

My response to the decision of the United Nations Committee Against Torture on my complaint

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In March 1964, when I was 14, I was taken from an Industrial School to the first of three Magdalene Laundries, in Peacock Lane in Cork. I did not escape until 1968, and I came on a boat to England in 1969 with nothing.

I have been seeking Justice for the past 25 years, for the cruel, degrading, abusive and torturous treatment I endured when in the care of the Irish State.

Having tried every possible option available to me in Ireland, I first brought my complaint to the UN Committee against Torture in Geneva in 2018, which found - contrary to the arguments made by the Irish government - that it was admissible.

At the young age of 73½, I recently received the Committee's findings in response to my complaint. They found that there had been no violation of the Convention. As soon as I read their findings, I felt deflated, so low, and very sad, not just for me but for all of the Magdalene Women who died in vain. Thoughts of isolation, despair and how I felt as a young girl came flooding to mind, of when I was trafficked to three Magdalene Laundries, by the State and their agents.

I want the Irish public to know what the Irish government told the Committee and see how Magdalene women are still treated. I want them to know what my response is. I am publishing all of the relevant documents here, including my witness statement and the expert psychological report by Professor Nimisha Patel to show how I was treated in the Magdalene Laundries, and how this has affected my life, and my husband's life and my children. Anyone who wants to know the truth should read those documents.

In particular, I want to highlight these points:

- The Government's conduct in this litigation:
 - Until I brought this case I had never seen the records of the Gardaí regarding my own complaint: they were disclosed to the United Nations before they were disclosed to me. I was dumbfounded. There are individuals that were still alive at the time who have not been investigated.
 - Indeed, having never seen this evidence before, I was amazed to see what was written there. I had no chance to rectify what was in it.
- The Government's refusal to accept its own failings:
 - The Irish Government still refuses to accept that I suffered torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in the Magdalene Laundries.
 - The Government continues to maintain that the McAleese Committee was independent, despite the Committee being staffed mainly by government department officials.

- The Government seems to want to rely on the McAleese Committee as being a comprehensive investigation into the Magdalene Laundries, when it only addressed State involvement.
- The Government appears to continue to wish to maintain that the Magdalene Laundries were private “refuges” where girls and women were voluntarily “resident” and that the State had no control. That is flatly inconsistent with what the McAleese Committee found. There were young, trafficked girls, doing the laundry of government departments!
- There are still problems with the Magdalene Scheme. I still cannot access healthcare. The Government will not pay for healthcare upfront and I cannot afford the fees of a private psychologist or physiotherapist. The government did not give us a HAA card to use in Ireland.
- As an Irish Citizen, who fled persecution in 1969, I believe I’m entitled to my Birth Records, Medical Records, County Home Records, Vaccine Trials Records, and anything pertaining to me. The same goes for all who were interned in these institutions, in the mother and baby homes, who were adopted, fostered and hospitalised. The records are still being hidden by the Government and the nuns. The list goes on . . . Will the state ever be truthful to their citizens?

The Irish State continues to treat citizens such as me in a degrading manner. Since we got our independence in 1922, stories of torture, ill-treatment, and degrading abuses of many sorts, has been a way of Irish life. It was “respectable people” who were our abusers. They made a profit from us.

I did not bring this case for money. The Irish State want to shout out loud how generous they are with money. But the government profited from us, when we were young children, girls and women. Where were the Men? In the Dáil passing the law to “protect” Women.

I am deeply disappointed that the Committee found the State did all it could to investigate the violation of my human rights. There has never been a prompt impartial investigation. No one has considered the abuse of my human rights. That has been recognised by the Committee on other occasions, as was pointed out by three members of the Committee who disagreed and (unusually) wrote dissenting Opinions.

I lived through this abuse. I was part of an experiment of keeping girls, women, children and babies suppressed. It was and remains a violation of girls’ and women’s human rights.