



MEDIA ADVISORY 3 February 2013

## **Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) awaits the release of the Inter-Departmental Committee Investigating State Involvement with the Magdalen Laundries**

*“My mother was Magdalene No. 322. Real name Margaret.”*

*“Margaret died in July 2003, one day before her 51st birthday. She died of her slave related injuries.”*

*“Mum lived 27 yrs in the servitude of nuns, losing me for the crime of becoming pregnant outside marriage.”*

*“A visit to Fatima & a few bob for the hospitals that were good to me.”*

These and other poignant, heartbreaking comments are reverberating now on Twitter, Facebook and in the media, along with the trending hashtag **#justiceformagdalenesNOW**.

Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) is a survivor advocacy group which has fought a ten-year campaign to bring about (i) an official apology from the Irish State and the Catholic Church, and (ii) the establishment of a distinct compensation scheme for all Magdalene survivors. In the days preceding the release of Senator Martin McAleese’s final report, JFM has organised a concerted campaign to keep pressure on the government to take immediate and appropriate action in response to the report’s conclusions.

JFM is calling on the government to issue an immediate apology to all survivors of the Magdalene Laundries on Tuesday. Moreover, we are calling on the government to establish a transparent and non-adversarial compensation process, that includes the provision of pensions, lost wages, health and housing services, as well as redress, and that is open to all survivors, putting their welfare at the forefront. Magdalene survivors have waited too long for justice and this should not be now burdened with either a complicated legal process or a closed-door policy of compensation.

Supporters, NGOs and media are encouraged to phone local TDs in Ireland – as the most impactful way to spread the message – and secondarily to e-mail and use social media. JFM has provided relevant links at [www.magdalenelaundries.com](http://www.magdalenelaundries.com) for contact information. Additional details can be found on JFM’s Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/groups/justiceformagdalenes/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/justiceformagdalenes/) or by following JFM on Twitter [@maglaundries](https://twitter.com/maglaundries).

**Representatives from JFM will be available on Tuesday, 5th February, to make comment on the release of the report after 4 p.m.**

[ENDS]

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### **Notes to editors**

#### **JFM website:**

[www.magdalenelaundries.com](http://www.magdalenelaundries.com)

## **JFM Summary of State Involvement with the Magdalene Laundries, submitted to the Inter-Departmental Committee in May 2012:**

[www.magdalenelaundries.com/Magdalene\\_Laundries\\_state\\_interaction\\_section\\_Final.pdf](http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/Magdalene_Laundries_state_interaction_section_Final.pdf)

### **Synopsis of JFM's campaign and milestones to date for quick reference**

#### **Justice For Magdalenes (JFM)**

JFM is a survivor advocacy group working to bring about (i) an apology from Church and state, and (ii) the establishment of a distinct redress scheme for all survivors of Ireland's Magdalene laundries.

JFM has uncovered substantial evidence (both archival material and survivor testimony) of State involvement in terms of (a) sending women and girls to the Magdalene Laundries and ensuring they remained there, (b) providing the Religious Orders with direct and indirect financial support, and (c) failing to supervise the Religious Orders operation of the Magdalene Laundries.

No one has apologised for the abuse suffered in these particular institutions, not Church, not State, not families, not the wider society. Consequently, these women—the majority of whom are elderly and aging—are denied restorative justice.

The Magdalene laundries were excluded from the state's Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002. Consequently, Magdalene survivors are denied redress when they apply to the Residential Institutions Redress Board.

#### **Historical Context**

- Magdalene Laundries were institutions operated by nuns in which women, called "penitents," worked at laun-dry and other for-profit enterprises
- these women were denied freedom of movement, they were never paid for their labour, and they were denied their given names and identities
- the daily routine emphasised prayer, silence, and work
- Women had to be signed out of the Magdalene or have a "position" to go to
- many remained to live, work, and ultimately die, behind convent walls
- after 1922, Magdalene Laundries were operated by The Sisters of Mercy (Galway and Dun Laoghaire), The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity (Drumcondra and Sean MacDermott Street, Dublin), the Sisters of Charity (Donnybrook and Cork), and the Good Shepherd Sisters (Limerick, Cork, Waterford and New Ross)
- these four orders also managed State residential institutions, in some cases on the same convent campus. All four are members of CORI
- the last Magdalene ceased operating as a commercial laundry on 25 October 1996
- the Nuns will not release records for women entering the laundries after 1 January 1900. Therefore there is no detailed accurate information regarding numbers involved
- JFM recognises at least five distinct groups within the survivor community: those now speaking out and demanding justice, those living in silence due to the ongoing shame/stigma, those dependent on and living in the "care" of the religious congregations, victims who have died—many of whom are buried in incorrectly marked mass graves, and the adopted children/families of former Magdalene women

