

**Witness Name:** Margaret Wilkinson

**Statement No.:** [WITN0008001]

**Exhibits:** [WITN0008002 – WITN0008006]

**Dated:** 17 September 2020

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF MARGARET ANNE WILKINSON

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#### INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Margaret (Maggie) Anne Wilkinson. I was born in Auckland on the GRO-C 1944 and I am now 76 years old. My maiden name was Evington. In terms of ethnicity, I identify as Pākehā.
2. My evidence is about the abuse I experienced when I was a young woman. It relates to my time in the St Mary's Home for Unwed Mothers (**St Mary's**), which began in 1964. This home was run by the St Mary's Trust, but I understand in the 1980s it transferred into the name of the Anglican Trust for Women and Children (**ATWC**).
3. My evidence also relates to my attempts to get recognition and a remedy for what I experienced.
4. As I explain below, the treatment of me, and others in the Home, was harsh during my pregnancy. Worse was to come, with my child being taken from me without my consent. While some people call this 'forced adoption', I prefer to call it abduction. My child was taken then given away by a self-righteous Matron of the Anglican Organisation. She was abducted from me at birth

then given away to make strangers happy. No-one bothered to look back at the grief of the 'sacrificing' mother.

5. In the early 1980s my daughter, then 18 years old, found me through JIGSAW (a service connecting adopted children with their birth parents). We have a close relationship, but I will never forgive St Mary's for taking her away from me.
6. A further important aspect of why I am giving this evidence, is that I present this information not only for myself but also on behalf of our support group, 'New Zealand Mothers of Loss to Adoption for Justice'.
7. Our group includes adopted people who lost their identities and whanau who were separated from their mothers by the act of abduction.
8. The information in this statement is not only about my own experience. There are others who have similar experiences and whom have provided me their story and given consent for me to contribute their experiences to the Royal Commission of Inquiry. For privacy reasons I do not identify these others by name.
9. This statement is a demand for justice and peace on behalf of the women and children who simply did not cope with what happened to them - and either committed suicide or existed with the burden of mental anguish, unsupported, invalidated and unrecognised.

#### **MY EXPERIENCE OF ABUSE IN CARE**

10. In 1964 I fell pregnant with my first child. I was 19 years old. The father of my baby refused to marry me and joined the army. He volunteered to be posted to Vietnam.
11. I was therefore in Whakatane living with my parents. They were ashamed and did not want to tell anyone that I was pregnant out of wedlock. They made me stay in my room and out of sight. They told their friends and associates that I was away in

- Wellington. This meant I could not leave the house and had to stay hidden from the community.
12. My mother would not take me to see our family general practitioner. This was all part of her wanting to hide my secret. Instead she arranged for another local doctor to come to the house and discuss how I was to proceed with my pregnancy.
  13. This doctor recommended to my parents that I be sent to an Anglican Home called 'Saint Mary's Home for Unwed Mothers' in Otahuhu, Auckland.
  14. We were not a religious family and I am certainly not a religious person.
  15. The doctor described this place as a safe haven, a sanctuary. He told my parents that I would be cared for at the home. So, when my parents decided to send me there, they expected a certain level of care.
  16. It was neither a haven, nor a sanctuary.

***Saint Mary's Home for Unwed Mothers***

17. On the 16th of January 1964 I was admitted to St Mary's. My parents drove me to the home from Whakatane.
18. I lived at the home for 6 months and was discharged on the 27th of June 1964.
19. The areas of St Mary's that were public facing, such as the office and the maternity wing for married women, were nice and created the perception that it was a good place.
20. There was a birthing suite and a <sup>public maternity</sup> hospital on the premises where we birthed our babies.
21. The rest of the home resembled a concentration camp. It was bare, with very little furniture. We slept in dormitories. The home was always damp because of the constant wet mopping.
22. The orphanage was a disgusting place, it was always cold, and we were not allowed to play with the children. The children were

crying out for attention. When I walked past, they would run to the fence, but we were not allowed to touch them.

23. The orphanage was full of the 'unadoptable babies' which were mainly twins and Māori children or children of mixed race.

