



## **Child abuse in Europe: Victims' groups launch initiative to come to terms with European abuse cases**

**At an international meeting in Switzerland, victims' groups from all over Europe launched the large-scale "Justice Initiative". With this political initiative, abuse of children, especially in state and church institutions, is to be comprehensively dealt with for the first time in all European countries. A motion to bring the processing of abuse cases up to a pan-European level will be submitted to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in September.**

Europe has violated the protection of children for decades: Hundreds of thousands of children and young people became victims of exploitation, maltreatment and sexual abuse. In particular, the most serious abuses happened in state or church-run institutions.. In various European countries, until a few years ago, there were child removals, forced adoptions, sterilisations and drug/vaccine experiments on children and young people. In many cases across Europe, the state authorities were partly responsible for the suffering, or they failed to protect the children from the abuses and human rights violations.

To this day, these cases of abuse have not been dealt with in most European countries. This must now change. Victims' groups from all over Europe, as well as academics and NGOs, have travelled to Switzerland to launch the "Justice Initiative". This political initiative draws collective attention to a suppressed part of history and to the victims who are still suffering today because of the abuse and the lack of public recognition.

### **More than a dozen European countries at launch - Ireland also on board**

Conrad Bryan, spokesperson for the Association of Mixed Race Irish, who attended the symposium in Bern, said "I very much welcome this initiative coming out of Switzerland, a country which had its own dark history of child abuse. Ireland is still grappling with similar historical abuse issues but each European state has its own unique aspect to this common problem. Unfortunately, justice is elusive in most cases and by going to a European level we may start to see some kind of impetus towards common European solutions and a reckoning with our European past". Conrad Bryan, is a human rights activist and campaigner for victims of racial abuse/discrimination and child abuse in church run state institutions. He was also the chair of the health sub-committee of the Collaborative Forum set up by the Irish Government to identify supports for survivors of 'Mother and Baby Home' institutions in Ireland.

The «Justice Initiative» is supported by victims' groups, academics and NGOs from all parts of Europe, including survivors from Ireland. In a joint declaration signed by the representatives from Europe, the focus is on public recognition of the injustice, reparations and scientific reappraisal. [www.justice-initiative.eu](http://www.justice-initiative.eu).

### **Motion to be submitted to the Council of Europe within 2 weeks.**

"This initiative is central for Europe," says the President of the Swiss delegation to the Council of Europe, National Councillor Pierre-Alain Fridez. "Only by coming to terms with the past can we build the future". For this reason, he will submit a motion in Strasbourg in the coming days that contains the basic demands of the initiative and should lead to a comprehensive reappraisal of this dark chapter. The politician is convinced that the motion will find an overwhelming majority.

### **Switzerland as a model for European reappraisal**

"The time for reparations is rushing," explains initiator Guido Fluri, who co-sponsors the European initiative with his reputable foundation and has received an honorary doctorate from the University of Lucerne for his commitment to child protection. "Most of the victims are now old and frail. They should experience during their lifetime how the injustice is recognised and dealt with throughout Europe." In Switzerland, the Guido Fluri Foundation, together with victims' groups, has made the "Reparations Initiative" a success: more than 10,000 victims who had suffered the most severe



abuse have received reparations. Switzerland is working on the cases of abuse scientifically and will continue to support the victims with various projects. Based on the Swiss experience and positive solutions in other countries, victims' groups from all over Europe have come together to pursue this political path at the European level as well. The "Justice Initiative" is an expression of this endeavour. By coming to terms with the past, child protection in Europe is to be strengthened in the long term.

More information at: [www.justice-initiative.eu](http://www.justice-initiative.eu)

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