



Launch

IHRC Follow-up Report on State Involvement with Magdalen Laundries

Tuesday, 18 June 2013

Introductory Comments

**Des Hogan, Acting CEO
Irish Human Rights Commission**

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

You are all very welcome here today and I would like to thank you for coming. I would also like to welcome the representatives from the various Magdalen survivor support groups who are here today.

Today the Irish Human Rights Commission is launching its "*Follow-Up Report on the State's Involvement in Magdalen Laundries*" and as the Interim Chair of the Commission Mark Kelly has indicated this is the first public event of the new Commission.

I would like to take a moment to set out the background to the publication of today's Follow-Up Report before handing over to Professor Siobhán Mullally and Sinéad Lucey.

In July 2010, the Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) organisation requested that the Commission conduct a formal enquiry into the Magdalen Laundries. JFM argued that the

Irish State was complicit in placing women and girls in Magdalen Laundries where they suffered a number of human rights abuses and they provided a large amount of information to support this contention.

This request to the Commission led to it publishing its report entitled "*Assessment of the Human Rights Issues Arising in Relation to the Magdalen Laundries*" in November 2010 which was submitted to the Government of the day.

That "Assessment Report" set out 12 conclusions regarding the Magdalen Laundries. Our central recommendation was that a statutory mechanism be established to investigate the State's involvement in Magdalen Laundries and to provide appropriate redress where State involvement was identified.

While a statutory inquiry has not been established, other important developments have taken place since which have significantly advanced the cause of the women who resided in Magdalen Laundries.

In May 2011, the United Nations Committee Against Torture in its Concluding Observations to its examination of Ireland, recommended that the State should (and I quote):

"institute prompt, independent, and thorough investigations into all allegations of torture, and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment that were allegedly committed in the Magdalene Laundries".

Shortly after, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence appointed an Inter-Departmental Committee, under the independent chairmanship of Senator Martin McAleese, to establish and report on the facts of State involvement with Magdalen Laundries. This Commission presented to that Committee and engaged with it.

The mandate of that Committee was fact finding only. It had no remit to consider the human rights law or indeed any legal implications of the placement of girls and women in the Laundries by the State and other actors.

In February this year, the McAleese Report was submitted to Government. It is a serious research report running to over 1000 pages. That Report documents the interactions between the State, its various agencies and Magdalen Laundries. As a result, a much clearer picture now emerges about the relationship between the State and the Religious Congregations who ran the Laundries.

Then on Tuesday 19th February 2013, an apology was offered on behalf of the State by An Taoiseach in the Dáil to the women who had resided in Magdalen Laundries. *"The women are and always were wholly blameless"* the Taoiseach said. He also spoke of a *"new dawn"* for the women.

Following this, Judge Quirke was requested to report to Government on an *ex gratia* scheme for the benefit of the women. The Commission has already offered some advice to Judge Quirke on that process drawing on its conclusions from today's report. We understand the work of Judge Quirke has now been completed and will be considered by the Government shortly.

Today the Commission is submitting its "Follow-Up Report" to the Government and we hope it too will receive serious consideration. We had hoped to be able to do so sooner. However there was considerable work involved in processing the information in the McAleese Report and the resources of the Commission are painfully limited. But we are very pleased to be able to publish our Follow-Up Report today.

Our Report takes the facts established in the McAleese Report and filters them through the prism of the human rights obligations on the State. The McAleese Report did not address the human rights issues in terms of naming them as such and without such a human rights analysis there would be a serious gap in our understanding of the duty

owed by the State to the women who resided in the Laundries. That is a role National Human Rights Institutions such as the Commission can do well.

It is the duty of the State to vindicate the rights of its citizens under the Constitution and under international human rights law. Our Report today focuses on this duty.

We hope this is another positive step in the process of vindication and redress for the women. We expect that the conclusions of this Report will be taken into account by Government in establishing a system of redress for them.

I will now hand you over now Professor Siobhán Mullally who will launch the report on behalf of the Commission.

Thank you.