***Matron Rhoda Gallagher***

24. The Home was run by Matron Rhoda Gallagher. I understand she is now deceased.
25. When I first met Matron, she seemed to have my interests at heart and created the appearance in front of my parents that she would look after and provide care to me.
26. However, upon entering the Home it became clear that the Matron's 'homey' front room did not mirror the hell hole out the back.
27. It became very apparent quite early on in my time at St Mary's that the unwed women were not able to keep their babies and that they would be forced to have their babies adopted. I found this out from the girls at the home, we would talk about it. I was horrified and in distress because I always wanted to keep and raise my child.
28. Matron was a vicious woman who would always shout at us and say the most awful things to us. She would tell us that we were selfish to want to keep our children. She would refer to our babies as her babies. She would say things like "*[s]omeone better than you wants your baby*" and "*there are lovely married couples just wanting to give baby a home*".
29. Matron would sneak up behind us and scare us, shouting in our ears. She would say the most terrible things to us. She would tell us that we were "fallen" women and that she would make "decent" women out of us. The language that Matron used featured words such as "selfish", "used", "tarnished", "illegitimate".

30. Another requirement Matron imposed was that we could not be called by or use our own given names. Christian names were changed and surnames disappeared – we all had to take Matron's surname.
31. Communal clothes had to be worn, from a shared box of clothing. One's own garments could only be worn on a Sunday if a visitor was coming.
32. When I look back on this, I see that the process of institutionalisation was instant, and we were dehumanised.
33. There would have been between 18-22 unwed women at St Mary's at any one time. There were young pregnant girls in the home. They were told to say they were 16 years old if anyone asked them. There were also a number of intellectually handicapped girl in the home. This signaled to me that these girls may have been raped but as far as I know there was no support provided to them.
34. We were made to attend chapel twice a day for our sins. Matron would deliver the service at chapel. I recall one time another one of the unwed mothers fainted in chapel and Matron told us to just leave her there on the floor. No assistance was given to her.
35. Male missionaries would come into St Mary's from time to time. They would attend our chapel services. They made me feel dirty too, they couldn't keep their eyes off our stomachs and breasts.
36. Rules were fiercely enforced and an inflexible daily routine along with a controlled 'one way only', Matron's way, of carrying out every function and occupation one was assigned too.
37. The fear of being caught doing a chore a different way to what Matron expected was overwhelming. Matron had the ability to arrive silently and scream recriminations if she spotted a variation.

38. The regimented discipline was excessive, cruel and incapacitating. Any personality one may have arrived with quickly dissipated.
39. We were institutionalised to the degree that we became controlled by the punishing, oppressive, authoritarian regime that was allowed by the overseeing Anglican Organisation.
40. We were treated as the proverbial dirty girls and were punished daily with a heavy work schedule. It was run in a military style. We were dictated to by a bell that rang to indicate to us when it was time to get up, eat and go to work.
41. I worked hard in the kitchen, orphanage and laundry. This included laundry from the public maternity annex. I cleaned and wet mopped constantly, I bottled the produce from the harvest festivals. The work was relentless and only with very basic equipment and tools, even when we were heavily pregnant. This was unpaid labour and the conditions were something out of 'Dickens.' This was taken as part of our punishment.
42. I experienced the hypocrisy of two chapel sessions a day (taken by Matron), when the culture of St Mary's was cruel, punishing and stigmatising, and there was no compassion.
43. As a single mother, I qualified for a sickness benefit from the government which was paid directly to the Home. I was allowed a small amount of pocket money per week from that, enough for a packet of barley sugars and some wool.
44. We were effectively locked up in the house and not allowed to go anywhere. While not physically locked up, with no other options or money, this was the practical effect. For the majority of us there, the 'home' was a prison for sad girls with no choices and no advocacy. It was a place of fear and punishment.
45. Food was a scarcity, we weren't given enough to eat because Matron wanted us to have small babies so there were no problems during delivery.

