

**THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE
IN THE MATTER OF A COMPLAINT PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 22 OF
THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE**

Between:

ELIZABETH COPPIN

Complainant

- and -

IRELAND

Respondent State

STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH COPPIN

I, **ELIZABETH COPPIN**, of [REDACTED] aged 69 years, say as follows:

1. I make this statement in support of my complaint against Ireland for violation of the rights guaranteed to me by the United Nations Convention against Torture 1984, which was ratified by Ireland on 11 April 2002 and which entered into force with respect to Ireland on 11 May 2002. In particular, my complaint relates to my treatment in the Magdalen Laundries when I was a teenager, and the fact that the State still fails to investigate, acknowledge or address that abuse.
2. I make this statement from facts within my own knowledge save where otherwise appears and where so otherwise appears I believe those facts to be true and accurate.

Introduction

3. I set out below in detail how I have been treated and how that has affected me. At the start, however, I wish to highlight a number of general points to the Committee:
 - a. The abuse that I suffered in the Magdalene Laundries followed on from the abuse I suffered in an industrial school as a child. It was therefore all part of the same history of abuse.
 - b. In particular, the abuse I suffered in the Magdalene Laundries was a kind of mental cruelty and torture. It was in many ways worse than the physical abuse I had suffered in the industrial schools.
 - c. A lot of what happened to me was not explained at the time. I didn't even know the term "Magdalene Laundry" until much later, and I didn't

know that the institutions I was kept in were called "Magdalene Laundries". We were never told anything about what was going on. We just accepted it. But this means that it is only in later life that I have been able to work out what happened to me and to explain it in these words.

My family background

4. I was born Elizabeth [REDACTED] in the Saint Columbanus County Home in Killarney, County Kerry, Ireland, on [REDACTED] 1949. The Home, which was established by the State, was run by the Religious Sisters of Mercy, a female religious institute of the Catholic Church.
5. My mother, also named Elizabeth [REDACTED], was from [REDACTED] in County Kerry. When she became pregnant with me, she decided to enter the County Home to give birth because she knew that she couldn't have me in the ordinary hospital as an unmarried woman. In those days, if a woman got pregnant outside marriage, the child could not be born where 'respectable' women had their babies. My mother was 19 when I was born.
6. After I was born, my grandfather had to pay £100 to the nuns in order to get my mother and me out of the County Home. Usually, in those days, unmarried women were not allowed to keep their children. My mother returned to her father's home in [REDACTED] with me. Her own mother had died leaving her father to care for a large number of children. She married my stepfather, John [REDACTED]. He was kind at first but became physically abusive toward me. He was prosecuted and fined, but refused to pay.

Nazareth House Industrial School

7. On 4 August 1951, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children ('NSPCC') applied to court for an order taking me away from my family. The order was granted and I was committed to the Pembroke Alms (Nazareth House) Industrial School for Girls in Tralee, County Kerry. I was two years old. I now know that I was committed to the School on the basis that I was "[d]estitute and illegitimate not being an orphan: her mother unable to support her", under section 10(1)(d)(h) and (e)(i) of the 1908 Children Act. The "sentence of detention" was said to be until the eve of my 16th birthday, on [REDACTED] 1965.
8. Nazareth House was run by the Religious Sisters of Mercy. I was known there by my registration number, 985. I saw my mother no more than once every two or three years. I was subjected to horrific emotional and physical abuse there by the nun in charge, Sister Enda. She was a monster. She victimised me relentlessly because I was "illegitimate". She hurled vulgar insults at me. She would say cruel hurtful things daily to me, like "You imbecile from the bogs of Listowel. I'll tame you my girl. You worm, you. Get out of my sight. Keep your tears for when you leave here, because you will need them then. Believe me, you will regret the day you were born." She regularly beat me with a leather strap on my bare back and buttocks so hard that I bled. I became unconscious more than once. Sister Enda often saw to it that I was deprived of food, and I was often so hungry that I would steal toothpaste from the other children to eat. The abuse I suffered was so severe

that I once tried to kill myself by setting myself on fire. Another girl put the flames out with a bucket of water, but I suffered serious burns on my upper left thigh. I still have those burns. No-one called the police. I received no hospital treatment. I was so terrified of Sister Enda that I never told anyone what was happening. None of the Departmental Inspectors ever noticed anything amiss. No-one tried to protect me.

9. The industrial school was located on the same grounds as primary and secondary schools run by the same nuns who ran the industrial school, the Religious Sisters of Mercy. The 'day scholars' in the schools came from around the town, and we industrial school children were mixed in with them in the classrooms. I passed my Primary Certificate in 1961, when I was aged 12 and in sixth class of primary school. The normal progression after passing the Primary Certificate was to continue to secondary school and this is what I wanted to do. However, Sister Enda decided that I would not be going to secondary school. My primary school Principal, Sister Elizabeth, told me in the summer of 1961 that Sister Enda wanted me to stay back to look after the babies in the Industrial School instead.
10. In September 1961, I started sixth class in primary school again, but I missed approximately 70 days of schooling that academic year. Instead of going to school, and instead of helping to look after the babies, I was forced to sand and scrub the long cloister floors. They made me chop wood and shovel coal and turf for the fire, which it was my responsibility to tend. I did menial tasks in the kitchen like cleaning fish and peeling potatoes. Even the days that I did go to school, I was forced to do manual labour in the evenings.
11. When I was in the industrial school, I didn't know what a Magdalene Laundry was. All I knew is that us girls were in categories for the nuns: there were the special ones, the mediocre ones, and the despised ones. We knew that the despised ones, in particular, didn't get out and go to secondary school. We knew that there was a place which was supposed to be worse than where we were – and that was saying a lot because I was living in hell, petrified daily. However we were told we could end up going to "the place where Hannah ██████ went". That was supposed to be a place worse than hell that you can't compare. For those of us where they took a dislike to us, Sister Enda would say to everyone that you'd end up there. I now know that those places were the laundries.
12. I still remember the day I was brought to the Magdalene Laundry very clearly, although I wasn't told where I was going. It was 19 March 1964 and I'll never forget it as long as I live. In the morning I was in the kitchen cutting off fish heads in the sink when Sister Enda came down and called me "Betty" (which is what I used to be called, and is a lovely name, but I hate it now because it was tarnished by the nuns), and she had a big smile on her face. She never used to smile at me unless my mother was there so I thought maybe my mother was visiting. I went with her and mouthed at all my friends that my mother was there. She took me up to the parlour and shut the door. She said to me: "Now my girl, you've been complaining of doing all the work around here. You'll be glad to know I've got a job for you. You've been complaining. You'll be getting paid 2 and 6 a week, and it'll be a long time before you get out of there".

