

DECADES OF ABUSE

# 9000 babies perished in nun homes

IRELAND

Jill Lawless

**DUBLIN:** Ireland's Prime Minister says the country must "face up to the full truth of our past", as a long-awaited report recounted decades of harm done by church-run homes for unmarried women and their babies, where thousands of infants died.

Micheal Martin said yesterday that young women and their children had paid a heavy price for his country's "perverse religious morality" in past decades.

"We had a completely warped attitude to sexuality and intimacy. Young mothers and their sons and daughters paid a terrible price for that dysfunction," he said.

Martin said he would make a formal apology on behalf of the state in the Irish parliament.

The final report of an inquiry into the mother-and-baby homes said

mortality among the children born in these homes, even though many of the facts were in the public domain."

The inquiry is part of a process of reckoning in overwhelmingly Catholic Ireland with a history of abuses in church-run institutions, including the shunning and shaming of unwed mothers, many of whom were pressured into giving up babies for adoption.

Church-run homes in Ireland housed orphans, unmarried pregnant women and their babies for most of the 20th century. The institutions have been subject to intense public scrutiny since 2014, when historian Catherine Corless tracked down death certificates for nearly 800 children who died at the former Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, County Galway, in western Ireland — but could only find a burial record for one child.

Investigators later found a mass grave containing remains of babies and young children in an underground sewage structure on the grounds of the home, which was run by an order of Catholic nuns and closed in 1961.

The commission of inquiry said about 56,000 unmarried mothers and about 57,000 children had lived in the homes it investigated, with the greatest number of admissions in the 1960s and early 1970s. The last of the homes did not shut until 1998.

"While mother-and-baby homes were not a peculiarly Irish phenomenon, the proportion of Irish unmarried mothers who were admitted to mother-and-baby homes or [state-run] county homes in the 20th century was probably the highest in the world," the report said.

The Prime Minister said the report "presents all of Irish society with profound questions".

"What has been described in this report wasn't imposed on us by any foreign power," he said. "We did this to ourselves, as a society." AP

*'We did this to ourselves, as a society.'*

Micheal Martin, Irish Prime Minister

that 9000 children died in 18 different homes during the 20th century. Fifteen per cent of all children in the homes died, almost double the nationwide infant mortality rate, the report said. Major causes included respiratory infections and gastroenteritis, otherwise known as the stomach flu.

The report said "the very high mortality rates were known to local and national authorities at the time and were recorded in official publications".

But it said: "There is no evidence of public concern being expressed about conditions in mother-and-baby homes or about the appalling

LA LSIC - FORCED ADOPTIONS  
INQUIRY SUBMISSION NO. 90  
ATTACHMENT 7