46. I had an obsession with food and would cut pictures of food out of magazines and hide them under my bed.
47. I was not given any education about pregnancy or what our births would be like. Matron did not allow or give any opportunity for advice from anyone.
48. Letters were vetted by Matron, coming into or leaving the Home. This meant that we were isolated and controlled by her.
49. Social workers were meant to visit the Home, but they were frightened off by Matron. I was told at a meeting once in 1994 by an ex-social worker, GRO-C who is now deceased. He apologised to me and told me that they knew terrible things were going on at St Mary's, but they did nothing.
50. Hidden in the 'home' were pregnant underage girls. They were told to say they were sixteen if asked. There were young women with intellectual disabilities. They were bewildered and lost. No-one asked about how it was that these young girls came to be pregnant. I consider this is a question that the Church should have been asking.
51. Matron accompanied the girls when their allocated doctor visited, which successfully stopped any communication by me (and others) to the doctor about what was happening or to seek information about the birth and the fact I wanted to keep my child.
52. My intent was always to have my baby and raise her myself. There was a Pacific Island woman who worked in the kitchen at St Mary's and she looked after her daughter living on site.
53. I loathed St Mary's but to keep my child I thought that I may be able to live and work at St Mary's just like the Pacific Island woman in the kitchen. I spoke to Matron about this plan and she seemed supportive and agreed to my request. I believed that Matron was going to let me work in the orphanage and raise my child.

54. However, Matron had no intent on following through on her word. My mother visited me at Easter time. Matron spoke with my mother and told her that *"I was not the type to cope with a child"*.
55. Later in my pregnancy when I happily disclosed to my parents that Matron was going to support me to keep the child, they told me that she was not going to assist. They told me of the conversation they had with Matron at Easter time.
56. I got in trouble one day when I got upset at a fellow resident. As a consequence, I was placed into an isolation room and given some sort of medication in little 'drops' to bring on my birth. I do not know what these drops were called.

#### ***Giving birth and removal of my child***

57. On the  1964 I gave birth to my baby girl. My allocated doctor attended the birth. He leaned on a counter on the other side of the delivery suite while Matron delivered my child.
58. It was a difficult delivery and I was torn to bits inside. I was physically left in a mess with no postnatal treatment or support.
59. A nurse let my baby stay in the room with me for a short time, I placed my hand on her as she slept. This was a big deal as she wasn't allowed to do this and would have been in trouble if Matron had caught her.
60. When I fell asleep my baby was abducted by Matron and concealed from me.
61. I was drugged without consent, I was given medication to stop lactation. My breasts were also bound tight.
62. My baby was given to an Anglican woman who was a member of the Auckland Diocese. I was called to say goodbye to my daughter when they took her, but I was not allowed to hold or touch her.
63. On  1964 (8 days after the birth) I was taken to the lawyer's office in Otahuhu with no explanation about what was



going to happen. I was driven to the lawyer's office by Matron. I think this was after my daughter had already been taken away from the Home. There is a Church record that confirms this date.

64. I did not receive any explanation about my rights under the Adoption Act 1955. I was not given any legal advice or told of my rights as guardian of my daughter.
65. I was made to sign legal documents and made to swear on the bible and say that I was never going to try to find my daughter. This aspect, of being made to swear on the bible, was common practice. While not legally binding, this was very effective emotional and spiritual blackmail.
66. The lawyers that were used to draft the papers (during my time and up until 1970s) were [GRO-C] (or simply known as [GRO-C] at the time). As I have said, Matron took me to the lawyer's office along with the papers. I know the name of the lawyer and the person who acted as a witness.
67. I understand that the lawyer was a trustee of St Mary's at the time and was also a partner of [GRO-C]. I consider there was a blatant conflict of interest.
68. On the adoption papers it was recorded that "*I thought it was better for my parents that my baby was adopted*" and it also refers to me being "*disillusioned*". These were the words of the author lawyers or the social worker, they were not my words. I was able to obtain a copy of these papers in the 1990s from a woman at Child Youth and Family. She was not meant to give this to me, but she was generous of spirit as she herself had been through a similar process.
69. I did not want to sign but felt that I had to.
70. It is a legal axiom that consent not freely given is not consent at all, and the history of the adoption corruption in New Zealand relied upon invalid consents, obtained under pressure,

manipulation, threats, illegal practices, emotional blackmail and stand over tactics.