13. That was when I realised I was going to the place I had heard about that was worse than the industrial school, which I now know was a Magdalene Laundry. She then asked me to put on nylon stockings, a suspender belt and a bra, none of which I had ever worn before. We then left in a black cab. I had no opportunity to tell any of my friends that I was going at all or to say goodbye and that was the saddest part – she could have told me the night before or even the hour before. I know now that it was all planned by the education department, who approved it so there was no reason not to let me know.
14. Now that I have finally seen my records, I know that I was “discharged” on “licence” to the Laundry. It is said that I was “sent there for protection as [I] was very bold”. I don’t understand this at all – it is ludicrous and in any case no reason to send me there. My record also shows that the Department of Education in Dublin spoke to Sister Enda, by phone, about my transfer from the industrial school to the Magdalene Laundry, and that the Department consented to it. Sister Enda told them that my mother had consented to me being put into employment at age 14. However, I know from speaking to my mother that she never gave any such permission. In any event, my mother had no say over my care because there was a court order requiring me to stay in the industrial school until the eve of my 16th birthday.
15. When we were in the cab on the way to what I now know was Peacock Lane, I was petrified. I didn’t know what it was or where I was going. I wasn’t noticing what the nuns were saying, they were talking but they never spoke to me, or offered me a drink or a bit of food on the journey. It was very weird. It was a combination of my innocence and not thinking of the bigger picture, not knowing what was happening and afraid to ask questions, stressed, frightened, and afraid of all the abuse I had already suffered there. I just gave up – what could I do? Who could I go to? Who would help me? It was all part of the way I felt – trapped, and with no one to help me. So I just sat in the car and waited.

The Peacock Lane Magdalene Laundry

16. I arrived at Saint Vincent’s Magdalene Laundry, Saint Mary’s Road, Peacock Lane in Cork, County Cork, on 19 March 1964. It was operated by the Sisters of Charity. I arrived and remember walking up the steps into a massive parlour. The nun came in and was whispering with Sister Enda. I just stood there and didn’t do anything. Sister Enda told me “I’ll be going, you be a good girl now”. I was scared, I wanted to run to her and say “I’ll come with you, I’ll be good”. But I didn’t have the confidence to say it. I had to go with an auxiliary (a woman who had been in the laundries since she was a young girl) and I was put to work. I had no idea where I was or why I was there. I just knew that they hadn’t liked me in the Industrial school.
17. The women in the Laundry were called ‘penitents.’ What I was supposed to be doing penance for was never clear to me. Sister Enda had told me that I would be paid 2 shillings and 6 pence per week. I never got any money.
18. I was put to work the first day I arrived and afterwards worked every day after Mass when we were sent to work. I was given a big heavy rubber apron and wellington boots. I worked in the washroom and I can still remember the

machines – they were huge. I loaded the huge washing machines (which had enormous steam pipes and taps) with dirty laundry from the army, hospitals, hotels and even, I believe, from some politicians. It was a massive operation, we did every type of organisation and there was so much washing. Some of the laundry was filthy: filthy sheets and filthy shirts. When the wash was finished, I had to pull the clothes or sheets out into a big trolley and take them to a large industrial dryer. This was exhausting – the sheets were soaking and heavy and very hard work. Then they were wrung out. That was my job, and I did this all day, six days a week, until 6.00 pm. In the summer it was particularly bad as with all the steam and water everywhere it was extremely tiring. I used to get pains in my legs whenever I was off, mainly on Sundays. There were jobs for everyone, everyone had to do their bit. Some women had to do the mangles or the ironing. It was a massive production line.

19. We were not allowed to speak in the Laundry. The main door of the Laundry was always kept locked by the Sisters. In the middle of the day, at about 12 or 1pm, we had dinner. For breakfast and supper, we might have had a slice of bread and tea. A nun sat on a podium in the refectory at all mealtimes, and when it was a strict nun we were not allowed to talk. We then had to be upstairs and lights out by around 8 or 9pm. We'd always be trying to avoid the nuns seeing us so that we could talk to each other, and sometimes we managed – I made a friend called Patricia [REDACTED] and we used to sometimes manage to chat in the Laundry or would try and call out to each other from our cells. We were next door to each other and the only way to talk was to pull the window down a crack (it didn't go down very far) and speak through the mesh or the bars on the outside.
20. We lived in small unheated cells, perhaps 6m² in area, arranged as in a prison. Each cell had a singled window with bars or mesh on the outside. Each cell contained a single bed, a bedside locker and a chamber pot. At night, the nuns locked the cell doors from the outside with iron bolts and in the morning we 'slopped out'. It was disgusting. All the women queued together with their pots at the open sluice. We had no privacy and the stench was terrible. We could bathe only once a week. Many of the other women in the Laundry had terrible psychological problems. I could hear them groaning and crying all night. I remember vividly one woman, whom I will call Mary, calling out at night time: 'my baby, my baby, they took my baby from me'. The isolation at night time was very bad. It was soul-destroying. When women died in the Laundry, it was not spoken of. There were whispers that they were buried in a mass grave, something that has now been confirmed. I believed that the same would happen to me. I thought that I would never get out of there alive.
21. I remember how it felt to arrive at Peacock Lane. One day I'd been in the industrial school, in a dormitory with the other girls, and having breakfast with them. It wasn't brilliant, but was still communal. The next minute I was taken away, locked in a cell, could hardly open a window at all, and was locked in at night. I went from the luxury of a bath and a toilet to no sink, a slop-out arrangement like prisoners (with an awful stench). Even thinking about it now makes me feel sick – it was the end of my childhood. My childhood had been an abusive one but it still had been a childhood. Then I was treated like an

adult – although when I think of it, I was treated like an adult with a criminal record, and I was still a child.

