

# Northern Ireland: Amnesty calls for Mother and Baby Homes inquiry in NI



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Amnesty and former residents unite in call for NI inquiry as Irish Government publishes 3,000-page investigation report into Mother and Baby Homes in Republic of Ireland

‘Northern Ireland must now follow the Republic of Ireland and instigate a full-scale inquiry into the appalling tragic scandal of Mother and Baby Homes here’ - Patrick Corrigan

Women who were forced to give birth in Mother and Baby Homes in Northern Ireland, and children who were born in the homes, have joined with Amnesty International to call for a public inquiry into abuses they say they suffered.

Amnesty says there were more than a dozen Mother and Baby Home-type institutions in Northern Ireland, with the last one closing its doors as recently as the 1990s. Some 7,500 women and girls gave birth in the Northern Ireland homes, operated by both Catholic and Protestant churches and religious organisations.

The call comes as the Irish Government publishes the report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes in the Republic of Ireland.

Former residents of the homes, alongside Amnesty, have been calling for a Northern Ireland public inquiry since 2013, a request which has so far been refused by the Northern Ireland Executive.

Amnesty has previously revealed the harsh treatment suffered by women and girls in the homes in Northern Ireland as well as allegations of removal and forced adoption of new-born

babies against the wishes of their mothers.

A 2017 investigation by The Detail website also uncovered information showing shockingly high infant mortality rates for babies in children's homes adjacent to the Mother and Baby Home run by the Good Shepherd Sisters, on Belfast's Ormeau Road.

Mary O'Neill (not her real name) gave birth to a baby girl in 1979 while she was at Marianvale home in Newry, County Down - run by the Good Shepherd Sisters. Aged just 18 at the time, she says her daughter was taken away for adoption against her will:

"My baby was taken from me. She was adopted against my knowledge or agreement. I missed everything - her first walk, her first words, her first day at school. "I will never get over it. The heartache has lived with me every day since and will live with me until my dying day."

Ms O'Neill was finally reunited with her daughter two years ago after a long search. Her daughter, now aged 41, moved to the United States 17 years ago.

Ms O'Neill recalls her time in the Home:

"My time in Marianvale was a living nightmare. The nuns enforced a regime of praying, knitting and scrubbing floors. We were like prisoners, not expectant mothers. "The nuns and the government did that to me. And they did it to my child and to so many other women and girls and their babies year after year in Northern Ireland. "We demand the truth be told now. We want a public inquiry. We experienced the same harsh regime as mothers and babies did in the Republic of Ireland, yet the Northern Ireland Executive still refuses to set up a similar inquiry. Are we worth less to our government? "We have been asking the Executive to set up an inquiry for years. And, for years, Ministers have brushed us aside. No more."

Ms O'Neill is now taking legal action against the Northern Ireland Executive over the failure to set up an inquiry.

Patrick Corrigan, Northern Ireland programme director of Amnesty International, which is supporting calls for an inquiry, said:

“Northern Ireland must now follow the Republic of Ireland and instigate a full-scale inquiry into the appalling tragic scandal of Mother and Baby Homes here. “These distressing findings echo the serious concerns we have long held about how women and babies were treated in near-identical institutions in Northern Ireland. “Women in Northern Ireland have told Amnesty that they suffered arbitrary detention, forced labour, ill-treatment, and the removal and forced adoption of their babies - criminal acts in both domestic and international law. “Meanwhile, their babies were branded as ‘illegitimate’ on birth, taken from their mothers as new-borns -- some were adopted without consent, while others were put into loveless institutions, only to face death by malnutrition and burial in mass graves. “In 2013, Amnesty submitted a paper to the Northern Ireland Executive making the case for a public inquiry into abuses in these Homes. “Stormont has ignored victims’ calls for an inquiry for years. The Northern Ireland Executive must deliver a human rights compliant investigation into the allegations of systemic human rights abuses at these institutions, and give an apology and redress to those who suffered irreparable damage to their lives.”

The UN Committee Against Torture and the UN Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women have both recommended that the government in Northern Ireland should establish an inquiry into abuses in such institutions.

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