

Press Release, 26th June 2013, 7.30pm

Justice for Magdalenes Research response to Magdalen Commission Report

Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFM Research), the survivor advocacy group, broadly welcomes the publication of *The Magdalen Commission Report* written by Mr Justice John Quirke and published this afternoon. The Report satisfies many of the questions and concerns we shared with Mr Justice Quirke through our various submissions. A few issues remain outstanding, however, today is another important day in the campaign to bring justice to all the survivors of the Magdalene Laundries.

In particular, JFM Research welcomes the Report's recommendations providing for contributory pensions, lump sum payments, enhanced medical cards, and a dedicated unit to ensure easy access to services and supports. These measures go some way toward compensating for the women's experiences of arbitrary detention, compulsory or forced labour, and cruel, degrading treatment or punishment. However, JFM Research is also mindful that the recommendations of both the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) and the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) to establish a prompt, thorough and independent investigation have not been implemented.

We acknowledge and welcome that the scheme will provide advocates for women still under the care of the religious congregations and/or the HSE. However, JFM Research is concerned on this point and strongly recommends that the advocates are independent and independently appointed.

In welcoming the dedicated unit, JFM Research strongly recommends that issues of access to and upkeep of Magdalene graves, concerns surrounding grave records, as well as the provision of copies of the McAleese Report to all survivors be part of its remit. JFM Research further recommends that relatives of deceased women are enabled to serve on the proposed advisory body or committee. The adult children of Magdalene women (many of whom are adopted people) continue to live with the legacy of these institutions, and it is important that their voices be acknowledged as part of this on-going process of restorative justice.

JFM Research acknowledges that there is no time limit in order to apply to the Scheme, but, keeping in mind the age profile of survivors, we still hope that the Scheme is immediately advertised at home and abroad, especially so that women in Ireland's Diaspora can avail of redress and compensation. It is also important that the Scheme, which provides enhanced medical cards to women living in Ireland, must ensure directly equivalent supports for women living in different jurisdictions (e.g., women struggling to fund health care in the United States).

JFM Research looks forward to learning who will serve as the Scheme's administrator and under what conditions s/he will operate. Likewise, we anticipate that further information will be forthcoming on the proposed "appeals process," and in particular

who will serve as the “single agreed independent person” and again under what conditions s/he will operate.

JFM Research welcomes Mr Justice Quirke’s acknowledgement of the “traumatic effect of admission and incarceration” on survivors’ “security..., confidence and ...self-esteem.” We further welcome the acknowledgement of the “adverse effect upon the education, perceived reputation, subsequent health, life, lifestyle, confidence and self-esteem of the Magdalen women”. We thank Mr Justice Quirke for the sensitivity displayed towards the women, particularly in the language and terminology used in his Report.

We note that application to the restorative justice scheme is based on women agreeing to waive their rights to take legal action against the State. We believe that the State-funded legal advice promised is essential in this regard to ensure the women are fully informed. We also note that this waiver of rights does not preclude actions against the relevant religious orders.

JFM Research takes this opportunity to thank Mr Justice Quirke for the care and attention he and his team have taken to complete this important task.

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