

## Dublin Honours Magdalene Survivors

A chairde go léir,

Cuirim fáilte mór romhaibh go léir go Teach an Ardmhéara.

Do na daoine sin a tháinig thar lear agus ó áiteanna eile in Éirinn, cuirim fáilte speisialta go Baile Átha Cliath.

**On my own behalf and on behalf of Dublin City Council and the citizens of Dublin I welcome you on this special occasion. Céad míle fáilte romhaibh.**

**For too long the voices of those in our country who were gravely wronged were silenced. No more. Those so long treated as non-persons by Church and State are being heard. Their voices must be listened to, their stories cherished, their rights vindicated.**

It is a pleasure to be here for this truly historic occasion, the Dublin Honours Magdalene Survivors gala banquet at the Mansion House.

It is a very special honour to welcome all of the women, your family members and friends, including those who have travelled from across Dublin, from the rest of Ireland, and especially from overseas. Dublin welcomes you home. You honour us by your presence.

And, in a special way we remember all those wonderful women who can't be with us here this evening: the many the organisers have heard from in the past few weeks, some not physically capable of making the journey to be with us tonight. And, we remember too those who are no longer with us; some lost in recent years are known to us and fondly remembered, others long since passed but never forgotten.

On behalf of the people of this great city, it falls to me as Ardmhéara - Lord Mayor to add my words of acknowledgement and thanks to the words spoken earlier today by President Higgins when he welcomed you at Áras

an Uachtaráin. It is, we all hope, a measure of how far Ireland has travelled as a society that we openly and proudly celebrate and honour you this evening.

In preparing for tonight's banquet, I found myself thinking about the memorial near here in St. Stephen's Green. The plaque affixed to the park bench invokes members of the public to "reflect here upon [the] lives" of the "women who worked in the Magdalen Laundry institutions" and "the children born to some members of those communities." When the memorial was unveiled on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 1996 a small crowd of approximately 30 people gathered to witness then President Mary Robinson mark the occasion as making a "historic statement." Reflecting back to that occasion begs the question what kind of a statement are we seeking to make with the Dublin Honours Magdalene Survivors event in 2018?

I ask this question because there is a lesson worth remembering from 1996.

That lesson is contained in what happened next. Just a short six months after the dedication in St. Stephen's Green, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity announced in October 1996 that they were closing down the Sean McDermott Street Magdalene Laundry because it was no longer commercially viable. At that time though, there was a population of 40 women still in residence, the eldest in her late 70s the youngest in her early 40s. What society had so recently deemed "historic" and part of the past was very much part of Ireland present.

And so I encourage us all here this evening to remember that Dublin Honours Magdalene Survivors must be about a new beginning rather than any attempt to close down the past and render it "historic." There is much still to be known and properly understood about Ireland's Magdalene Laundries. Your presence here in Dublin tonight—your life-stories, your testimony about your time spent in the different institutions, your resilience, your perseverance in the cause of justice and human rights, your good humour, and your decency—paves the way for a different kind of

monument, one not sculpted in cast iron and fixed in place, but rather a process of remembering that is alive, still-emerging, open-ended, and looking toward the future.

If we are brave and if our leaders embrace this new path forward, then we will achieve two crucial objectives that lie at the foundation of Dublin Honours Magdalene Survivors. First, we will honour all survivors and their experiences. Second, we will guarantee no repetition of the past in the present or the future.

We need to make three resolutions.

Firstly – Never again! Never again must women or children or any section of our society be treated in this way.

Secondly – Truth. We need the full truth about what happened in these institutions and similar places – and the State and Church and all concerned must ensure full openness, accountability and transparency.

Thirdly – Justice. All survivors must have access to redress and to justice.

Today's events coincide with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of James Connolly who was born on this day, 5 June 1868. James Connolly and the men and women of 1916 certainly did not die for the type of Ireland that maintained women in the slavery of the Magdalene laundries, the State that stood over the torture, abuse and murders that took place in industrial schools, and the robbery of children from their mothers in mother and baby homes. Connolly and his comrades did not die for a State in which women and children were accorded the status of the property of men. A society where powerful men in Church and State ruled by means of coercion, fear and secrecy. But no more.

**The name 'Magdalene' was once imposed on women to bring shame and disgrace to those who bore it. Today the shame and disgrace are on those in Church and State who destroyed the lives of so many, while those who**

**stand up for justice – you the women we welcome here tonight - can  
speak to the nation with pride. We stand with you.**