

PRESS RELEASE

One year after the Ryan Report, Irish Government still shirks responsibility for the Magdalene Laundries

Justice for Magdalenes (JFM)—a survivor advocacy group—says that the government continues to shirk its responsibility towards survivors of the Magdalene laundries. JFM has launched an [online petition](#) and a [direct email campaign](#), both addressed to Mr. Cowen, demanding that he provide leadership on this issue. Both links may also be found on our website at www.magdalenelaundries.com. Almost 450 people have already registered their outrage at the State's inaction. JFM asks the people of Ireland to join us in sending an unmistakable message demanding justice for this community of survivors. Doing so underscores that the work of the Ryan Report is yet incomplete.

One year after the Ryan Report, the State is no closer to accepting the implications of its complicity in referring women to the laundry institutions. It has yet to (i) offer an official apology or (ii) establish a distinct redress scheme. JFM has met with three government departments in recent months and documented complicity on the part of the Departments of Justice, Education and Health. And still the government prevaricates.

Mr. Cowen recently stated "the position of women in such laundries was not analogous with that of children in the residential institutions that were the subject of the Ryan Report" (27 April 2010). But as Mr. Cowen is well aware, there were children in the Magdalene laundries—children transferred there from residential institutions as documented in volume 3, chapter 18 of the Ryan Report, as well as children placed there by "parents, relatives, social workers, Welfare Officers, Clergy, or Gardai" as documented by the Kennedy Report (1970).

The State was constitutionally obliged to protect *all* children from abuse experienced outside the home. Only last year, Mr. Cowen, along with his fellow politicians, pledged to "cherish all of the children of the nation equally." JFM now asks Mr. Cowen whether the welfare of children in the Magdalene laundries is some how fundamentally not his concern?

Ms. Mary Coughlan, T.D., Minister for Education, in a response to a letter from JFM in which we asked for information regarding children placed in the laundries as a result of "voluntary placements, Health Authority referrals, etc.," replied that "any records which my Department holds could not be relied upon to accurately quantify the numbers"(27 April 2010). Precisely whose responsibility is it to document what became of these children? As Minister Coughlan is no doubt aware, the Kennedy Report documents "at least 70 girls between the ages of 13 and 19" confined to laundries who should more properly have been dealt with by the Reformatory School system. What became of these 70 children?

Ms. Coughlan reveals in the same letter that an internal departmental review "identified 261 references of referrals" of children between residential institutions and various laundries. However, the same review only positively identified 3 referrals to Magdalene laundries (one each to Galway, Limerick and Donnybrook). She continues: "A further 95 were to convent laundries, 102 to school laundries and 61 to other laundries. The number of laundries involved is unclear as some locations are listed as school, convent and other laundries" (27 April 2010). As Minister Coughlan is no doubt aware, the religious orders refuse to release records related to the laundries after 1 January 1900. Therefore, no one can say with any certainty how many of these children were indeed confined in Magdalene institutions. Can Minister Coughlan demonstrate what became of the 3 children transferred into the Magdalene Laundries? Can she demonstrate conclusively the fate of each of the 261 children placed in laundries famous for exploitative and dangerous work conditions? Does she believe that such haphazard record keeping with respect to the welfare of children is acceptable?

Mr. Dermot Ahern, T.D., Minister for Justice, recently acknowledged that "research had indicated that a small proportion of entrants to Magdalen laundries came through the criminal justice system" (13 May 2010). Additionally, he stated that "Magdalen laundries were among the institutions used" in placing women on Probation, and that St. Mary Magdalen Asylum, Sean McDermott Street, Dublin 1 "was used as [sic] a period as a remand centre for female persons aged from 16 to 21." Mr. Ahern followed these admissions of complicity with the following: "My department does not hold records that would identify the number of women who were sent to the Magdalen Laundries." JFM asks why not? If the Department of Justice and the Courts referred women to these institutions, why can they not produce a single record documenting the fate of any of these women?

The Ryan Report deliberately evades the Magdalene laundries—it refers to them as "Residential Laundries" (Vol. 3, Ch. 18), and in the process elides from the official record the very identity of a group of women and children deliberately disappeared in the past. In precisely the same manner Ireland's political leadership responds to JFM's calls for justice with deliberate evasion and calculated obfuscation. Rather than confront the implications of historic complicity and collusion, the government makes empty gestures of cooperation, while protecting itself from claims of liability, all the while insinuating that survivors pursue the religious congregations exclusively.

JFM asks that all Irish people join us in bringing the current government leadership to task on this issue.

Please sign the online petition at: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/leadership-needed-on-magdalene-laundries>

Please participate in the direct email campaign at: http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/an_taoiseach.htm

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