71. The fact that I swore on the bible that I would not try to find my daughter meant that I felt I could never take steps to do so. I am lucky my daughter took steps to find me.
72. The New Zealand Adoption Act 1955 states that the mother cannot sign adoption consent until 10 days after the birth. It wasn't legal if the mother signed before then. That still is the law in NZ. It has never changed. I was forced to sign the adoption papers when my daughter was only 8 days old. Therefore, I consider the adoption has always been illegal.
73. I was discharged from St Mary's, without my baby two weeks after the birth. I was discharged bleeding, both physically and mentally.
74. I was told by Matron that I would get back to my normal life and I would forget about her. This has never been the case.
75. After the birth of my child I realised something was very wrong. I was bleeding profusely. I did not feel like I could go to the GP because the birth was not recognised, so I didn't seek any help for a birth-related problem.
76. In summary, the treatment at St Marys was bad enough. But to walk out with empty arms, baby gone forever, was the most horrendous walk of my life. As a victim, I was punished. That punishment has continued throughout my life.

## **THE IMPACT OF THE ABUSE ON ME AND OTHERS**

### ***Life after leaving St Mary's Home***

77. I returned to Whakatane for a short time. I phoned Rhoda Gallagher many times from my parent's home, pleading with her to get my child back for me. My appeals were met with repudiation, the deed had been done.

78. I found employment in Auckland and after saving I left to live in Sydney Australia.
79. The bleeding was constant and a worry, so on 6 January 1966 I made an appointment to see a gynaecologist at Eastern Suburbs Hospital Clinic in Sydney.
80. I can't recall the name of the doctor, but he told me that because of the tearing at the birth of my child I would be unable to conceive another child. I was unable to afford his care and was terrified of hospitals, so I persevered with living with the bleeding.
81. I met up with my old and dear friend GRO-B and we decided to marry, at that time I was working at the Manchester Unity Sydney and during this period mentioned to a co-worker that I was unable to have children.
82. It was suggested that I see the Unity doctor, Dr Green at his Point Piper residence. Dr Green was an elderly European and was semi-retired. He was horrified and angry at the extent of the damage. He told my husband that if I had been left in that condition in Australia he would investigate and make a complaint.
83. I then underwent a series of procedures cauterising to repair the damage. This process was extremely distressing, painful and expensive.
84. I know through my advocacy and lobbying work in New Zealand that many women experienced the same treatment that I did at St Mary's. They have written to me in support of an inquiry into Adoption within New Zealand.
85. One woman who was at St Mary's in 1969 shared with me a similar experience to mine. When she was peeling the potatoes one night, Matron smacked her on the knuckles with a bamboo stick to indicate that she was peeling the potatoes too thick and therefore wasting money. She often went without meals as punishment from Matron and was regularly smacked around her legs and knuckles for small silly little things.

86. Another woman, also at St Mary's in 1968 has written to me and told me that after her time at St Mary's she had two nervous breakdowns and ended up in a psychiatric unit after she tried to commit suicide. Having to give up her baby to adoption was the catalyst for her mental downturn.

### **Effects**

87. At this point I believe it is appropriate to acknowledge the women who took, or attempted to take, their own lives after losing their children, women who suffered the unending grief and psychological wounds from being systematically dispossessed of their children, who went on to realise that they could not just "get on with their lives and forget", as they had been reassured by social workers and by Matron.
88. Disenfranchised and isolated, trivialised and discounted, in many instances their pain was overwhelming.
89. Subsequent discoveries that their children had also suffered, from being placed with inappropriate adopters, and in some instances simply returned to the state as unwanted chattels and/or who suffered years of abuse, or were simply treated as second best, compounded the unending distress of these women. I/We/They feel betrayed and conned.
90. I consider I have been controlled, deliberately discounted, and betrayed by the representatives of the Anglican Church, who consider their status and philosophy and their bottom line beyond question. The responses from the Church, as I describe in my evidence below, have continued to invalidate me. For all these years, I have been grappling with the ongoing grief and depression.
91. My husband has stood by me, my sturdiest support. My children from my marriage lived with a mother who was deeply depressed and suicidal and there were many times they did not cope.

**ATTEMPTS TO GET REDRESS**

92. In this section of my evidence I describe the personal remedy I have sought from the ATWC and their response. I also talk about the attempts to get redress through political avenues.

