



Press Release 19th November 2014

Adoption Rights Alliance welcomes government decision not to oppose Adoption Bill

Adoption Rights Alliance (ARA), which advocates for equal human and civil rights for those affected by Ireland's closed secret adoption system has welcomed the government's decision not to oppose the Adoption Bill being introduced in the Seanad today. The Adoption (Identity and Information) Bill 2014 is sponsored by Senators Jillian van Turnhout and Averil Power and for ARA it represents an important first step towards equality [link to relevant press release below].

On Monday of this week representatives from Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) and ARA met Children and Youth Affairs Minister, Dr James Reilly. Both groups were becoming increasingly concerned that their calls for a comprehensive terms of reference for the commission to include Magdalene Laundries, County Homes, private and state maternity homes and all adoption agencies had remained unacknowledged and unanswered. The delegation raised issues arising from the inter-departmental report commissioned by Reilly's predecessor, Charlie Flanagan during his brief tenure, which hinted heavily that any investigation of forced and illegal adoption practices outside of Mother and Baby Homes would be limited to a historical survey and would therefore exclude the experiences of the majority of unmarried mothers, whose children were forcibly taken for adoption since the foundation of the state.

Dr Reilly acknowledged the groups' concerns and said that no decision had yet been made on the inclusion of the institutions but that he was determined to have as inclusive an inquiry as possible.

The JFMR delegation cautioned the Minister against repeating the mistakes of the much criticised McAleese report, which discounted the extensive survivor testimony gathered by the organisation. JFMR also drew the Minister's attention to research which calls into question the McAleese Report's contentions on duration of stay.

The group also outlined evidence that some women conceived their children while they were confined in Magdalene Laundries before being sent to Mother and Baby Homes to give birth. These women were then returned to the laundries without their children who were, without exception, set aside for adoption within Ireland or for trafficking to the US.

ARA cited private institutions such as the still registered, St Patrick's Guild, Cunamh and St Attracta's adoption agencies as requiring particular scrutiny. They also referenced St Patrick's Infant Hospital, Temple Hill in Dublin, which although it did not operate as a Mother and Baby home, non-marital children born in private and state maternity hospitals were sent to Temple Hill before being adopted. Whilst not committing to including any of these pivotal organisations, Dr Reilly confirmed that the inquiry would have the power to compel religious orders to hand over relevant files and records, as well as the power to order witnesses to attend.

ARA's Northern Ireland Co-ordinator, Edel Byrne drew the Minister's attention to the on-going discrimination against all Irish adopted people and their siblings in particular, who are denied the knowledge of each other's existence. The delegation confirmed that they were supporting Senators Averil Power and Jillian van Turnhout's Private Member's Bill on Adoption Information and Tracing, which will be debated in the Seanad today and urged the government to do likewise.

Co-founder of ARA Claire McGettrick described the meeting as 'productive' but stressed that any inquiry which ignores the wider issues of illegal and forced adoptions and the does not include all of the institutions involved in such practices was 'destined for failure'. 'If the proposed Commission of Investigation merely looks at a selected list of institutions to the exclusion of others, and if it does so in isolation from the wider issues like the State's involvement in forced and illegal adoptions and of how women in crisis pregnancy and their children have been treated, then this inquiry is destined for failure before it ever commences,' she said. Ms McGettrick argued that if the inquiry was to enjoy the confidence of the adoption community, the terms of reference needed to be as broad as necessary. 'If not, these issues are guaranteed to arise again and the court of history will not look kindly on a government that chose to ignore those who have called for a genuine truth-finding investigation. If the Commission of Investigation is to enjoy the confidence of the adoption community, it is imperative that the Terms of Reference are as broad as is necessary and reflect the views of those affected most,' she said.

After the main meeting, Susan Lohan from ARA introduced Dr Reilly to a natural mother, Ms K who told him that she never seen nor held her son (born in the Erinville Hospital in the 1970's) as he was forcibly taken from her directly after his birth by a social worker from a registered adoption agency, who operated with impunity within the hospital in acquiring children for adoption. Ms Lohan said that it was important for Dr Reilly to realise the extent to which for decades, the vast majority of unmarried mothers had their children taken from them and that to exclude from the Investigation, the thousands of mothers and adopted people from outside the Mother and Baby system would be an inexcusable travesty. Ms Lohan added that given the publicity of the film 'Philomena', everyone understood the experience of women and girls incarcerated in Mother and Baby Homes but were largely uninformed of the other routes to forced adoptions. Dr Reilly agreed with Ms K. that she had been let down by the state as she was rendered powerless in the system, which declared her an unfit mother, merely based on her marital status. Ms K. stressed the need for Dr Reilly to include mothers such as herself in the terms of reference in the forthcoming inquiry and told him that her life was paralysed until people heard and understood her brutal experience.

Dr Reilly concluded the meeting by offering assurances that he had asked the AG for advice on how all adoption files could be opened and promised that he would re-confer with the AG to ensure that the most liberal information access system would ensue. The ARA reminded the Minister that all six of his predecessors had failed to deliver on similar promises and that both domestic and international human rights experts continued to suspect that this government would continue 'to deny until we die' in a cynical and misguided attempt to spare the blushes of and reduce the financial liability of the state and the various religious groups behind the systemic abuse of unmarried mothers and their children.

Ends.

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Notes to editors

- Adoption Rights Alliance Press Release regarding Adoption Bill:
http://www.adoptionrightsalliance.com/ARA_PR_03-11-14_FINAL.pdf
- Our attention has been drawn to media interviews with social workers who claim that natural mothers require 'protection' from adopted people. Please see the following op-ed for a response to such claims: <http://www.irishexaminer.com/viewpoints/analysis/adoption-the-secrets-lies-and-myths-278941.html>