22. One day, in Magdalene Laundry number one, I was accused of stealing sweets by the nuns. I said that I had not stolen the sweets. Nobody listened. The Sisters had two of the older women physically drag me to a punishment cell, which was called the “padded cell”. None of the nuns ever mentioned the existence of a cell, but there were always mind games being played and I had heard from another girl that if you behaved really badly you could be sent to a “padded cell”. I remember being dragged there specifically as I was so terrified. The cell had a bare floor (with no carpet or lino) and no furniture in it. There was an air vent but no window. On reflection, there was not even a mattress. There was a pot for the toilet, an enamel plate with a slice of bread and an enamel cup of water. I remember the moon shining in. I was locked in the cold, dark cell for three days and three nights. I was given bread and water for meals. In the evening I was allowed to take my pot and slop out, and then I was given water for the night.
23. This was a terrible experience. I was very upset to be in there. I didn’t steal the sweets but there was nothing I could do – I was fed up of arguing with them and knew I wasn’t going to be believed. At the time I was very young and immature, and felt very very low. It was so bad that I was thinking of writing to my first abuser, Sister Enda, and asking her to get me out of there. It was then that I realised that I was going to be in there forever, that no-one was going to get me out. I saw the older women around me and thought that was my life. It’s terrible at that age to think that you’re going to be somewhere for life. If I had stolen the sweets that was one thing, but I hadn’t and it made me very bitter and very sad. I was very sad and very upset, and in part I think I was broken. I knew I had to survive.
24. This experience added to my feeling of being trapped. I was in perpetual fear.
25. I never saw anyone from the Government come in to inspect the Magdalene Laundry in Peacock Lane. The only people who came in from the outside were men and women from the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Cork – who would come some Sundays and sometimes take us out for a supervised walk. I was so alone in the Laundry that I used to write to Sister Enda, the nun who had brutalised me so viciously in Nazareth House, asking her to come and take me back. That is how bad things were. She would reply saying that I had to be a good girl. I actually thought that Sister Enda would get me a job and that sooner or later I would leave the Laundry.
26. When I spoke one day to a workman who was fixing one of the washing machines it really came home to me that I would be going nowhere. He told me that most of the women in the Laundry had babies and that they had to stay in the Laundry forever. He asked me where my baby was and was very surprised when I said I had never had one. He asked me what I was doing there, and told me that no-one was going to get me out of there. It dawned on me then that some of the women in the Laundry were in their seventies and eighties and that if I did not leave, I would die there and be buried in the communal grave. I never wanted that, and I knew I had to survive. Despite

my immaturity and vulnerability and ignorance, I knew I had to get away. The workman gave me 10 shillings, and I hid it in my wellington boots.

27. I decided to try to escape. One Saturday, on 13 August 1966 when the Sisters were at lunch, I asked the Nun for the keys for upstairs, on the pretext of washing my hair, so we could get to a cell at the front of the building without barred windows. I persuaded another girl, whom I will call Kathleen, to come with me. The room was on the first floor. We opened the window and jumped out. When I fell, I hurt my ankle, but I managed to hobble out. We had planned to go and meet the workmen who said they would be waiting for us at the station, but they weren't. We walked across the city to Saint Finbarr's Hospital to look for a job. It was a training hospital. It seems unbelievable now, but we told the nun in charge, Sister Finian, that we'd run away from the Laundry. Of course, she called the police, who came and took us back to the Magdalene Laundry.
28. When we arrived back at the Laundry, the Sisters wouldn't take us back in, so the police took us back to the Hospital. Sister Finian gave Kathleen and me a job in the kitchen, and for a while we felt safe.

The Good Shepherd Magdalene Laundry

29. On 4 November 1966, two officials from the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC, the successor of the NSPCC), a man and a woman, arrived at the Hospital. Sister Finian told me to go with them. The man, Inspector William O'Callaghan, was a very nasty character. He took great satisfaction in telling me that because I had run away from the Laundry, he was going to send me to a place that was even worse. The woman never said a word. It reminded me of when Sister Enda said I was going to be locked up for a long time. I didn't really say anything. At the time I thought they were the police and didn't think there was anything I could do. There was a man in uniform threatening me. I was terrified.
30. Inspector O'Callaghan took me to the Magdalene Laundry in the convent of the Good Shepherd Sisters in Sunday's Well, Cork and left me there with the Sisters. I remember arriving there. It was a big place with a couple of steps going up to it. We went in and Inspector O'Callaghan was doing all of the talking, and went, without saying anything to me. One of the sisters said, "Right, we're going to call you Enda". When I said "my name's not Enda, it's Betty [REDACTED]", she said "forget Betty [REDACTED] here you'll be Enda". Then they ran a bath for me and said I had to get in. There was disinfectant in the bath. They put a towel around my shoulders and cut off all my hair with shears. They then took my clothes and gave me a uniform which was like a biblical sack, in a brown colour (which is what I had to wear the whole time I was there). I didn't say anything – what could I say? I was annoyed and angry and frightened, but couldn't show it.
31. The name was the worst thing. Enda is a boy's name and it was also the name of my tormentor, Sister Enda. I absolutely hated that name. From then on, whenever they would call me Enda I would yell that my name was not Enda! I hated it. I was constantly stressed and in trouble, and I could never work out why as I didn't feel I had done anything wrong.