***Attempt to get response from the ATWC***

93. In the mid-1990s I was driving to work one morning, listening to the National radio when I heard an interview with a person who had attended an Anglican synod at Hamilton.

94. The person being interviewed spoke about the Anglican decision to accept homosexuals. Big of them I thought, but what about the terrible punishment doled out to me and other young women for daring to have any sexuality.

95. I contacted St Mary's. I was furious. I spoke with and subsequently met the Manager who had taken over St Mary's and had turned it into a training facility.

96. The Manager visited me at my home address and told me how proud he was of the different philosophy that the ATWC had adopted, focusing on education.

97. He wrote to the then Bishop of Auckland, Bruce Gilbert, to tell him that I was very angry and suggested that an apology may appease me. I refer to Exhibit WITN0008002 as a copy of the letter.

98. In time I received a phone call from Bishop Bruce Gilbert who presented me with a verbal apology.

99. I was not satisfied with a verbal apology and requested a written acknowledgment and apology, which was duly carried out. It was published in the Anglican newsletter and in the NZ Herald. I refer to Exhibit WITN0008003 as a copy of the apology printed in the NZ Herald.

100. I believe that apology was only spoken and written to merely keep an angry woman quiet.

101. In July 2014 I requested my medical file from the ATWC. I wanted to know what the medication was that they gave me to stop the lactation whilst at St Mary's.
102. I am aware through my research that the synthetic oestrogen diethylstilboestrol, known by the acronym 'DES' or as stilboestrol, was administered to single mothers without informed consent in hospitals where unmarried women gave birth.
103. I was told by a woman named Kate at the ATWC that those records no longer exist because there was a fire.
104. I also made my request at the Anglican Archives. I heard back from a woman named Mary who told me that the papers could not be found, and she said they were destroyed when a hot water tank burst in the room where the files were kept was flooded.
105. While I was looking at the ATWC web site to look for names and numbers to call, I read the 'history' written by Diane Kenderdine in 2011. St Mary's is not mentioned in their history.
106. In 2015, at the recommendation of a dear friend, I engaged with law firm, Cooper Legal, to seek financial compensation from the Anglican Church for the treatment I suffered at St Mary's and the unlawful abduction of my baby girl.
107. I attended a mediation session with a representative of ATWC, a lawyer for the Anglicans, my lawyer (Courtney Scott, Cooper Legal Wellington) and my husband GRO-B
108. I was offended by ATWC's representative's question when I walked in she asked me "*Margaret were you brought up in the faith?*" I didn't feel that was relevant or appropriate. The mediation experience was awful. As a consequence, my depression intensified.
109. On the 1st March 2016 Hesketh Henry sent a letter to Cooper Legal, which I refer to as Exhibit WITN0008004.
110. I felt that the Anglican Diocese of Auckland deflected responsibility by saying that the practices I described would not

be permitted today. I consider that the approach of '*that's what happened then*' is an attempt to deflect responsibility. It is also, however, an implicit condemnation of the people who represented the Church at that time. It seems to be to be a cop-out.

111. The response letter from the Anglican Trust implies that I was merely placed in St Mary's as a boarder. St Mary's was *not* a boarding house. They only took in unmarried pregnant women. They made them pay for the cost of their 'board' through their sickness benefit - but also forced them to work as domestics as well.
112. I take great exception to the inference that it was perhaps the fact that I was a rather pathetic child and that was the reason I did not cope with the treatment at St Mary's. St Mary's in the time of Matron Rhoda Gallagher could not be compared with a strict boarding school. In hind-sight I would go as far as saying my soul was raped when I was in St Mary's.
113. The letter also attempts to reduce Matron's part in her betrayal. My mother simply echoed Matron's words. Up to that point I believed I had Matron's support to keep my child. This inference is an old attack of using 'transference' in an attempt to turn Matron's actions back on myself and my mother.
114. The whole process cost me \$10,000 in legal costs to Cooper Legal which the Anglican Church refused to contribute towards. All they offered me was six counselling sessions.
115. I felt re-victimised by engaging with the ATWC.
116. On 9 November 2015 I contacted the Waihi community Constable and requested that the Police investigate the possibility of taking criminal action against the Church for kidnap and abduction.
117. On 11 December 2015 I met with a Detective who explained to me that I could not bring a charge against the Anglican Church for abduction or kidnapping. However, if Matron Gallagher had

still been alive I may have been able to bring charges against her.

