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MACSAS PRESS RELEASE

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CLOYNE REPORT Lessons for the Catholic Church in England & Wales

The ‘damning’ report into the handling of child sexual abuse allegations by senior Church officials within the Diocese of Cloyne, Ireland, published on Wednesday 13th July 2011, highlights areas of concern that also apply to the Catholic Church here in England & Wales.

The Commission of Investigation reviewed how the child protection guidelines put in place by the Catholic Church in Ireland in 1996 had been followed in Cloyne up to 2009 and in particular whether all reported allegations of child abuse involving priests were referred to the police as required under the procedures. The Commission found:

- Of the 19 priests alleged to have abused children within the Diocese in this period only one had resulted in a conviction
- Only 9 out of 15 cases of abuse reported to the Diocese in the period 1996 to 2005 were referred to the police
- Bishop Magee lied to the Irish government when he stated that all allegations of child abuse within his Diocese were referred to the police
- Bishop Magee was the person primarily responsible for the Diocese’s failure to report abuse to the police and that he continually breached the agreed child protection guidelines over a period of 13 years from 1996 to 2009
- At all times the position taken by Bishop Magee was encouraged by the Vatican which did not endorse the child protection procedures

The Irish government is to pass legislation to make it a criminal offence, punishable by up to 5 years in prison, for anyone who fails to report allegations of child abuse told to them, to the police, this includes priests and even if the allegation is first disclosed during Confession.

In the report “The Stones Cry Out” released in May 2011 MACSAS highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures within the Catholic Church in England & Wales. Only 5% (or 1 in 20) of all allegations of child abuse reported between 2002 and 2009 resulted in convictions, and the MACSAS Survey 2010 found that a number of victims who had reported allegations to Church officials after 2002 did not know whether cases had been referred to the police, some were told that their allegations had not been reported to the police, and others waited years to get any response. Little if any actions seemed to have been taken against the accused.

The 19 cases central to the Cloyne report look very similar to the types of cases reported in this country often years after the abuse has taken place, as do the responses received from Church officials: cases involving elderly priests, priests who are ill, those who left the priesthood, and those who have died, as well as priest who are still in active ministry. MACSAS is concerned that allegations of child abuse reported in this country are not being properly considered, with some Diocesan and safeguarding officials sitting on cases until the priest has died or is too ill to face investigation.

MACSAS calls for an Independent review into the handling of child abuse cases reported to the Catholic Church in England & Wales since 2002 to ascertain whether all cases have been reported to the police, to determine what if any actions were taken in respect of each case reported and the extent of record keeping for all reported cases.

MACSAS calls for an independent inquiry into the advice and directions emanating from the Vatican to Bishops in England and Wales on the handling of reported allegations of child abuse involving clergy, to determine whether such advice and directions have adversely affected the effectiveness of measures in place within the Catholic Church in England & Wales since 2002 when comprehensive child protection guidelines were first introduced.

MACSAS calls for the mandatory reporting by Diocesan officials of all allegations of child abuse within all churches including the Catholic Church to the police even where allegations have been disclosed during confession. For decades Bishops have argued that they could not report the priest or religious to the police when they had confessed to abusing children during confession. Such an argument is morally and theologically bankrupt and undermines the paramountcy of safeguarding the welfare of children.

MACSAS reiterates its call for transparent and independent monitoring of safeguarding procedures within all Catholic Dioceses in England & Wales to ensure that procedures are consistently followed in all cases and that complainants are provided with appropriate support throughout.

All inquiries can be made to **Anne Lawrence, Co-Chair of MACSAS** on **07939574368** or through the MACSAS email macsas1@hotmail.com