32. I was put to work in the Laundry immediately. The work was the same as in the Magdalene Laundry at Peacock Lane. After early morning Mass, we were put to work in the Laundry. My job was to load the big washing machines. The laundry came from hospitals, prisons and the army. When the wash was finished, I pulled the heavy, wet clothes or sheets out into a big trolley and put them in the dryer. Again, I did this all day, six days a week, until 6.00 pm. The main door of the Laundry was always locked. In the evenings, we did mending, embroidery, sewing and rug making for the Sisters. It was to make extra money for the nuns. We were never paid a penny.
33. In the Good Shepherd Laundry we slept in dormitories rather than in cells, and we had proper toilets and baths, which was a good change. The nun in charge, Mother Mount Carmel, enforced a strict rule of silence at all times. I was treated very badly by the Sisters because for a while I refused to obey them when they called me Enda. But the Sisters turned the other penitents against me and they isolated me until I gave in. I hated it there and felt very disturbed. The Sisters watched me very carefully because they knew I had escaped from Peacock Lane. In the five months I was in the Good Shepherds Laundry in Cork, once I also was made to lie out prostrate on the floor and say I was sorry for nothing once, just to get my dinner.
34. After five months in the Laundry, on 8 March 1967, I was called into Mother Mount Carmel's office. She said "Enda, because you're not settling, I'm sending you to Waterford." I said "My name's not Enda" She just said "I know. I've heard it all before".

The Waterford Magdalene Laundry

35. One of the Good Shepherd Sisters, Sister Concepta, came with me on the train and took me to Saint Mary's Magdalene Laundry on the Cork Road in Waterford. On the way there I asked her how long she had been in the laundries. She said 50 years, and I asked her why she didn't run away. I remember her answer: "who'd have me now? I couldn't live out there."
36. Once Sister Concepta had left, the Sister in charge in Waterford, Mother Mary Patricia, spoke to me kindly. I was very surprised. I think it was the first time anyone had spoken to me with respect. She asked me "My God, what have they done to you?". I had a brainwave and said "If I do 12 months good here, will you get me a job?" When she said yes I hardly believed her and so I kept asking her whether she meant it or whether she was just saying it.
37. The regime in the Magdalene Laundry in Waterford was not an especially cruel one by comparison with the Laundries in Cork. I was allowed to use my own name, and no-one cut my hair or beat me. This was the first time of happiness in my sad abusive life. Once a month a priest came and gave us a disco, and there was a very different atmosphere about the place. I found Mother Mary Patricia and Mother Mary of Grace approachable. I wasn't so frightened there. Of course, I was still locked up and made to work without pay. I never saw any inspectors from the Government. No-one ever checked on us.

38. Mother Mary Patricia said to me, not long after I'd been there, that I could do a typing course if I wanted, but I said no – I wanted to get out. I wanted to get out of there. She said that was ok, 12 months was enough but I had to keep to my side of the bargain and do my work every day. One day in or about April 1968, Mother Mary Patricia told me that she had arranged a job for me. I was pleased at first, but then she told me that it was in the Bon Secours Hospital in Tralee. I knew then that Sister Enda from the Nazareth House Industrial School would find me, because she was in Tralee. I asked Mother Mary Patricia whether Sister Enda would know, and she said that they had to tell her.
39. I left the Magdalene Laundry in Waterford on 30 April 1968 and went back to Kerry. I was given some money and a coat, and got the train by myself. It was the first time I had done such things by myself. I was given a job cleaning the Hospital. I was paid at least, but one day I was scrubbing the floor, and when I looked up there was Sister Enda walking towards me. I was on my hands and knees, scrubbing, just where she wanted me to end my life. She told me to come to the convent, and I went. I was a broken woman. I had just turned 19, and I was so broken. The first thing Sister Enda said to me when she opened the door was "aren't you sorry now for all the trouble you caused?" Even then, I nodded, because I was still afraid of her.
40. A short time after that, I had an offer of a job in a hospital in Dublin. I decided to take it to get away from Sister Enda. So I went to Dublin and started saving money so that I could leave Ireland altogether and leave my life behind.
41. In February 1969 when I had saved enough money to pay for my passage, I took the boat to England. I saved up with a woman I met in the hospital, and I went with her. We left in secret.

Emigration

42. When we arrived in England the man at the customs counter asked me whether I had anything to declare. I said "I'm lucky to have myself", and he laughed. I got on the train after that. I had no idea where I was or what I was doing. I remember getting to Reading and thinking it was pronounced "reeding". The woman I travelled with told me that I should go to St Augustine's in Hammersmith to get help. I did, and they helped me find a place in Notting Hill Gate to stay.
43. I got my first job in London as a tea-lady and then gradually moved from place to place and up through different jobs. I went to school at night and learned to type. I then got a job as a clerk, typist and cashier, I even worked at an engineer's tools business and a clothing firm. I just kept working my way up – trying to improve myself. It was difficult because I had had so little education. My only education had been earning money for the religious orders. I still sometimes find it takes me time to grasp things. At night I had nightmares about the nuns coming to take me back to the Laundry. I found it very difficult to maintain a job. I always felt the stigma of having grown up in institutions rather than with my family. Whenever anyone from Ireland asked where I was from I would ask them where they were from first, and then just say somewhere different. I wouldn't admit to having grown up in an institution.

