

HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE INQUIRY

PRESS RELEASE BY THE CHAIRMAN - SIR ANTHONY HART

1st October 2012

“As its Terms of Reference make clear, the remit of the Inquiry is to “examine if there were systemic failings by institutions or the state in their duties towards those children in their care between the years of 1945 and 1995”. Although funded by the Northern Ireland Executive, the Inquiry is independent of government, and I want to emphasise that the matters within its remit will be thoroughly and rigorously investigated without fear or favour by me and by those who have been appointed to assist the Inquiry in various capacities, whether as panel members or staff.

I want to assure all those who will be affected by this inquiry in particular, and the public in general, that all the panel members, the staff of the Inquiry and I have been doing everything within our power over the summer to put in place the necessary procedures and equipment to allow us to carry out our task effectively, expeditiously and sensitively. Whilst the public inquiry component of the Inquiry will not be able to start some of its work until the draft legislation which is presently before the Northern Ireland Assembly becomes law, during the rest of this year we will be doing as much as we can in the interim to prepare for the next stage of the Inquiry once the legislation is passed.

A great deal of detailed preparatory work has been essential before we could be ready to provide a proper service to those who wish to recount their experiences to us, but I am pleased that we are now able to invite members of the public who wish to contact us, and in particular those who wish to recount their experiences to the Acknowledgement Forum, to contact us, either by going to our website at www.hiainquiry.org, or by ringing our Freephone Number 0800 068 4935. We will then send them a leaflet explaining how the various parts of the Inquiry will operate, and a form for them to fill in and return to us stating whether they wish to speak only to the statutory inquiry, or only to the Acknowledgement Forum, or to both. All applications will be treated in confidence.

Once we receive completed application forms we will be able to plan who we should contact first, and when. Depending upon how many people wish to contact us this process may take a little time, but we plan to offer the first appointments for the Acknowledgement Forum starting in a few weeks' time."

ENDS

Notes to Editors

1. Following an inter-departmental task force report, the Northern Ireland Executive, on 29th September 2011, announced there would be an Investigation and Inquiry into historical institutional abuse.
2. On 31st May 2012, the First Minister and deputy First Minister announced the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry and advised the Assembly of the Chair of the Inquiry and the panel members for the Acknowledgement Forum.
3. The Inquiry will be chaired by Sir Anthony Hart, assisted by Panel members Geraldine Doherty and David Lane. Acknowledgement Forum Panel members are: Beverley Clarke, Norah Gibbons, Dave Marshall QPM and Tom Shaw CBE.
4. The Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill is currently at Committee stage which is due to conclude on 26th October 2012. Further information can be found on the Northern Ireland Assembly website.
5. The work of the Acknowledgement Forum is not dependent on the passage of the legislation and Panel Members will begin to hear accounts of the experiences of victims and survivors shortly after completed applications have been received.
6. Further information, including a more extensive statement from the chairman, is available on the Inquiry website at www.hiainquiry.org
7. Applications can be requested on Freephone number 0800 068 4935 or can be downloaded from the Inquiry website.

8. The Inquiry intends to hold a preliminary hearing before Christmas at which the chairman will explain how he intends to proceed and give interested parties an opportunity to comment. More details on this will be made available later.
9. Members of the Inquiry are not available for interview, but any specific request for additional information should be emailed to General.Enquiries@hiainquiry.org