***Attempts at political solutions***

118. Calls for the reform of the New Zealand Adoption Act 1955 have occurred over a lengthy period of time motivated from a wide range of interest groups. Changing social needs and expectations had prompted reviews of the Act in 1979, 1987, 1990 and 1993. However, none of these reviews led to legislative change.
119. I was a member of Movement out of Adoption (**MOA**) which was set up by Robert Ludbrook in the 1990s. This group no longer exists.
120. MOA had the support and assistance of a membership of 110. Its main aim was to educate the population about the Adoption Act 1955.
121. MOA hosted conferences, met with various groups including doctors and others in the social services plus politicians across the board.
122. MOA worked through community development to highlight the flaws, inequality and harm perpetuated by closed adoption through the Act.
123. Part of MOA's lobbying was to tell the stories of those that abduction/adoption had impacted on, these stories were published in the Woman's Weekly in 1994. I refer to Exhibit # WITN0008005 as a copy of this article.
124. The work of MOA was consistent with Joss Shawyer's book *Death by Adoption* (1979) for the practice of closed adoption.
125. The practice used birth certification to disown children's biological roots and was accompanied by forms of pressure and force on women to sever their immediate and ongoing relationship in that child's life which is legal fiction.



126. The practice is and was sustained by its secrecy which advantaged childless couples, or those choosing not to have their own children, this activity enabled by a cloak of public shame around single parenting. Significantly it proved to disadvantage unwed mothers and their biological children for the benefit of others.
127. The practice nevertheless represented a truth that a number of people involved in individual closed adoption acts, were advantaged by securing children and held moral or social investment in the activity.
128. It is in *Death by Adoption* that the stories and experiences of women who lost children via adoption began to be heard and communities concerned with adoption as social injustice formed.
129. In the mid-1990s there was growing concern to investigate closed adoptions.
130. There were many other support and lobbying organisations operating such as JIGSAW, Adoption Support Link, Siblings Affected by Adoption and Aotearoa Birthmothers Support Group. These support groups advertised their services in the front pages of telephone books and in national or local newspapers.
131. In May 1994 the current events TV show 60 Minutes offered a two-part story, a special investigation into the history of New Zealand adoption procedures, case studies of adoptions that went horribly wrong and a call to change the adoption laws.
132. I wrote about my experience in St Mary's and sent that manuscript to Renee Taylor. I also put other women in touch with Renee. She used the stories as a base for her book titled *Does This Make Sense to You*, published in 1995. This book was later made into a film *A Piece of my Heart*, released in 2009.
133. This was a call for community accountability. This should have been enough to alert commenter's/politicians to investigate the practice of adoption in New Zealand. However this did not happen.

**Government Administration Committee**

134. In 1997 we lobbied for a government inquiry into adoption in New Zealand.
135. In the end, the Government Administration Committee did not recommend an inquiry.
136. It seems that this Committee did not make much attempt to contact the advocacy and support community-based organisations I mentioned.
137. With the many adoption support or lobby groups widely advertised and easy to contact, it is a concern to me that the issue was treated with such indifference.
138. The Adoption Act 1955 has been quietly modified over the years in an attempt to make the suggested changes by those who identified the many flaws, which has been the reason for political statements such as "It's not like that anymore." Which in turn seems to be an excuse to rid themselves of the reality of what actually happened and the need to do anything about it now.
139. These points listed are to note the wider legal, social context around the implementation of adoption which caused harm, that an apology is not enough, and restorative actions should mirror the outcome of the Australian apology.
140. The statutes and practices were remarkably similar, and Australia followed New Zealand's 1955 lead statute by passing very similar legislation in the 1960s.
141. Unlike New Zealand, however, Australia revised its legislation in 1993, applying a 'best interest of the child' principle which is still notably absent in New Zealand's outdated statute.
142. As in Australia, New Zealand's practices had racist elements, and the placement of Māori children with Pākehā families was not uncommon, while the reverse situation was very rare.
143. Many Māori children were subject to secret adoption in Pākehā families, some apparently with no regard whatsoever for the

impact on these children. In my daughter's case, her father was Māori, but it is only now much later in her life that she is learning about and connecting with her whanau and culture.

