



MIXED RACE IRISH SUBMISSION
TO

THE OIREACHTAS JOINT COMMITTEE

ON

JUSTICE, DEFENCE AND EQUALITY

TOPIC:

**The inequality in treatment based on race whilst under the care of Irish State
Institutions.**

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Mixed Race Irish Submission to the

Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality

Mixed Race Irish (MRI) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality concerning the degrading and inhumane experience of children of mixed race heritage involving an Irish parent, raised in State institutions in Ireland between the 1940s-1980s.

1. Introduction

Evon Brennan, Rosemary C Adaser and Carole Brennan are the founding members of Mixed Race Irish. We formed our group upon realising that Irish Survivor Support Services and indeed, within Survivor histories did not acknowledge the historical and continuing suffering of Mixed Race Irish Children placed in State Institutions throughout Ireland between the 1940s – 1980s. By coming together as a distinct ethnic community, we were for the first time able to voice our painful, colour specific abusive experience while under the care of Irish State Institutions. We discussed and realised how the long term effects of colour specific abuse has directly resulted in continued prejudice, poverty, poor mental and physical ill health of members of our community.

(1.1) The Constitution of Ireland states that all children of the nation are to be cherished equally. Our submission will reveal how the Irish state singularly and spectacularly failed mixed race children through inequality and discrimination and that they suffered in terms of:

- a) Poor adoption opportunities
- b) Physical, neglectful emotional and sexual abuse because of the colour of their skin
- c) Additional poverty within institutions
- d) Even fewer educational opportunities than their peers
- e) Fewer job opportunities as a result of institutional racism
- f) Reduced quality of life in respect to health, economic and social status.

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2. Aims of Mixed Race Irish

Inequality is complex and not easily visible to people. The aim of the Mixed Raced Irish organisation is to share our tragic stories and have them witnessed (and therefore believed) by the Irish Government and to have our stories documented and learned from so as to enable the State to make changes for a more equitable future for everyone. The majority of Mixed Race Survivors are too vulnerable to speak of their experiences. We, the founding members feel compelled to seek redress with our intention to enhance the existing and damaged quality of life for Mixed Race Irish. In particular, we seek reparation under the 2005 United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/147 Van Bowen Principle(see foot note, p, 9). This will enable our organisation to support and provide services for Mixed Race Irish particularly those ex institution who are now entering the autumn of their lives to enjoy peace, healing and harmony that was not possible during their formative years in State Institutions.

(2.1) We now represent a growing community of 71 displaced Mixed Race Irish whose lives and equality of opportunity in their adult lives were blighted by the long-term racism they suffered as infants and throughout their adolescence. All report a history of racism, isolation and abuse while in State Institutions - effectively 18 years of our youth. Records for our community are not readily available as the Irish Census did not begin to record ethnicity until 1996. However, we believe that up to 150 Mixed Race Children were placed in State Industrial Schools between 1940-1980 from all corners of Ireland, for example, St Josephs and St Patricks (Kilkenny) Naven Road (Dublin) Letterfrack (Galway) Banada Abbey(Sligo) Ballagdreen(Mayo) to name but a few.

(2.2) Our toughest aim, for Mixed Race Irish (MRI) is to reclaim our identities, defined by the Irish State as “unfortunate and disadvantaged” **non- citizens** throughout our lives and to undo the ingrained beliefs, burdens and legacy of torture we carry; for some this may never happen. In order for MRI to do this we need support from the country of origin that instilled this twisted and damaging template into our psyches.

3. At Risk Group

In 1968, the Irish Government signed up to the International Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Racial discrimination (CERD). As of 2011, the Irish State had still not implemented all the recommendations under Article 9 of the Convention (concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2011). Indeed the State has abolished the National Action Plan against Racism and we are unclear what efforts the State has made to adopt an effective policy and action plan to combat racism.

(3.1) In 1966, a report sent to the Minister of Education, stated ***“A certain amount of coloured children were seen in several schools, their future presents a problem difficult of any satisfactory solution. Their prospects of marriage in the country are practically nil and their future happiness***

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and welfare can only be assured in a country with a fair multi racial population, since they are not received by either black or white.....they are also at a disadvantage in relation to adoption.....these unfortunate children who are frequently hot-tempered and difficult to control.”

(Excerpt taken from the Ryan Report)

We note with horror the language in the above statement to the Minister of Education. We consider this language deeply offensive. This is the language that made Mixed Race Irish children the ‘Other’ in Irish Industrial Schools and Institutions and encapsulates the racist labelling that ensured our childhoods in Irish Industrial schools were filled with terror, misery, abuse and pain. That thread of racist abuse within industrial schools where Mixed Race Irish children resided, dominates the personal stories of our community. For example, here are just a few comments:

“Separate but still intrinsically linked to the physical and emotional abuse being called “Monkey”, “Savage”, “Useless black bastard”, “blackie”, “Wog”, Beluba”, “Nigger, “Go home you Black Bastard” and other racist terms of abuse since I was a child has severally dented my self confidence and my ability to speak up and defend myself and definitely has had an impact on my career”. “You were simply made to feel worthless and sub-human, not worthy”. “I learned to feel dirty and insignificant”. “My memories of this period are vivid and I recall great misery”. “I was a 14 year old girl and I was told my only salvation would be to find a white man to breed the black out of me, this severely dented my self-worth”. “In the Mother and baby home, my new born infant was called ‘a dirty black bastard’”. (Please see our Research and Position Paper for more detail on these issues, Bryan, C, 2014, p 11).