44. When I arrived in London I used to stand leaning against the railings of my balcony and cry and tell myself I could go back to Ireland. But it dawned on me that if I did go back to Ireland I would have nowhere to go. I didn't know anyone in Ireland. I had had no contact with my family since childhood at all.
45. I met my husband Peter in England. We were married in 1973. We had two children, a daughter in 1979 and a son in 1980. Finally, after we were married, I went back to education and qualified as a Nursery Nurse. Then I worked as a Nursery Nurse from 1987 to 2003. I studied at night and obtained a degree in primary education in 2003. I found the process very difficult because of my lack of childhood education but I am very proud of what I achieved. I got a B.Ed with second class honours.
46. During my time in England, I suffered from profound depression and anxiety. In the 1990s I briefly received counselling and was prescribed anti-depressant medication. When I was first married, I would still get nightmares and think that Sister Enda was coming for me. I suffer from depression and anxiety still. I am sure that this is at least partly because of what happened to me as a child.
47. I was married to Peter in the Church of England. From the time I left Ireland in 1969 until I returned to Ireland in 2006, I did not set foot in a Catholic church. Now I go to church from time to time, but I did not bring my children up as Catholics because I didn't want the Catholic Church to have any hold over my children in any way, like it did with me.
48. Having been kept in institutions for my entire childhood, and then having moved to England, I didn't know my family. It was only after I went back to Ireland, 14 years after I moved to England, that I started to see them again. I was back in Ireland in 2005 for a few years, but returned to England to be closer to my children. Of the family that I knew, my grandfather used to come and visit me while I was in the industrial school but once he got into a big row with Sister Enda as he saw the marks on my back. He didn't come back then, and I didn't meet him until I returned to Ireland after I'd moved to England. He couldn't get me out because a court had put me there, not him. I also only met my mother properly when I visited Ireland (although she visited occasionally in the industrial school). Getting to know her was wonderful – it was amazing just to be able to do all of the things, to laugh and cry and argue together and have some normality. I found that I had sisters and brothers and got to know them. It was so sad when my mother died. It made me think that none of this should have happened. I was very, very low at the funeral. The Government, the religious orders, even the courts and the NSPCC were all involved in preventing me from having a family unit.

Reporting the abuse

49. In October 1997, I decided to report what had happened to me to An Garda Síochána (the Irish national police force). I wrote a letter to the Chief Superintendent in Tralee describing what had happened. In 1998, I gave a full statement at Tralee Garda Station.
50. Thereafter I was never contacted by the police about this complaint. I was never provided with any information about any investigation that may have

been carried out. It does not appear that any such investigation was ever carried out.

High Court proceedings

51. In 1999, I initiated civil proceedings in the Irish High Court against the representatives of the Congregations in whose care I had been abused. I claimed damages against them for assault, false imprisonment, and violation of constitutional rights, including inhuman and degrading treatment. The Sisters of Mercy applied to the High Court to have the case dismissed on the grounds of inordinate and inexcusable delay on my part. They argued that the nuns involved were dead and that their records relating to me had not survived, so that they would not receive a fair trial. The High Court acceded to their application and my proceedings were dismissed on 23 November 2001.

Application for redress for childhood abuse

52. When the Irish Government established the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse in 2000, I made a statement to the Commission about the abuse I suffered.
53. When the Government established an *ex gratia* scheme to provide redress for people who had been abused in industrial schools under the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002, I applied for an award.
54. On 24 February 2005, I appeared before the Residential Institutions Redress Board to put my case. I told the Board, which was chaired by High Court Judge Mr Justice Sean O'Leary, about the abuse I had suffered in Nazareth House and in the Magdalene Laundries.
55. The Board assessed the level of abuse I had suffered as being at the very top of the Board's scale. The Board made an award to me of €140,000 in exchange for a waiver of any rights I had to take action against the State or the nuns. Because my case had already been dismissed, I signed the waiver and accepted the award. When I accepted the award, I also had to sign an agreement never to speak about my experiences in the Industrial School in a way that could identify the people who abused me or the institution I was in. I know that I have broken that agreement, but I think that it was totally unjust and I am willing to take the risk of telling the truth.

Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries (McAleese Committee)

56. Ireland has never established a Commission to investigate the Magdalene Laundries.
57. The only investigation carried out into the Magdalene Laundries by was an Inter-Departmental Committee chaired by Senator Martin McAleese, who was appointed to the Senate by the Taoiseach (the Irish Prime Minister) and married to the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese. The McAleese Committee was only given the task of looking at State involvement in the operation of the Laundries. It did not consider whether human rights violations occurred in them.

58. The McAleese Committee was not independent. Its members were all senior civil servants in the very Government departments responsible for the Magdalene Laundries.
59. In May 2012, I filled in a form detailing my abuse in the Magdalene Laundries for the McAleese Committee. I was asked to do so by the Irish Women Survivors Support Network.
60. Shortly afterwards, we all received an invitation to attend a meeting with Senator McAleese. He came with his assistant, Nuala Ni Mhuirheartaigh, to a hotel in London. We were all taken into a room and we had to wear name tags. I only got a chance to answer one or two questions from Senator McAleese and then other women were speaking. I didn't get a chance to speak to him properly.
61. I subsequently received an invitation to meet Senator McAleese for a second time, which I did in December 2012. My husband Peter and I went to Dublin to meet him and Nuala. It was one of the days when Hilary Clinton was visiting Dublin. I remember Senator McAleese and Nuala were making a big deal, discussing how she had made a wonderful speech on human rights. I butted in and said, "Ireland needs to look after their own human rights." I also remember asking him, "How can this inquiry be independent when four of the Departments on this investigation had something to do with my abuse?"
62. We were talking then and I was telling Senator McAleese about the punishment cell. In the Magdalenes it was actually called the "padded cell". He turned around to me and said, "Where was it?" as if he didn't believe me. I explained where the cell had been. Then he said to me, "Did you ever see any abuse?" I replied, "No, but they played mind games, it was all about mind games and that was hard to cope with, and they dragged me to the padded cell."
63. When I think about it now, I am very upset that I said "No" when Senator McAleese asked me if I ever saw abuse in the Magdalene Laundries. I should have said, "I didn't see it, I lived it". Neither Senator McAleese nor Nuala explained what they meant the word "abuse" to mean. I think I have always associated the word "abuse" with the physical beatings I grew up with on a daily basis in the Industrial School. I didn't believe that the act of dragging me to the padded cell, or the detention and forced labour I experienced, would be classed as abuse. On reading the McAleese Report, I discovered the replies the other women gave when asked the question by Senator McAleese, "Did you see any Abuse there?", were the same as mine. We all appeared to have associated the meaning of abuse as beatings. The women questioned by Senator McAleese replied "No" and I did likewise. He did not explain what type of abuse he was asking about, and I believe that the answers we gave have been used to avoid finding the State and the Church to be at fault for human rights violations in the Magdalene Laundries.
64. The McAleese Committee delivered its report to the Government in February 2013. It did not pay proper attention to our human rights and the horrendous abuse that we suffered. I feel that the McAleese Report was suggesting that somehow what we went through in the Magdalene Laundries was not all that bad. In Chapter 19 of the McAleese Report, there is nothing about me. I

