

PRESS RELEASE

Pressure Mounts on Cowen as Fianna Fáil TDs Deliver Petition Demanding Justice for Magdalenes 21 June 2010

Fianna Fáil TDs Tom Kitt and Michael Kennedy today personally delivered to Brian Cowen the first 1,000 signatures from an online petition demanding a State apology and distinct redress scheme for survivors of the Magdalene laundries.

[View photos from this event online.](#)

The significance of such distinguished internal pressure from within Fiann Fail is remarkable. Kitt and Kennedy are convenors of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee seeking justice for Magdalene survivors. The committee met with the survivor advocacy group Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) who initiated the petition. Members who attended today's meeting included Ned O'Keefe, Chris Andrews, Maureen O'Sullivan, Kathleen Lynch and Michael D. Higgins as well as representatives of a number of TDs and senators who were in session.

The meeting was addressed by Prof. James M. Smith (Boston College) who presented additional new evidence which demonstrates the State's complicity in referring girls and women to the Laundaries as well as providing a number of capitation grants and lucrative contracts to subsidise the religious-run institutions. The meeting closed with discussions on concrete actions that the Oireachtas committee are pursuing over the immediate future.

National and international pressure is now mounting on An Taoiseach to take leadership on this issue as support for JFM's campaign gathers momentum as over 40 nationalities have expressed their shock at the Irish government's refusal to acknowledge the suffering of Magdalene survivors. Signatures have been received from Ireland, the US, the UK and other EU nations, as well as Australia, Canada, even as far afield as Brazil, Columbia, Argentina, Indonesia, India, Singapore, Thailand, New Zealand, and the Philippines.

People signing the petition have also posted comments signalling their outrage at the government's failure to correct an historic injustice [samples provided below]. Many participants have also sent a protest email directly to Brian Cowen.

Mari Steed, Director of the JFM Coordinating Committee, welcomes the encouraging response thus far. "I want to urge people in Ireland to make their voices heard on this issue. It is important that Mr. Cowen understands the world is watching and there is widespread support for survivors of the Magdalene laundries. It is time for Ireland to catch up with the rest of the world and apologise for the wrongdoings of the past."

Claire McGettrick, JFM PRO, added, "We are approaching the first anniversary of JFM distributing its proposal calling for an official apology and a distinct redress scheme. JFM has established that the State was complicit in this institutional abuse and yet in the face of incontrovertible evidence, the government refuses to act."

JFM Advisory Committee member James M. Smith (Boston College) adds: "What Mr. Cowen seems not to appreciate is that this is a time-sensitive issue. Many survivors in this community are elderly; some are nearing the end of their lives. They deserve a form of restorative justice. It doesn't seem outrageous to ask that the government let these women know that what happened to them was wrong. An apology would mean a lot to this community of survivors."

The petition can be accessed from the JFM homepage: www.magdalenelaundries.com

[ENDS]

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Photographs of petition delivery available at our Flickr page:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/45626669@N04/sets/72157624208703381/>

Sample Comments

- Monika Earner (Germany) writes, “Do something about this. These women were locked up in these hellish prisons. They had no rights, least of all to their own children.”
- Thomas Walsh (Ireland) challenged Mr. Cowen that, “It would be great if you, for once, would do something that is morally right rather than legally correct.”
- Vivien Greene (UK) adds, “The slave labour together with the heartbreak of losing a child ... is unconscionable. The state and church should acknowledge and make recompense for the pain and suffering caused to the women and their children.”
- Rebecca McCarthy (US) states, “Little choice was offered to these women incarcerated in the Laundries, where both Church and State profited on their labor.”
- Maggie Shirley (Canada) writes, “The women of Ireland have long suffered from this injustice. ... Take responsibility and give these women the dignity they deserve.”
- Kathleen Swearer (US) adds, “As an adoptee from Ireland in the 60' sent to the US I am beyond upset. You have a moral obligation to give these women back some humanity and begin the healing process!”
- Eugene McFarland (US) also addressed the real life impact of the government’s inaction, stating, “Born Edward Eugene Callan, 30 May 1959, I have a twin I have never met. We were split up and I was given up to adoption March 16, 1961 to parents in Brooklyn, NY. Acknowledge what happened please and open the information so we can find our siblings.”
- Annamaria Brown (UK) calls for “no more secrets and lies, adopted adults need to know where they come from.”
- Augusta McDermott (Ireland) states, “A society heals by acknowledging past culpabilities ... and crimes. Women were imprisoned for having children out of ‘wedlock’, for being different. The State failed them as did Irish society.”
- Louise Walshe (Ireland), writes “This was institutional abuse colluded with by the State and should be recognized and compensated by the State and the church.”
- Martin Foran (Ireland) writes, “If the state continues to deny involvement when there is evidence to the contrary then it has to credibility. Will we continue to deny justice to those who are most vulnerable”
- Eoin O’Callaghan (Ireland) adds, “Please An Taoiseach, on behalf of all the citizens of Ireland, I request that you give this moral matter your attention and try to undo some of the wrong that we as a nation have done”
- Anonymous (Ireland) summed up the frustration of many, asserting “If the Taoiseach was a woman, would this issue be ignored?”

PLEASE view additional comments added to the petition at: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/leadership-needed-on-magdalene-laundries>