### **Social Services Select Committee**

144. I belong to the lobbying and support group New Zealand Mothers of Loss to Adoption for Justice. In 2017 we petitioned the government to *'[u]ndertake a broad and full inquiry into the practice of "forced adoption" in New Zealand during the 1950s to the 1980s, and that the inquiry include and acknowledge the abuse, pain, and suffering cause by the State sanctioned practice of forced adoption'*.
145. On 15 March 2017, we prepared submissions to accompany this petition and in early 2017 I presented them to the Social Services Select Committee.
146. I was devastated when a representative of Oranga Tamariki refused to speak to our submission but instead read the Adoption Act 1955 to us at the subsequent hearing. I found this to be a cynical response to our plea.
147. Our petition was dismissed. I refer to exhibit WITN0008006 as a copy of the Health Select Committee Report.
148. Of note in the report it states at p 3 that:
- Most of us do not believe that an inquiry is the best way to deal with this issue. Although we do not agree with many adoption practices from the 1950s to the 1980s, we note that these practices reflected the social values and attitudes of the time. We note that, as attitudes and values have changed, so too have adoption practices.*
- Some of us consider that an inquiry would clarify what involvement Social workers had in adoptions. An inquiry could help to identify other forms of reparation for woman who were forced to adopt out their children.*

*It could also help bring closure for families who were affected by forced adoption.*

149. New Zealand Mothers of Loss to Adoption for Justice considered the dismissal unjust given that women from countries such as Australia, Canada, Ireland and Holland have all been acknowledged and apologies have been made plus support services set in place for those whose lives have been impacted by loss due to the abduction of babies and the adoption process.
150. I feel that we had been given hope to have our voices heard, only to have our hopes dashed. This was not the first time politicians had pushed aside the important history and issues we were raising. The question I have is: *What are the forces in the background, which appear to me to have had a powerful impact, that keep preventing a proper inquiry?*
151. The harm done to us is so deep and so extensive that many in the adoption community regard attempts to explain away what happened to them as unconscionable revisionism, politically motivated, and a further attempt to evade moral and political responsibility for the very real wrongs done.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

152. I have been asked to comment about how redress for the type of abuse I suffered could be improved in the future.
153. In relation to the Anglican Trust, my comments are set out below. I also comment on what I think the State should do.
154. A July 2016 NZ Herald article, notes that the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia declared assets of \$1.7 million and an annual income of \$1.9 million.
155. With this in mind, I wish for the Church to financially resource an independent counselling service for the mothers and their children that were abducted by St Mary's, and other similar homes. I wish for them to fund these services with no conditions or intrusive questioning of their victims.

156. I also wish for the Church to issue a public apology to all of the mothers and the children who were affected by their illegal practices and for them to publicly validate the suffering that they have caused for generations.
157. In relation to what the State could do better, it is time that the state and faith-based regime of abuse be acknowledged without the excuses (and dismissive attempt to annihilate our physical being and pain) of “but that’s just what happened then” or “it’s not like that anymore.”
158. We ask that you hear us. That you hear how women, and known and unknown families, have had to endure terrible injustice, mourning missing members and seeking their inclusion remain experiences which, if unresolved, continue to haunt the pursuit of wellbeing which we all must engage in.
159. We seek restoration of our truth in families, communities, Church and State for we are part of an unfortunate history. We ask for a full inquiry, report and opportunity for mediation in real robust discussion within those affected.
160. An apology is not enough. Very substantial legislative change is also urgently needed. The failure to take it is a stain, an ominous complicity with the abuses of the past, supportive of the secrets and lies mentality and the culture of secrecy which meant that the faith-based and state’s mistakes were easy to cover up, ignore, deny and perpetuate.
161. This submission seeks that the Royal Commission of Inquiry recommend that there be a broad and full inquiry into the practice of abduction (concealment of babies), which led to forced adoption in New Zealand during the 1950s to the 1980s, and that the inquiry include and acknowledge the abuse, pain, and suffering cause by the faith-based and state sanctioned practice of forced adoption.



**Not relevant to the NJ process**