

PRESS RELEASE

Minister acknowledges State complicity as Department meets with Justice for Magdalenes

Justice for Magdalenes (JFM), the survivor advocacy group, will meet with officials in the Department of Education on Tuesday, 2 February 2010. The meeting follows statements in recent days by the Minister for Education, **Mr. Batt O'Keeffe**, T.D., revising his earlier assertion that "the State did not refer individuals nor was it complicit in referring individuals to the laundries" (4 September 2009).

In a letter to JFM (dated 27 January 2010), Mr. O'Keeffe acknowledges that the Department of Justice has "confirmed that some women were referred by the Courts to the Magdalen laundries." As such, Mr. O'Keeffe now "accept[s] that this was the case as opposed to the position outlined in my letter of September last." Mr. O'Keeffe repeated this new understanding in his response to two Parliamentary Questions in the Dáil on Thursday last (28 January 2010). JFM welcomes the Minister's acknowledgment of State complicity, and suggests that it provides the basis for moving towards the establishment of a distinct redress scheme for Magdalene survivors.

JFM asserts, however, that evidence of State complicity also involves the Department of Education directly. **Dr. James Smith** (Boston College), a member of JFM's Advisory Committee, said, "Minister O'Keeffe continues to evade this issue. Rather, he maintains the distinction between 'children who were taken into the laundries privately or who entered the laundries as adults' as 'quite different to persons who were resident in State run institutions.' The means by which a child ended up in a laundry is immaterial, as this did not obviate the State's constitutional obligation to protect her. That surely is what Dáil Éireann meant when it voted unanimously 'to cherish *all* of the children of the nation equally.'" JFM asks the Minister to make public the number of children who "were transferred to a Magdalen laundry from a State regulated institution" as well as the number of survivors who have applied to the Redress Board on the basis of section 1(3) of the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002.

JFM points to the Department of Education's awareness that historically children were confined in Magdalene laundries as demonstrated in The "*Reformatory and Industrial School Systems Report, 1970*" (also known as the Kennedy Report). Despite this awareness, the Department never intervened to protect these children from abuse "outside the home." Mr. O'Keeffe contends that the Magdalene laundries "were not regulated or inspected." JFM asks Minister O'Keeffe to explain why, given the department's awareness that children were confined therein, these institutions were never visited, inspected or licensed?

JFM demands that the Minister for Education now account for every child confined to a Magdalene laundry since the founding of the State. JFM demands that the State produce records for all women and children it was complicit in referring to the laundries. JFM urges the State to enter into dialogue with the four religious congregations involved so that they too might make available their records. Access to these records is the crucial next step in understanding this aspect of the nation's history and in establishing an appropriate redress scheme for survivors. Finally, the State should apologize to survivors for its part in the abuse of women in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries.

[Read more detailed arguments and documentation online.](#)

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