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Irish bishops meet with abuse victims

by Catholic News Service

DUBLIN, Ireland -- Ireland's senior Catholic bishops met with representatives of abuse victims in what both parties called a momentous and fruitful effort to bring closure to the issue.

In a three-hour meeting Oct. 7 at St. Patrick's College in Maynooth, the clerics and representatives of four of the most prominent victims' groups discussed ways to help the healing process continue. Both parties pledged to meet again.

Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, president of the Irish bishops' conference, described the meeting as "the first step of many steps."

Michael O'Brien of Right to Peace, one of the victims' groups, said at a press briefing with Cardinal Brady afterward that the meeting was a "gigantic step forward."

During the meeting, the victims' groups asked the church as a whole to be more responsive to survivors. They also asked the bishops to establish a subcommittee to begin a regular dialogue with victims and to open a fund to help people who may have received redress for being abused but still need additional help such as counseling and education.

The bishops made no commitments during the meeting.

The meeting was the latest effort to reach a satisfactory outcome to decades of child abuse as detailed in a scathing government report published in May. The report described the serial abuse of children from the 1930s to 1990s in facilities run by 18 religious orders across the country. Leaders of the orders are negotiating with the government to establish a new trust fund to determine the total restitution due to more than 14,000 identified victims.

Some disagreement among victims groups arose Oct. 9 when two representatives of victims accused the four groups that met with the bishops of making a "solo run" because they did not have a mandate to speak for all survivors and should not have met with the bishops.

Mick Waters, founder of Survivors of Child Abuse UK, which works with victims of abuse in Ireland who now live in Britain, said a dozen groups met with government officials in June, where it was decided the government would act as broker with the religious orders in establishing the compensation fund.

O'Brien fended off the criticism, saying the meeting was open to any group of victims and that no one was excluded.

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