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Ireland: Orders should transfer land to pay abused

Michael Kelly Catholic News Service | Jul. 6, 2011

DUBLIN -- The government has asked religious congregations implicated in the 2009 Ryan Report on abuse at Irish institutions to transfer land and properties worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the state as part of a revised package to compensate victims.

Education Minister Ruairi Quinn insisted that the 476 million euros ($681 million) already offered by the 18 congregations was not enough. He said he expected the congregations to pay 680 million euros and, if they were unable to do so, they should transfer the ownership of many of their schools to the state.

None of the 18 religious congregations concerned would speak on the record about the latest proposal. However, a number privately expressed reservations about the land transfer.

Quinn is to seek a meeting with the congregations to assess their views.

"The congregations' total offers fall well short, by several hundred million, of the 680 million euros contribution they should bear toward the cost of institutional residential child abuse," he said.

A spokesman for the Irish Department of Education told Catholic News Service that Quinn "proposes to seek the congregations' agreement to a legal mechanism which would ensure that title to school infrastructure properties would be transferred to the state, at the state's request, and that title to such properties could not be altered, whether by sale on the open market or by transfer into any trust arrangement, without the prior consent of the department."

The government is also asking the congregations to transfer their properties that are currently rented by the state and properties that are identified as being of specific interest to the state.

Quinn said: "I believe that this approach affords the congregations involved the opportunity to shoulder their share of the costs of responding to the horrendous wrongs suffered by children in their care, while at the same time, recognizing the legitimate legacy of their contribution to Irish education."

The government also announced that it would establish a so-called "statutory fund" to distribute further compensation to former residents. Some victims' groups have consistently argued that the earlier payouts received by their members were inadequate to compensate for the suffering they endured.

The Commission to Inquire Into Child Abuse -- headed by Justice Sean Ryan -- heard from thousands of former residents of state-supervised, church-run reformatories and institutions and found that abuse was widespread and sexual abuse endemic in some institutions.

Religious congregations had originally agreed to a 2002 deal in which they provided 128 million euros to a state redress scheme. However, when the report was published in May 2009 it emerged that the cost of compensating some 13,000 former residents had risen to 1.36 billion euros, and pressure mounted for the religious to

contribute half that amount.

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