

**JFM Meeting with Interdepartmental Committee
9th September 2011, Montague Court, Dublin 2**

In attendance:

JFM Delegation:

Jim Smith
Katherine O'Donnell
Mary McAuliffe
Maeve O'Rourke

JFMR Note: Claire McGettrick was also present and taking minutes (including additional comments below which were intended for JFM's benefit, some of which are included in the public interest).

Interdepartmental Committee:

Senator Martin McAleese (Chairperson)
Nuala Ní Mhuircheartaigh (Advisor to the Chair)

Jimmy Martin (Department of Justice)
Mary McGarry (Department of Education)
Mary Moylan (Department of the Environment)
Denis O'Sullivan (Department of Health/maybe Children?)
Bairbre Nic Aonghusa (Department of Health)
Francis Rochford (Department of Jobs Enterprise & Innovation)

Note: We've obviously had Jimmy Martin at lots of our meetings, but we've also had Mary McGarry at our meeting with Education and Bairbre Nic Aonghusa at the Harney meeting.

- McAleese opened the meeting, he thanked us etc, said they'd be consulting widely on this issue
- He started to speak about the Terms of Reference and I was there with pen poised waiting to write a list of some sort, but alas I still feel none the wiser.
- He said the period they'd be dealing with is 1922 – 1996. I didn't want to interrupt him in the middle of his introduction, but capping it at 1996 worries me a little as there are women still in the charge of the nuns who are there to this day and the state has done nothing to assist them – surely this is lack of "interaction", where there should be "interaction"?
- He said the Terms of Reference will develop a little over time.
- Each department at the table is charged with identifying relevant records in their possession.
- While Minister Shatter has named six departments, the committee has access to all – he noted that access would be probably needed at the Department of the Taoiseach, Finance and Social Protection.



[REDACTED]

- The interim report will be published on 20th October. We will have access.
- They have met with the orders who have been “very cooperative”.
- The orders have a lot of records, which they will make available after certain “comforts” have been put in place, particularly in relation to confidentiality, which the committee are consulting with the Data Protection Commissioner about.

[REDACTED]

- McAleese noted that the orders are not required to give anything, that this is being done on a voluntary basis.
- McAleese and Nuala Ní Mhuircheartaigh can and have viewed numerous records, but they won't go into detail until after the “comforts” have been put in place.
- **IMPORTANT:** Nuala Ní Mhuircheartaigh phoned Jim afterwards asking that we refrain from speaking in the media about the orders seeking “comforts” about the records.
- McAleese says the committee is conscious of survivors and “residents”, they don't want to cause distress.
- Again referring to the Terms of Reference, he said “there are things we can do and there are things we can't” ?????
- If necessary they'll stray beyond the Terms of Reference – if needed.
- He said he had received “Jim's homework” and said they had noted the issues raised.
- He said they fundamentally want to seek out the truth - there is no agenda – they want to get to the truth as quickly and efficiently as possible without causing distress.
- He acknowledged the work done by JFM, in particular the IHRC and UNCAT recommendations, which they/he (?) have/has read.
- They need some “steers” as to where they should look in trying to find documentary evidence.
- They'll be looking at documentary evidence, public debates and articles, but they'll also seek to “contextualise” these records. [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- He said they were in “listening mode” at this meeting.
 - They had met the IHRC that morning [REDACTED]
 - During his presentation, Jim asked them to read Chapter 2 of his book and offered a pdf of it [REDACTED]
 - McAleese asked for an account of the origins of JFM and Jim obliged.
 - As part of this, Jim explained JFM’s role as an advocacy group, that we don’t necessarily represent individual survivors, but explained that survivors we have contact with are in the region of 30-40 women.
 - When Jim asked during the presentation if the state can show that it followed up to ensure that women got out of the laundries, McAleese interrupted and asked how it was possible to prove this. Jim cited survivor testimony and McAleese asked “so this is based on 36 reports?” [REDACTED] – We explained that sometimes it’s about what’s **not** there as well as what is there, ie there is proof of probation officers bringing the women **to** Sean McDermott Street but no record of the probation officer visiting to ensure the women got out.
 - When Jim put up the Senator Connolly O’Brien quote in the presentation (where she says that it would be preferable for a woman to go to prison rather than a laundry), Francis Rochford interrupted and noted that James Connolly (who was the senator’s father) wasn’t over fond of the laundries, especially as one of his comrades was incarcerated in a laundry and they didn’t want an association with “fallen women”. [REDACTED]
 - Rochford said that his department was looking into their inspection records.
 - When Jim put up the An Grianan letter, Jimmy Martin was very quick to interrupt and say it wasn’t a laundry, but a home for “problem girls”. We explained it’s all part of the same complex and that there was crossover between High Park laundry and other parts of the same facility. McAleese said he thought there would be maps available of High Park that might help to clarify the issue.
 - Denis O’Sullivan asked if there were babies born in the laundries, we said no.
 - O’Sullivan also asked if there were transfers from other areas, e.g. from foster care, in order to assist him in seeking out files. I gave the example of the lady in [REDACTED] who was transferred from foster care.

