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Mercy sisters pledge $191 million to abuse victims

Cian Molloy Catholic News Service | Dec. 7, 2009

DUBLIN, Ireland -- Ireland's Sisters of Mercy have pledged to contribute an additional 128 million euros ($191 million) to compensate victims of abuse in government schools and orphanages run by the order.

That equals the amount that 18 religious orders -- including the Sisters of Mercy -- agreed to pay under terms of a 2002 deal with the Irish government.

The Christian Brothers announced in late November they would contribute an additional 161 million euros ($239 million). Four other religious congregations have also announced additional contributions.

In May, an independent commission on child abuse issued a report that said a climate of fear created by pervasive, excessive and arbitrary punishment permeated most of Ireland's residential care institutions for children and all those run for boys from 1940 through the 1970s. The report also said that in several institutions managed by the Christian Brothers, sexual abuse of boys was a chronic problem.

Following a June 4 meeting with the Irish prime minister and other government ministers, the 18 orders agreed to an independent audit of their assets, so their ability to pay further compensation could be determined.

More than 10,000 former residents of religious-run institutions in Ireland allege they were abused while in care.

Irish Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe said he would not comment on the offer from the religious orders until all offers from congregations had been received.

Details of the additional compensation packages have been posted on Web sites belonging to the various orders, which also reiterated apologies for having failed the children in their care.

The remaining orders were expected to publish their compensation packages by mid-December. Once all the packages are announced, a government panel will study the asset reports of each of the orders to assess if the compensation is acceptable.

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Contributing to this story was Michael Kelly.

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