



Concerning The combined fifth and sixth periodic reports submitted by Ireland under article 44 of the Convention pursuant to the simplified reporting procedure 2022.

“The Committee is concerned about [...] (b)Lack of measures to ensure that children fathered by Catholic priests are able to access information on the identity of their fathers; [continuing] 34. The Committee recommends that the State party [...] ensure measures to assist children fathered by Catholic priests in upholding their right to know and be cared for by their fathers, as appropriate, and ensure that they receive the necessary psychological treatment.” – UNCRRC, 2016.

To begin with, I approached the Irish Government concerning this issue in 2014. Each time I approached the State, I asked them to support Coping and its mission of provision of Mental Health facilities, counselling and so forth, and to enable this venture, a pioneering venture, in some format.

Then, Minister for Children, Frances Fitzgerald, assured me that a letter of support had been sent “as requested” to the Archbishop of Dublin, in support of a proposal for mental health support for children of Irish priests and religious. The Archbishop of Dublin confirmed via email that he had “no idea whatsoever” about any such letter. The Department of Children subsequently apologised for the fact that the aforementioned letter could ‘not be found.’

I approached multiple ministers for mental health in the Irish State, starting with Kathleen Lynch, Helen McEntee, Jim Daly, and Mary Butler. Minister Lynch’s staff reminded me multiple times that she could not be of help to Coping. I approached her successors only to receive no reply whatsoever. Whilst Mary Butler did respond to Coping, her response was regrettable. She commented,

“Mental health issues vary from person to person and need to be addressed as they arise on an individual level. It would not seem to be appropriate to group all children of priests as having such needs” Mary Butler, Irish Government Minister.

What Minister Butler did was sidestep, whether knowingly or unknowingly, the socially recognisable stigma toward children of priests. She ignored the presence of a heaving burden of shame that such children are born into, despite the fact that I highlighted this to her. I asked her, as Mental Health Minister, to condemn, any such stigmatising attitudes that might foster negativity toward such children. She ignored



this pervasive reality of socially engrained dispositions toward such persons, an attitude, I would argue, that conversely enables such stigmatising attitudes.

Former Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Enda Kenny, was asked a question by former TD, James Bannon about meeting Coping representatives. The question was disallowed and thrown out of parliament. Further requests to meet went unanswered or dismissed.

In 2021, the Department of Children contacted me, upon hearing that I became aware -in my capacity as Coping Director- of the 2016 Recommendations of the UNCRC to the Irish State. The Government assured me they would respond to the document and made various suggestions on how to do this. The 2022 Ire. Gov't response reads as follows in relation to the issue at hand:

“In 2017, the Irish Episcopal Conference approved the Principles of Responsibility Regarding Priests Who Father Children While in Ministry, stating that if a priest fathers a child, the well-being of his child should be his first consideration. The document states that priests in this situation need to discharge their responsibilities and give due consideration to the best interests of the child, civil and canon law, and the views of the mother. Access to psychological support is through the HSE primary care services and community mental health teams. There is limited free-at-point-of-service psychological support available in Ireland, including a national Childhood Abuse or Neglect service for adults.” – Irish Government.

To begin with, the Irish State cannot lay claim to the Irish Bishops Principles of Responsibility within the context of replying to the UN. The State's response reads as if they somehow had a hand in said Guidelines or at least encouraged said guidelines or even knew of their existence. Nothing could be further from the truth!

When the Irish Bishops Guidelines were being developed between 2016 – 2017, the Irish State was busy denying Coping any assistance whatsoever.

This mention of the Irish Bishops Guidelines is misleading. With regard to the use of the HSE for counselling, not forsaking the fact that no less than four ministers for mental health denied any assistance whatsoever, with one minister avoiding the pervasive stigma ingrained in our society, attitudes that foster impaired psychological development.

I advised the Government in May 2021, using the HSE as a response for psychological assistance is troubling for two reasons:

1. The taxpayer should not fund counselling for clerical abuse victims; children coerced into a condition of being silenced are by definition, abused as per



Tusla definitions of abuse and coercive control, or ‘premature imposition of responsibility upon a child.’ Coping could arrange free counselling for children at church cost, but the State denied the latter -Coping- option.

2. The use of HSE negates provisions for counselling for children born to Irish priests outside the State, in missionary countries, children entitled to assistance having been abused and neglected by Irish priests. Again, the State denied paying any heed to this reality, as advised to the State in 2021.

In conclusion, the Irish State has repeatedly denied any semblance of assistance toward Coping and the mission of Coping.

The Irish State has been of no help whatsoever toward priests’ children and in fact, their position has worsened our situation, for now, it appears on paper at least as if there is no problem, and whatever problems do exist, it is being remedied by the State. This is a lie.

Since Coping wrote to Frances Fitzgerald, the multiple ministers, Daly, McEntee, Lynch and Butler, each and every one of them, to date, has been of no assistance to Coping in any way.

Ireland is a society, a community, and the stigma lives like a virus in our community; this is a virus of being silenced, and this silence erodes the mental health and well-being of young children, adolescents, and adults alike.

In response to this silence, this cancerous, psychological silence, the Government has made it look as if they condemn this silence and have responded as requested ... instead, they have sellotaped other people’s work together and presented it as if they had done something. This is misrepresentative and reeks of disrespect toward the most vulnerable, small innocent children and vulnerable adults.

In 2021, Senator Ronan Mullins commented in a letter to Coping, concerning the Government’s actions toward this phenomenon as follows ...

“The Government may consider that there are other situations where children are deprived of the knowledge or society of their fathers, in a context of secrecy or otherwise. [...] The Government may not wish for the State to address its obligations to children of priests as you describe because it could potentially be drawn into addressing the issue in a wider context, in a way that would not attract social support, and which would involve the provision of resources to a wider group than just the children of priests.” – Senator Ronan Mullins, Letter to Coping International. February 2021.



In this regard, I draw attention to the 2015 Children and Family Relationships Act, section 35.2.b which states in part ...

“The Minister shall, [...] release to the donor-conceived child the information requested unless the relevant donor makes representations to the Minister setting out why the safety of the relevant donor [...] requires that the information not be released.”

– Children & Family Relationships Act, 2015.

Under Irish law, if a donor-conceived child requests the name of the said donor when they turn 18 years old, the donor can have said information not released to their offspring if they feel their “safety” is at risk, and “safety” is in no way expanded upon; thus, this does not preclude ‘psychological safety,’ akin to anxiety. Thus, the preference for anonymity remains with the donor denying the child access to their heritage in every case.

This section of Irish law stands in direct contrast to what the UN asked the State to do, i.e., *“[implement] measures to ensure that children fathered by Catholic priests are able to access information on the identity of their fathers.”*

In other words, the State, Kenny, McEntee, Daly, Lynch and Butler among others choose not to support the child in every case.

In the wake of Ireland’s mother and baby home scandal, where children were separated from their genetic parents, this recent unfolding of events adds double insult to injury.

- Coping International.