Magdalenes (JFM), on Tuesday morning, 2 February 2010.

The meeting followed Batt O'Keeffe's statements last week revising his earlier assertion that "the State did not refer individuals nor was it complicit in referring individuals to the laundries" (4 September 2009). Mr. O'Keeffe's changed his position in light of the Department of Justice's admission that it was complicit in referring women to the laundries (15 December 2009). Education officials today confirmed that they would now enter discussions with the Departments of Justice and Health and work in an interdepartmental fashion to facilitate the release of any information that is useful.

JFM presented evidence at the meeting, contained in The Reformatory and Industrial School Systems Report, 1970 (also known as the Kennedy Report), documenting the Department of Education's awareness that historically children were confined in Magdalene laundries. JFM contends that the State failed to protect these children from abuse occurring outside the home. We assert that the State thereby failed to protect the children's Constitutional rights, i.e., to provide a basic education, to fulfill the place of the parent, and to ensure they were not exploited in the work place.

The Department of Education now acknowledges that at least from 1970 and the publication of the Kenney Report, the Department was aware that girls were confined in the Magdalene laundries. Officials also confirmed the Department's awareness that Reformatory Schools did transfer girls into the laundries, and that these survivors alone are eligible for redress under the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002. JFM now calls for a distinct Redress Scheme for all survivors of the Magdalene laundries.

JFM made a number of requests at today's meeting and we look forward to the State providing answers in the near future:

- JFM asks that the Minister make public the number of children who "were transferred to a Magdalene laundry from a State regulated institution" as well as the number of survivors who have applied to the Redress Board on the basis of section 1(3) of the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002.
- JFM asks that the Minister for Education now account for each and every child confined to a Magdalene laundry since the founding of the State.
- JFM demands that the State produce records for all the women and children it was complicit in referring to the laundries.
- JFM urges the State to enter into dialogue with the four religious congregations involved so that they too might make available their records for all women and children entering Magdalene laundries after 1 January 1900. Access to these records is the crucial next step in understanding this aspect of the nation's history and in establishing an appropriate redress scheme for survivors.
- JFM asks that the State apologise to survivors for its part in the abuse of women in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries.

JFM PRO, Claire McGettrick, who attended the meeting, said, "The admission of State complicity allows for the opening of dialogue and will bring some much-needed good news to the Magdalene laundry survivor community. We hope that this news will make it easier for survivors to come forward to tell their stories and seek the redress that is owed to them. We also hope that the state will

issue an apology to those incarcerated in Magdalene laundries so that the injustice that these women endured can be finally acknowledged.”

Dr. Katherine O'Donnell, head of UCD's Women's Studies and School of Social Justice, who is a member of JFM's advisory committee, said, "It is wonderful after campaigning since 1993 that the state has finally engaged with our group and has offered some recognition and willingness to address the issue. However the state is only responsible for certain populations of survivors and the fate and status of the bulk of those incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries can only be revealed by the religious orders and we again call on the religious orders who ran Magdalene Laundries to open their records.”

JFM calls on the all-party ad hoc Oireachtas committee that was formed in December 2009 to promote justice for survivors of the Magdalene laundries and to pursue these issues with the relevant Ministers and Departments.

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