have checked again and again and my experiences are not discussed. Chapter 19 of the McAleese Report looks like it was done on an *ad hoc* basis. We have not been taken seriously in our complaints.

65. The McAleese Report didn't question why we were imprisoned, why the nuns and the State were allowed to treat us the way that they did, and why we had no rights.
66. I was not surprised that the McAleese Report showed that the State was involved with the Magdalene Laundries, including by imprisoning girls and women in the institutions and giving laundry contracts to the nuns. The Report also showed that even though the Magdalene Laundries were supposed to be inspected for health and safety reasons, the State inspectors rarely visited. And when they did, they were not concerned about how we lived, or the fact that we were locked up and getting no pay. They just wanted to see that the machinery was in proper working order.

Application for redress for work in Magdalene Laundries

67. On 19 February 2013, in light of the McAleese Report, the Taoiseach apologised to the Magdalene Women on behalf of the State. He announced that an *ex gratia* redress scheme would be established, and asked the President of the Law Reform Commission, High Court Judge Mr Justice John Quirke, to make recommendations about its terms.
68. I gave a written statement to Mr Justice Quirke about my experiences in the Magdalene Laundries. Mr Justice Quirke reported to the Government in May 2013. The Government promised to accept all of his recommendations in respect of redress but it has only ever implemented some of them.
69. When the Irish Government established the Magdalene Laundries Scheme, I applied for an award to the Minister for Justice and Equality.
70. On 22 November 2013, I was offered an award of €55,500 by the Minister in exchange for waiver of all my legal rights against the State in respect of what had happened to me in the Laundries. The Minister asked me to confirm that his assessment of my time in the Laundries was correct.
71. I wrote back to the Minister on 3 December 2013 protesting that the offer of redress entailed no acknowledgement on the part of the State that it had failed to protect me and that my human rights had been violated.
72. On 19 December 2013 the Minister wrote back stating that unless I indicated whether I accepted the assessment of my time in the Laundries, my application would be deemed withdrawn. On 20 December 2013 I told the Minister that I confirmed that the assessment was correct.
73. On 3 March 2014, I wrote to the Minister protesting again that the offer of redress entailed no acknowledgement on the part of the State that it had failed to protect me and that my human rights had been violated.
74. On 14 March 2014, the Minister wrote back saying simply that there was no need to review my application because I did not disagree with his assessment of the time I had spent in the Laundry. At some point around this time I also telephoned the Ombudsman and asked if there was anything they could do to

help me assert my human rights and they said no. They said that if I wanted to challenge the payment being offered by the Department of Justice I should go through the internal appeal process in the Department.

75. As my High Court proceedings had already failed, and on the basis of the public representations by the Government that the recommendations of Mr Justice Quirke would be implemented, on 21 March 2014 I accepted the award and signed the waiver required by the Minister. It is frustrating to think that I had to sign the waiver.
76. On 1 August 2014 I sent a complaint to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. On 21 August 2014 the Commission sent me an email saying that it does not take decisions on the merit of communications submitted to it. I haven't heard anything further from the Commission.
77. Several elements of the Magdalene Laundries Scheme have yet to be implemented by the Government. For instance, we have not been offered the level of medical services recommended by Mr Justice Quirke, notwithstanding that the Government publicly accepted this recommendation, and that it was on this basis that I and many other women accepted redress under the Scheme. In addition, the Department of Justice has not set up the Dedicated Unit, which was supposed to support the women to decide together on a suitable memorial. It was also supposed to support the Magdalene women in meeting each other and meeting the nuns, if anybody wanted to.

Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters

78. On 17 February 2015, the Government set up a Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters. It did so in response to public outcry over research which indicated that 796 babies' bodies had been buried unmarked in a disused septic tank between 1925 and 1961 at the former 'Home' for unmarried mothers and their children in Tuam, County Galway.
79. I thought that this Commission of Investigation would finally be an opportunity for the truth to be told about how women in Ireland, like my mother and me, were treated by the State and the nuns. I made a submission to the Minister for Children in June 2014, when he was consulting on the Terms of Reference for the Commission, requesting that he ensure that all County Homes were included in the investigation. However, I have been disappointed yet again by the fact that this Commission is not investigating the County Home where I was born, nor is it investigating the Magdalene Laundries.
80. The Terms of Reference for the Commission of Investigation, dated 17 February 2015, state that the Commission is to investigate 14 'Mother and Baby Homes' and a 'representative sample' of County Homes – the type of institution in which my mother gave birth to me. According to the Terms of Reference, the Commission can also recommend to the Government that its remit should be extended if it identifies matters that warrant further investigation in the public interest.

