

Press Release 28th May 2012 – for immediate release

One year after UN Recommendation Magdalene women are no closer to an apology or redress

Justice for Magdalenes (JFM), the survivor advocacy group, is today submitting its NGO Follow Up Report to the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) in Geneva, Switzerland. This one-year follow up process requires the Irish State to report back on measures taken to put last June's recommendation on the Magdalene Laundries into effect (see copy of Recommendation below[Note 6]). JFM finds it unacceptable that 12 months later Magdalene survivors are still waiting for an apology, redress and reparation.

JFM will also present a courtesy copy of its Follow Up Report to Ms. Felice Gaer, Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights and Vice-Chair of UNCAT at an event co-sponsored with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) in Dublin on Monday afternoon (See events details below[Note 1] and please note advisory regarding Ms. Gaer's attendance at the event in a private capacity [Note 3]).

JFM is delighted to help welcome Felice Gaer to Dublin and to thank her personally for her efforts last year in challenging the "voluntary" nature of the Magdalene Laundries system, as asserted by the head of the Irish delegation in Geneva last May. (See link to YouTube clip below, Note 5.)

JFM's Report welcomes the establishment of the Inter-departmental Committee to "clarify state interaction with the Magdalene Laundries." Nevertheless, the Report points out the ways in which the Inter-departmental Committee does not satisfy the "prompt, thorough and independent" investigation called for by UNCAT. JFM has submitted over 1,500 pages of evidence of State interaction to the Committee. We look forward to the publication of Committee's report, due by mid-2012.

Maeve O'Rourke, JFM Advisory Committee member, who represented JFM at UNCAT in Geneva and is speaking at today's event said: "Our report states clearly that the government has failed to implement the UNCAT Recommendation, which called on the state to ensure that Magdalene survivors obtain redress and to establish an independent investigation into the full extent of the abuse. We acknowledge the important work of Senator McAleese's Committee, however, it should not impede the women's access to an apology and redress, and we also reserve the right to call for a fully independent inquiry with statutory powers to compel evidence."

James M. Smith (Boston College and JFM Advisory Committee) said: "While JFM will continue to cooperate with the Interdepartmental Committee, we assert that there is ample evidence of state involvement with the Magdalene Laundries to warrant an apology, pensions and restoring lost wages to this group of aging and elderly women. They need help now while still alive to benefit from it."

This week JFM will submit the first tranche of newly gathered survivor testimony to Senator McAleese, totalling 519 pages. Claire McGettrick (JFM Advisory Committee member) said: "In the testimonies already gathered, all survivors told us that they could not leave the laundries, that the doors were locked and the windows inaccessible. If they did try to leave they were returned by the Gardaí, while others decided not to try to escape because they knew the same fate awaited them. They all told us they could not complain, in most cases they remarked that there was nobody to complain to; while others begged to leave, often on a daily basis, but all were refused. Every single survivor confirmed that they were never paid, that no inspections were ever carried out and that no government official ever came to check on them."

JFM is delighted to participate in this event with ICCL and to share our experience at UNCAT with other organisations. Central to JFM's UNCAT experience was the use of YouTube clips which were made possible by the webcast hosted by the ICCL and the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IRPT) who will also speak at today's event.

[ENDS]

Contact Details:

Claire McGettrick [PRO], Ireland—353-(0)86-3659516, clairemcgettrick@gmail.com

Mari Steed, Philadelphia—(00)1-215-589-9329, mari_tee@yahoo.com

James M. Smith, Boston (in Dublin for today's event)—353-(0)87-187-1654, smithbt@bc.edu

Maeve O'Rourke, London (in Dublin for today's event)—(00) 44 74 0330 1781, maeveourourke@gmail.com

Notes to Editors:

1. Event Details:

Preventing Ill-Treatment and Securing Accountability:
The Impact in Ireland of the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT)

Date: Monday, 28 May 2012

Time: 2pm - 4pm

Venue: Radisson Blu Royal Hotel, Golden Lane, Dublin 8 (<http://www.radissonblu.ie/royalhotel-dublin>)

2. JFM Publications

JFM UNCAT Follow Up Report, Executive Summary, Priority Questions for Government and Summary of State Interaction will be posted later today to www.magdalenelaundries.com and are available on request. Email info@magdalenelaundries.com

3. Advisory regarding Felice Gaer's participation in today's event:

"Ms. Felice Gaer is Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights and Vice-Chair of the UN Committee against Torture. Ms. Gaer is participating in this event in her private capacity as Director of the New York-based Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights."

Felice Gaer Biography:

"Felice Gaer is the Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights. She is the Vice Chair of the United Nations Committee against Torture and has been the first American to serve as an independent expert on that treaty monitoring body. From 2001-2012, Ms. Gaer was repeatedly appointed to the bipartisan federal U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on which she has served three terms as Chair. She was a public member of U.S. delegations to the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, the Beijing World Conference on Women, and other multilateral human rights negotiations. A member of the Council on Foreign Relations, she was Regents Professor at UCLA in 2010, and recipient of the First Freedom Center's National Religious Freedom Award. In 2012, she was appointed to the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO. She is currently the chair of the Leo Nevas Task Force on Human Rights of the United Nations Association of the USA. Ms. Gaer is the author of more than 40 articles on international human rights. In addition, she has been active in ensuring that women's rights are addressed as human rights, and that violence against women, including rape, has been addressed effectively by UN human rights bodies."

5. Link to YouTube clip

At Ireland's UNCAT examination in Geneva on 24th May 2011, Felice Gaer questioned the government's statement that "the vast majority" of women entered Magdalene Laundries" voluntarily" (Link to video below)

Link to Felice Gaer's comments about whether there was a voluntary element to the Magdalene Laundries:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=YsUMPiFjUuk

6. UNCAT Recommendation on the Magdalene Laundries:

"21. 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 and inspect their operations, where it is alleged that physical, emotional abuses and other ill-treatment were committed, amounting to breaches of the Convention. The Committee also expresses grave concern at the failure by the State party to institute prompt, independent and thorough investigations into the allegations of ill-treatment perpetrated on girls and women in the Magdalene Laundries (arts. 2, 12, 13, 14 and 16).

The Committee recommends that the State party institute prompt, independent and thorough investigations into all complaints of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment that were allegedly committed in the Magdalene Laundries and, in appropriate cases, prosecute and punish the perpetrators with penalties commensurate with the gravity of the offences committed, and ensure that all

victims obtain redress and have an enforceable right to compensation, including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible.”

7. About the Irish Council for Civil Liberties:

The Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) is Ireland’s leading independent human rights watchdog, which monitors, educates and campaigns in order to secure full enjoyment of human rights for everyone. The ICCL is an entirely independent organisation and does not rely on government support or funding. Founded in 1976 by Mary Robinson and others, the ICCL has played a leading role in some of Ireland’s most successful human rights campaigns. These have included campaigns to establish an independent Garda Ombudsman Commission, legalise the right to divorce, secure more effective protection of children’s rights, decriminalise homosexuality and introduce enhanced equality legislation. Since 1976 the ICCL has tirelessly lobbied the State to ensure the full implementation in Ireland of international human rights standards – www.iccl.ie