

Press Release: 29 July, 2009

Justice for Magdalenes committee calls on Government to provide redress for Magdalene survivors

Justice for Magdalenes welcomes the publication of the Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009: Implementation Plan, and we look forward to witnessing the immediate implementation of the ninety-nine measures outlined therein.

However, we challenge the compartmentalised, two-tiered response by the Irish state towards institutional abuse that results in survivors of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, many of them children at the time, once again being ignored.

Specifically we ask that the Minister for Children investigate the plight of children (which we now have mounting evidence that some were as young as 11 years old) who were placed directly into Magdalene Laundries. Their applications to the "Residential Redress Board" are routinely rejected because "the Applicant had not established that she was resident in an institution covered by the Act or any Order made thereunder."

"The fact that these children were never committed to a residential institution (e.g., an industrial or reformatory school) is immaterial," said Justice for Magdalenes spokesperson Mari Steed, whose mother was a Magdalene. "The fact that a family member signed these children into the "care" of the nuns does not obviate the state's responsibility for their welfare. These children were and are citizens of the state and they deserved to be cherished. Yet increasingly we're discovering they were all but 'invisibly' moved between residential institutions and Magdalene Laundries, with little or no record maintained by the religious orders or Departments of Health, Education, Children or Justice," she added.

Children's Minister Barry Andrews in his remarks insisted that Irish people no longer show deference towards the Catholic Church. But the government maintains precisely the same deferent attitude towards the religious congregations that operated the nation's Magdalene Laundries, i.e., the Good Shepherd Sisters, Sisters of Charity, Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, and Mercy Sisters. No one has apologised. No one held accountable. And the core issue is still liability and the State's evasion of all financial responsibility for institutions they continue to view as "private" and "voluntary." This deference is also clear in the government's dismissal of claims submitted by non-Catholic survivors of such institutions as the Bethany Home. JFM demands that the Minister for Children introduce amending legislation whereby survivors of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, regardless of how they entered such institutions, are provided with redress and reparation for their abusive childhoods, the unpaid labour they performed and the abrogation of their civil and human rights.

Furthermore, JFM demands that the Minister for Justice introduce legislation for a distinct redress scheme for survivors of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries as outlined by JFM and submitted to all politicians in Dáil Éireann on July 3 (copy attached).

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Justice for Magdalenes seeks to promote and represent the interests of the Magdalene Women, to respectfully promote equality and seek justice for the women formerly incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries and to seek the establishment / improvements of support/advisory/re-integration services provided for survivors.