81. On 12 May 2016 the Commission of Investigation chose the four County Homes that it would investigate. The list did not include my County Home: the Saint Columbanus County Home in Killarney, County Kerry.
82. On 3 August 2016 I emailed the Department of Children, which is the Department in charge of the Commission of Investigation, to ask why my County Home was being ignored by the Commission. I said that, as an Irish woman, I felt that my human rights were being violated again.
83. An official from the Department of Children replied to me on 8 August 2016 to say that the Commission of Investigation was independent in its decisions and that the Department could not interfere or comment. I felt that the Department was using the Commission as an excuse to avoid taking responsibility for its duties towards me, as someone complaining of human rights violations.
84. I duly emailed the Commission of Investigation itself on 9 August 2016 to remind it that human rights violations took place in all of the County Homes and that the Commission should investigate all County Homes. I said that "It is just not good enough for parts of Irish Society to be ignored" and that I believed that "all Irish Women should be afforded the same rights as the few the Irish Government has chosen to be selected for the various investigations."
85. The Judge who is leading the Commission of Investigation, Judge Yvonne Murphy, replied to me on 24 August 2016 to say that she knew I was disappointed that my County Home had not been selected for investigation. She said that the Commission regularly reviewed its work and that she would contact me if they decided to investigate my County Home.
86. I received a further email from the Commission of Investigation on 8 December 2016 letting me know that I could avail of pro bono legal assistance from Hogan Lovells in London to give an account of my experiences. Hogan Lovells was providing this pro bono assistance as part of an initiative by the groups Adoption Rights Alliance and Justice for Magdalenes Research, called the "Clann Project". I made a witness statement with Hogan Lovells and I asked Hogan Lovells to send this statement to the Commission.
87. On 10 March 2017 I emailed the Minister for Children, who has been speaking about changing the Terms of Reference for the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, to ask if she will make sure that there is an investigation into the abuse in the Magdalene Laundries and in all County Homes. I explained my history of abuse to the Minister. Three days later her private secretary replied by email, informing me that the Minister would reply as soon as possible. I'm still waiting for the response they promised me.
88. I haven't given up trying to convince the Commission of Investigation to listen to me, even though I find it so upsetting to deal with them. In June of last year, I realised that the Commission of Investigation would be visiting London and I phoned the office to ask if I could attend one of their meetings. The answer I received was "No, you cannot attend, because your County Home is

not included." I emailed the Commission on 19 June 2017 in sheer frustration, again letting them know that they are violating my human rights and the rights of all of the Irish women and men that they are not listening to.

89. In February of this year, I contacted the Commission again to request that it widen its remit.
90. I don't understand why the County Home where my mother gave birth to me, and where she would have been kept had my father not paid £100, is being ignored. I don't understand either why the Magdalene Laundries are being ignored again. I have tried everything I can to get Ireland to listen.

No independent investigation

91. To this day, there has never been any independent investigation into the human rights violations that happened to thousands of girls and women in the Irish Magdalene Laundries.
92. Neither has there been any investigation into what happened to me in the Laundries, notwithstanding that I complained about what happened to the police, the High Court, the Residential Institutions Redress Board, Mr Justice Quirke, the Minister for Justice and Equality and most recently the Minister for Children.

No admission of liability by the State

93. Successive Irish Prime Ministers have offered apologies to children abused in industrial schools and women sent to Magdalene Laundries. However, the Irish State has never accepted that it is responsible for what happened by its failure to protect women and children against abuse. I feel like even when it offers redress, it is on the basis of a quid pro quo: money in exchange for waiver of my rights.

Continuing injustice

94. Overall, I feel like none of my complaints are taken seriously. Time and again I have tried to raise this and yet nobody cares. I don't think Ireland cares about justice. They only care about what is in the media. At the time I was so taken with the apology that was made, but actually that's not enough. It feels like they didn't really mean it because now they deny there were any human rights abuses. If our human rights were investigated, they would have acknowledged how serious the situation was, moreso than with crocodile tears. The Government and the McAleese report would have acknowledged us being locked up for no reason, arbitrary detention, bars on the windows, locked in a cell, changing names. None of that has been addressed for me, personally.
95. Except for Eamon Gilmore (who wasn't frightened to say the words 'human rights' in his apology), I truly believe that the Taoiseach and the others don't know the meaning of the words "human rights". If they did, they'd acknowledge that they've violated us in every shape and form: lack of education, lack of names, lack of freedom, lack of pay, trafficking, illegal detention, punishment cell, running away and being brought back, not being supported when we left the Magdalene Laundries, no aftercare, no checking

up to see if we're OK. It's just, "we'll give you money, shut up and go away, you don't have human rights, we'll decide who has human rights".

96. I'll have to take this other form of abuse I'm receiving right now from the Government, about the violation of my human rights not being addressed, to the grave. I'll have to leave that legacy to my children and grandchildren: it was never addressed, it doesn't matter, because I was only a Magdalene woman. They could traffick me, it didn't matter, and they could change my name. I had no adults to look out for me. The Ministers who were supposed to were totally dysfunctional, inadequate and not fit for purpose – and to me they're still not fit for purpose because they haven't addressed my human rights.
97. Justice Quirke was the only person who was good – he was very professional and wasn't patronising. He was just listening to us. I felt he not just listened to us, but he believed what we had to say. He took me at face value, he wasn't giving me crocodile tears or apologies. But still, he had to follow what he was told to do, which was not to bother with our human rights.
98. Apart from Judge Quirke, the others I don't think cared. Senator McAleese I think always sided with the Government – I wasn't sure he was very neutral. Mainly I just think he was blinkered and was just looking at one thing. I would say Senator McAleese had a very narrow instruction remit from Enda Kenny. I would say the civil servants behind the scenes were trying to save money. The people who were on the Committee were all part of the problem: the health services, judiciary, education department were all part of the problem. I don't understand how you could have people on the interdepartmental committee that represent those departments. It wasn't like there was a fair hearing.
99. I live every day with the trauma of what I experienced in Nazareth House and in the Magdalene Laundries. From time to time, I still suffer from crippling depression and anxiety as a result of what I went through. It doesn't take much to trigger me. For example, I get very upset when I see stories in the news about how the Government still is supporting the religious and Catholic Church to force their beliefs on women about abortion and to control maternity hospitals.
100. I would like the Committee to think what it was like: my name was changed, my hair was cut, I was locked in padded cells, I was locked in overnight, I had to do my human functions in a pot, I wasn't allowed to speak.
101. The abuse I suffered changed over time and had different forms and different shapes, but it was continuous. In the first Magdalene Laundry in Peacock Lane it was awful conditions, but I had some control over my identity. In the second Magdalene Laundry it was so cruel. Even in the last Magdalene Laundry, where I was treated better, I was trapped and made to work.
102. They deprived me of my education. They deprived me of my family. They deprived me of my childhood. They shipped us from place to place. They detained me until three weeks prior to my 19th birthday without any basis. I was a child. This abuse was mental torture. It was degrading. At the time, you thought it was normal, which is very sad to think.