These statements highlight the racism our members confronted from an early age and reflect the racist attitude existing within Irish Industrial Schools.

4. Torture and Inequality Experienced by Mixed Race Irish

The right to equality before the law and protection against discrimination for all persons constitutes a Universal Right recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights International Convention, on the elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) and the United Nations Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and Conventions against Torture and other cruel Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or punishment (1984), by the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and fundamental freedoms, to which all Member States are signatories.

(4.1) We lived in a hostile, degrading, humiliating and offensive environment which crushed our health, dignity, self-respect, aspiration and motivation to realise our true potential and left us with broken spirits. This catalogue of racist trauma, torture, sexual abuse, insults and degrading words defined our childhood experience in State Institutions (and subsequent life chances). These Institutional attitudes labelled and held back our life so that we occupied the lowest positions within

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the hierarchy of State Institutions. Deemed as savages to be “tamed” and integrated into civilised society, we faced an overwhelming set of odds in a white country that still refuses to ratify all the anti racism treaties ratified by every other country in the EU.

(4.2) Such repeated abuses ensured we were imbued with a deep shame for not being born with the same colour skin as our white peers (the origins of a self loathing common to our members); that we were not considered suitable candidates for adoptions with the lie that that our mothers’ did not want us adopted. In an environment that put us at severe risk for life and limb, brothers were placed into separate institutions; sisters too were separated, and:

- a) Our true names were deliberately withheld from us or we were renamed.
- b) We were used to boost income for un-assessed foster parents or put to work unpaid for local farmers.
- c) We were abused mentally, physically and emotionally by all and sundry who came into contact with us.
- d) We were deprived of food, clothing and care more than our white peers. Our intelligence was belittled and not nurtured.

Our boys and girls were targeted for sexual abuse by lay and medical staff and the Clergy. Some of our young men were incarcerated at the age of 15 and our girls were subjected to racist sexual inspections. As young unmarried mothers, we experienced the full weight of racism in Mother and Baby homes at an especially vulnerable time of our life; told our conditions were inevitable because of our blackness and our babies subjected to the politics of eugenics.

4.3 . Deprivation

- a) We were deprived the knowledge that our fathers were students of medicine, engineering and of a professional nature, contributing to Irish society and instead were fed with repeated lies that our fathers were savages from the jungle.
- b) We were subjected to a culture of racism through wilful neglect, gross negligence or intentional mis-conduct in Irish State Institutions.

Our members, still coping with the chronic racial abuse in childhood entered adulthood with such very low self worth, self-esteem, poverty, personality disorders and isolation and further experienced discrimination in housing and in the workplace resulting in a high early mortality and a high level of serious mental disability. All of these issues identified by our members are caused by structural inequality and, where race meets economic and social criteria, we still carry the primary instilled teaching of ‘undeserving and unwelcome’ and have been and continue to be woefully disadvantaged in Irish society.

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5. Impact of Racism on Lives of Mixed Race Irish

Inequality caused by racism is pernicious. We have conducted our own impact statement and conclude that, as a group, we suffer with Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's legacy of enduring Injury and Healing by Dr Joy DeGruy Leary, 2005). This has been brought about as a consequence of being considered genetically inferior to white people resulting in "vacant esteem (meaning the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth exacerbated by the group and societal pronouncement of inferiority. Vacant esteem is the net result of three spheres of influence; society, community and our family), insufficient development of primary esteem along with feelings of hopelessness, depression and a general self destructive outlook; internalization of racism, poor mental health, well being and a lack of social identity". This is an explanation for the high rates of early mortality, youth offending, high levels of substance abuse and mental disability within our community.

(5.1) Based on our MRI numbers (where we have known information about our trauma and where our community has been willing to self-disclose highly sensitive and private information), we know 10% have died early, 7 deaths were suicides which represents approximately 8% of the group. We suspect this is a conservative number as there are a number of people in our group we are still trying to track down. Statistically this is a very high rate of death for this community when compared to the national average of 11 suicides per 100,000 in 2012 (CSO). Extrapolated to the wider population the statistic above of 8% would hypothetically represent a staggering 8,000 people for every 100,000 of the population. (Please see our Research and Position Paper for more detail on these statistics, p,11)

(5.2) Of the 56(from the 71 we have identified) of our community where we have personal knowledge or our members have self-disclosed;

- a) 35% suffer from severe health problems (mental and physical), all suffer with trauma and emotional/psychological problems at various levels and there is a high proportion of substance abuse.
- b) 44% will admit to sexual abuse,
- c) 9% were incarcerated as young adults (prison or Magdalene laundry)
- d) Over 51% spent their entire childhood in institutions and
- e) Only 12% were adopted.
- f) At least 6 Mixed Race Irish Women were placed in Mother and baby homes while awaiting the birth of their child.