- Jim asked if the Department of Health report into files discovered could be supplied to us, and explained that we could be of assistance in interpreting the files.
- Jim asserted that the interim report should call for a formal apology, given that IHRC and UNCAT have already backed up our assertions.
- McAleese responded that under the Terms of Reference, this wouldn't be possible.

..the drip feeding of the Terms of Reference is very frustrating.

- Jim asserted that the Interdepartmental Committee will influence the government's reaction and that without an apology we would find it difficult to advise women to participate in the answering of questionnaires etc. in the absence of a formal apology. Quick as lightning, McAleese reminded Jim that we're an advocacy group.



- McAleese said that they don't want to raise expectations about the interim report. He said it "won't have a lot of fat on it", but it would estimate the length of time it might take to complete the committee's work. Nuala added that it will set out the progress to date, it won't contain any conclusions.
- She added that everything JFM has provided will have to be checked and verified.
- McAleese said to rush the process would be a disservice to survivors.
- Maeve outlined the areas that the committee should look at:
 1. The facts regarding direct involvement
 2. The facts regarding state awareness
 3. The facts regarding failures and omissions
- Maeve indicated that she was in contact with Felice Gaer and that she would be amenable to contact with the committee.
- McAleese said they'd bear everything in mind, but that their main thrust was factual.
- He said the committee is committed to a quick completion but there can't be gaps.
- He reiterated that they were in "listening mode" and said they'd take all in and reflect.
- We are welcome to communicate any new advice/direction/new facts etc.

- Katherine welcomed the progress made in obtaining records from the orders so we can get a complete picture of what happened.
- Katherine also explained that our research will continue, e.g. examining electoral records, as well as the Oral History Project.
- Katherine also asked if the committee could request the orders to deposit the archival material with a facility such as the National Archives.
- McAleese responded that this was a decision for the orders, that the outcome of this process is likely to have an impact, that things are being taken in “baby steps” and that they would have to “nurse these things along”. This he said was ultimately a question for later on.
- Katherine also explained that we are communicating with the Department of Justice regarding the Reparation Scheme.
- Jim suggested that the committee meet with Patricia Burke Brogan and Mary Raftery
- I mentioned that there was an ex-employee of the Galway laundry that might be interested in speaking with the committee.
- Katherine explained that the questionnaire is likely to elicit a level of backlash as the more outspoken survivors tend to be angry, have literacy issues and a lot of fear. She explained that their lack of understanding of the process could raise their expectations about the purpose of the questionnaire.
- McAleese said they’d welcome suggestions for modifications to the questionnaire. He also said it hasn’t been widely distributed.
- Nuala explained that the structure of the committee involved two extremes, in that they want to be open, yet they don’t want to give a misunderstanding that the questionnaire is compulsory.
- Katherine suggested that perhaps an invitation to speak with the committee without the questionnaire might be a better way to approach the issue. She added that the person doing the listening would have to be skilled.
- A discussion about the questionnaire ensued and it does seem that they genuinely want to get things right and that their intentions were good in distributing the questionnaire. I think it showed (and I hope they took it in) that they have a huge learning curve to overcome in terms of understanding survivors and how they react and interpret things.