103. There's also this lack of information, which haunts me. I never was given any information at the time and I'm still not. I don't know why they kept me in the Magdalene Laundries. My record from the Peacock Lane Magdalene Laundry is mostly redacted and I thought that the redactions might be hiding evidence about my detention in a padded cell. I recently wrote to Sister Christina Gordon of the Religious Sisters of Charity, which operated the Peacock Lane Magdalene Laundry, asking her to tell me what was behind the redactions on my record. I also asked her to leave no stone unturned seeking information to give to me about my time in the padded cell. She wrote back on 21 February 2018 to say that the Sisters of Charity have no more information to share with me.
104. I don't have information about my mother's stay in the County Home. I also don't know what happened to me as a child which required me to go to hospital while in the industrial school. I still haven't got my medical records. I constantly try and get further information, particularly because I believe that I may have been subjected to vaccine trials as a child. I have phoned libraries in Dublin and Kerry, and I have written to the Health Service Executive, the Department of Education and GlaxoSmithKline (who are known to have performed vaccine trials on children in various institutions around the country). But in the end I am drained and exhausted. It feels like a battle. And it's difficult because the stigma is still there up to a point. So while it was said in the apology that when people thought of us at all, they did so in undue and offensive stereotypes, I think they still do! Nothing has really changed.
105. It was only the women that were punished – this was definitely discriminatory and I still get annoyed about it. The discrimination continues – it is all men saying that we're in charge, we're superior, you are a woman and will do as you're told. A lot of what happened to me was about depriving women of a place in society, and depriving us of respect.
106. Ireland has never acknowledged the truth of what occurred in the Magdalene Laundries. It has not provided public access to records of the Laundries. It has not held any institution or any person accountable for what happened. There are still Magdalene women lying in unmarked graves all around the country. The State has prevented women like me and family members of women who died from getting justice. The Government will say things like we could leave when we wanted to, but that's just not true! They don't listen to what we've said. They need to pay the price and face up to it. But they just want us to go away and drop dead before they have to deal with it.
107. In my position, you're very dependent on the state to see you right, but it feels like all Ireland is doing is abusing us again. I feel now that they are still abusing us because they're not addressing the real issues: they haven't booked anyone or brought anyone to justice. It doesn't surprise me that they have never prosecuted the nuns. There is still this ideology – they're nuns, and Christian Brothers, we're Magdalenes or Industrial School children. They're nuns, so we won't prosecute them. The Government doesn't want to offend the Church. The Government is persecuting us and violating us still, by bowing to the people who did this to us.

108. What we've got isn't good enough. We don't even have a proper apology – I feel like the apology was something, but it wasn't enough for what we went through. I was degraded. A proper apology would accept that our rights were violated and that the State was responsible. But they can't own up to that. I also feel like I have been short-changed financially. I know that Justice Quirke was told not to consider human rights violations when coming up with the amounts that should be paid through the Scheme. We never got the proper healthcare that we were promised under Justice Quirke's Scheme. I feel like they're laughing at us, and are happy to get away with it. I genuinely believe that if it had happened to their sisters, or mothers, or aunts, it would be a different story. I also believe that as politicians they haven't fought hard enough for us as I don't think they care. People will say the right words but they haven't even fought for us. It is not easy when we didn't have our education. Sometimes I get flustered or find it difficult to deal with the Government on these issues, but I have to keep trying.
109. I don't ever want to let the State, the Church, or any other future organisation to have control over Irish society and children and women as they did in the past. I don't want them ever to have sole access to the livelihoods of people like me ever again. If it did arise again, I would want men to be brought to book for those women who they left with babies. It's also not just the Church: they played their part, but they were allowed to do it. They did a terrible disservice to the Irish people and particularly to us "fallen women" and the State did not protect us. There have now been consecutive Irish Governments who are in denial and are not looking at the position properly.
110. I know I will carry this to the grave. Having been in the Laundries is part of my life. It's impossible to forget horrible things that happened to you in the past. I don't think I need to forgive them. It was me who was violated. I was violated in every aspect of my life by these "good people". While there were some nice nuns, who were genuine and sincere, they couldn't do anything to protect me. It's all bullying. The Irish Government still bully me – they know they're in the position of the power. They underestimate us and they undermine me. They think because they deprived us of an education then they can keep us down.
111. Ireland failed to protect me and thousands of other women like me against abuse in the Magdalene Laundries. It permitted me to be subjected to torture, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment, servitude and forced labour in violation of its own laws and of its international obligations, including the United Nations Convention against Torture 1984.
112. For this reason, I ask the United Nations Committee against Torture to condemn Ireland's failure to comply with its obligations under the Convention.

Statement of truth

113. I believe that the facts stated in this statement are true.

Signed: Elizabeth Coppin

Elizabeth Coppin

Dated: 12.07.2018