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All report being called racist names and treated differently to their white peers and to enduring racist inspections of their new born infants and told that our babies were not worth the same as white babies and so the cycle of racism continued for our children.

(5.3) Lack of Identity that is intergenerational.

A study from Howard University in Washington DC points out that parent's responses to their own experiences of racial discrimination may **influence their parenting** and how they teach their children to successfully negotiate racism. This indicates the generational effects of racism, which has had direct impact with many Mixed Race Irish presenting with a disturbing lack of identity, not living up to their full potential and intergenerational issues.

6. Way Forward

1 Recognition

1.1 There needs to be acknowledgement of a mixed race identity in Ireland which reflects the true composition of Irish society today. We ask members of Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to consider amending the Irish Census to reflect mixed race heritage.

1.2 We ask members of the Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to acknowledge the trauma and suffering of Mixed Race Children raised in Irish Industrial Schools between 1940-1980 and, the failure of the Irish State to protect our basic human rights of racial identity as outlined by the International Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination 1968 (CERD) and the Van Bowen/Bassiouni Principle 2005.

1.3 We ask members of the Justice, Defence and Equality and Committee to acknowledge the dual oppression of racism and institutional abuse on the lives of Mixed Race Children and to acknowledge that the State failed in its Duty of Care to Mixed Race Children in Irish Industrial Schools and other institutions.

1.4 We ask members of the Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to acknowledge the damaging trans-generational impact of racism on Mixed Race Irish and our community.

1.5 We ask members of the Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to consider ratifying outstanding treaties of CERD. In particular, amend those relating to incitement to hatred and racially motivated offences, and to empower statutory agencies to address such issues in Irish Society.

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1.6 We ask members of the Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to acknowledge that the Ryan report on industrial abuse was in error for failing to include within its remit, enduring racism within industrial schools.

2. Justice : We ask Members of the Justice and Defence and Equality Committee, to advocate on behalf of our Members, to the Ministers of Department of Justice, and Equality and, The Department of Education and Skills, Jan O'Sullivan, TD. Frances Fitzgerald, TD; and where you might feel appropriate in seeking the following:

2.1 We ask the members of Justice and Defence and Equality Committee for immediate funding to continue research and trace other Mixed Race Irish and for administration and travel costs to sustain our research. To include funding for our expenses and costs associated with the work involved in attending meetings and co-ordinating, and raising awareness of the MRI Campaign and its relevant issues now and in the future.

2.2 We ask members of Justice and Defence and Equality Committee to establish a specialist tracing service where mixed race survivors can trace their ethnic origins.

2.3 We ask members of Justice and Defence and Equality Committee for appropriate reparation to enable our fragile community seek relief from their years of poverty, humiliation and ill health, discrimination in education, employment and life opportunities caused by racism and inequality in Ireland, a pension upon reaching the age of 65 should be part of the reparation.

2.4 We ask members of the Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to provide services where Mixed Race Irish of institutional racist abuse and their immediate families can be educated in their denied heritage through visiting their country of paternal origins.

2.5 We ask members of the Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to ensure, to the extent possible, that all records pertaining to our childhood in State Institutions (including third party correspondence) be made available to us, to include, fostering, adoption, and medical files and that the Committee appoint an Officer with the necessary authority to oversee this.

2.6 We ask members of the Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to provide a gravestone for our sister, Pauline Griffith who epitomised the tragedy of being Mixed Race Irish in State funded Industrial School Institutions. Pauline who, at the tender age of 22, was found dead in the river Liffey and is buried in an unmarked grave in Dublin – for the Mixed Race Irish community Pauline's life ended as it started; unloved, unwanted, and unwelcome.

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3. Mixed Race Irish Contribution

Finally, we ask members of Justice, Defence and Equality Committee to explore how the issues we raise sit within Irish society today, and how Mixed Race Irish experiences and painful lessons herewith disclosed; can be transformed into positive force for good in Ireland.

References.

1. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 1968).
2. Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (Post Traumatic Slave Syndrom(Dr Joy DeGruy Leary, 2005).
3. Van Bowen /Bassiouni Principles(2005)
4. Research and Position Paper (Bryan, Conrad, 2014)

Foot note.

16 Dec 2005 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution 60/147 entitled: The Basic Principles and Guidelines on the right to Remedy and Reparation for victims of gross violations of International Human Rights law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law.

This resolution was inspired by the work of Van Bowen and Cherif Bassinouni and are known as the VanBowen/Bassiouni Principles.

The Convention on The Rights of the Child (1989) whereby children are viewed as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of passive objects of care and charity.
Conventions against Torture and other cruel and inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment(1984).

This submission is on behalf of our members by the founders of Mixed Race Irish (MRI).

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