

Press Release

Inquiry launches international appeal

Issued: 31st May 2013

Embargoed for use from 00.01 hours [GMT + 1 hour], Monday 3rd June

Note to editors: The Inquiry would appreciate it greatly if media outlets could publish the Inquiry's contact details which are included at the end of this press release.

A major statutory inquiry into historical institutional abuse in Northern Ireland is today [Monday 3rd June] launching an international appeal for victims and survivors to come forward.

The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry was set up earlier this year by the Northern Ireland Executive. It has a remit to investigate child abuse which occurred in residential institutions in Northern Ireland over a 74-year period up to 1995.

The inquiry was established after calls from campaigners in Northern Ireland for an inquiry similar to the Ryan Commission on institutional child abuse in the Republic of Ireland.¹

To date, 271 potential witnesses have made formal applications to participate in the Northern Ireland Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry. Most of those who have come forward still live in Northern Ireland.

However, the Inquiry is anxious to encourage any survivors who suffered childhood abuse in Northern Ireland institutions but who now live overseas to get in touch.

It is focusing its international appeal on the three English-speaking countries which have the largest Irish expatriate populations – Australia, Canada and the United States.

The Inquiry's Chairman, Sir Anthony Hart, said he appreciates that the decision to contact the Inquiry can be a very difficult one for survivors, particularly if they live abroad.

"We recognise that, for many potential witnesses, reliving their experiences will be very painful and traumatic," he said.

¹ The Ryan Commission, which carried out its work over a nine-year period, heard testimony from nearly 2,000 survivors of abuse. It published its report in 2009.

“Indeed, some will not have told their closest relatives or friends about the abuse they suffered. If they now live overseas, the thought of contacting the Inquiry may seem especially daunting.

“But we want to emphasise that we’re doing everything we can to make the process as easy as possible for those living abroad.”

The Inquiry is offering to meet the travel expenses of those who need to give their testimony in person. If a sufficient number of witnesses come forward from one country, the Inquiry will consider travelling to that country to hear their evidence.

Potential witnesses are also offered the option of providing private testimony to the Inquiry’s Acknowledgement Forum if they don’t wish to participate in the public inquiry process.

The Inquiry is scheduled to complete its work by 2015, and to submit its report to the Northern Ireland Executive by January 2016.

In addition to making findings of fact on the scale, nature and impact of abuse, the Inquiry is also tasked with making recommendations on the steps which might be taken to help meet the needs and wishes of survivors.

To date, the Inquiry has identified more than 170 residential homes and other locations in Northern Ireland which could potentially form part of its investigation.

Survivors of childhood abuse in Northern Ireland institutions and any other potential witnesses who wish to contact the Inquiry should visit the Inquiry’s website at: www.hiainquiry.org or contact the Inquiry by telephone on 0800 068 4935. Potential witnesses now living in Australia should use the following Freephone number: 1 800 675920.

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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 of the Panel Members for the Acknowledgement Forum.
3. An amended terms of reference to widen the scope of the Inquiry from 1922 - 1995 was announced by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 18th October 2012. See <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-ofmdfm-191012-ministers-widen-historical>

4. For the purposes of this Inquiry “child” means any person under 18 years of age; “institution” means anybody, society or organisation with responsibility for the care, health or welfare of children in Northern Ireland, other than a school (but including a training school or borstal) which, during the relevant period, provided residential accommodation and took decisions about and made provision for the day to day care of children; “relevant period” means the period between 1922 and 1995 (both years inclusive).
5. 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. Biographical details are available on the Inquiry website: www.hiainquiry.org
6. The Inquiry is formally established under The Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 which became law on 19th January 2013.
7. All requests for media interviews and further information should be directed to the Inquiry’s Press Officer, Liz Fawcett, on +44 (0) 28 9020 0811 or +44 (0) 771 943 5662, or at liz@lizfawcettconsulting.com