#### **JFM asserts that the Irish State:**

- was aware of the nature and function of the Magdalene laundries
- was aware that there was no statutory basis for the use of the laundries by the courts as an alternative to a prison sentence
- was aware that there was no statutory basis for the use of the laundries by the courts for placing women and young girls "On Probation"
- enacted legislation to enable the use of the Sean McDermott Street Magdalene laundry as a remand home
- was aware that children and adolescent girls were confined in the laundries as late as 1970, and that these "voluntary" placements were in addition to children transferred to the laundries from State residential

- institutions
- maintained a “special provision” whereby women giving birth to a second child outside marriage at a Mother-and-Baby or County Home could be transferred directly to a Magdalene laundry
- paid capitation grants to Magdalene Laundries and other religious convents for the confinement of “problem girls,” girls “on probation,” and girls “on remand” and yet it maintains that these were “private and charitable” institutions
- never inspected, licensed or certified these home as “Approved” institutions, rather referred women and young girls into these institutions based on the assumption that the religious congregation would care and provide for them
- has yet to produce a single record for any woman or young girl, or the children born to these women and young girls, referred to the laundries by State agencies
- refuses to admit its complicity in referring women to the Magdalene laundries
- refuses to acknowledge its failure to protect women’s constitutional rights
- refuses to apologise for its role in referring women to the laundries and therefore impedes “restorative justice” for this population of institutional survivors
- refuses to enter into discussions with the Catholic hierarchy and/or the relevant religious congregations in an effort to produce records
- refuses to establish a distinct redress scheme as outlined by JFM

### **Milestones in the campaign for justice for Magdalene survivors 2009 - 2012**

July 2009	JFM submits its first draft redress scheme to the Irish government
September 2009	Labour Women support JFM redress scheme
December 2009	JFM meets with representatives from the Department of Justice, who acknowledge that the state was complicit in referring women to Magdalene Laundries
December 2009	All party Ad Hoc Committee formed to address the issue of the Magdalene Laundries
February 2010	JFM meets with representatives from the Department of Education who admit State awareness of transfer of children from industrial schools to Magdalene Laundries
June 2010	JFM submits application to the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC)
June 2010	JFM meets with Cardinal Sean Brady, who characterises our presentation as “fair and balanced”
July 2010	The National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI) passes a motion to support the JFM campaign
November 2010	The IHRC publishes its Assessment of the Human Rights Issues Arising in relation to the “Magdalen Laundries” and calls for a statutory inquiry into the Magdalene Laundries
March 2011	JFM submits a “Restorative Justice and Reparations Scheme” to the Irish government, updating the scheme published in July 2009
April 2011	JFM makes a submission to the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UNCAT)
May 2011	JFM makes a statement before UNCAT
June 2011	UN Committee Against Torture issues recommendations on the Magdalene Laundries and expresses its grave concern at the failure by the State to institute prompt, independent and thorough investigations into the allegations of ill-treatment of the women, insisting that the State ensure that survivors obtain redress
June 2011	The Irish government announces the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Committee on the Magdalene Laundries
July 2011	Senator Martin McAleese is appointed as Independent Chair of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Magdalene Laundries
July 2011	JFM meets with Ministers Alan Shatter and Kathleen Lynch
July 2011	JFM submits a 50 page narrative of State Interaction, supported by 500 pages of Appendices
October 2011	JFM submits revised Restorative Justice and Reparations Scheme to Ministers Shatter and Lynch
October 2011	The Inter-Departmental Committee on the Magdalene Laundries publishes its Interim Report
2011-2012	JFM continues to submit additional evidence of state interaction
March 2012	IHRC, Women’s Human Rights Alliance and JFM address UN Human Rights Council on Magdalene Laundries abuse
June 2012	JFM helps organise survivor meeting with Senator McAleese
July 2012	Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, Geoffrey Shannon calls for “acknowledgement, redress

August 2012	and accountability” for survivors and characterises their treatment as “slavery” JFM submits its principal submission to the Inter-Departmental Committee, a 145-page document collating evidence of State complicity, supported by 795 pages of survivor testimony consistent with the 3,707 pages of supporting evidence
September 2012	JFM submits a redacted version of its principal submission to every TD and Senator
September 2012	A motion on the Magdalene Laundries is to be debated in Dáil Éireann
February 2013	The Inter-Departmental Committee report is published

### **ACTION NOW:**

**The government should issue an immediate apology to all survivors of the Magdalene Laundries. It should also establish a transparent and non-adversarial compensation process, that includes the provision of pensions, lost wages, health and housing services, as well as redress, and that is open to all survivors, putting their welfare at the forefront. Magdalene survivors have waited too long for justice and this should not be now burdened with either a complicated legal process or a closed-door policy of compensation.**

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