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2 **EVIDENCE OF MARGARET ANNE WILKINSON**
3 **(Not in Person - Read by Sarah Cato)**
4 **QUESTIONED BY MS ANDERSON**
5
6

7 **CHAIR:** Welcome back everybody. Thank you,
8 Ms Anderson.

9 **MS ANDERSON:** Thank you, Commissioners. We are now
10 going to hear the witness statement of Margaret, better
11 known as Maggie, Anne Wilkinson. The statement is
12 going to be read by Ms Cato as Ms Wilkinson is not able
13 to be here today to deliver it in person.

14 **CHAIR:** I believe she may be watching, so if she is,
15 can we, on behalf of the Commissioners, acknowledge
16 you, Maggie, thank you for your evidence and we look
17 forward to hearing Ms Cato reading it.

18 **MS ANDERSON:** Before Ms Cato begins, I confirm the two
19 witness statements that have been provided are signed
20 by Maggie as being true and correct to the best of her
21 knowledge and belief.

22 **CHAIR:** Thank you.

23 **MS CATO:** "My name is Maggie Anne Wilkinson. I was
24 born in Auckland in 1944 and I am now 76 years old. My
25 maiden name was Evington. In terms of ethnicity, I
26 identify as Pākehā.

27 My evidence is about the abuse I experienced when I
28 was a young woman. It relates to my time in the St
29 Mary's Home for Unwed Mothers which began in 1964.
30 This home was run by the St Mary's Trust but I
31 understand that in the 1980s it transferred into the
32 name of the Anglican Trust for Women and Children.

33 My evidence also relates to my attempts to get
34 recognition and a remedy for what I experienced.

1 As I explain below, the treatment of me and others
2 in the home was harsh during my pregnancy. Worse was
3 to come, with my child being taken away from me without
4 my consent. While some people call this forced
5 adoption, I prefer to call it abduction. My child was
6 taken and given away by a self-righteous Matron of the
7 Anglican organisation. She was abducted from me at
8 birth and then given away to make strangers happy.
9 No-one bothered to look back at the grief of the
10 sacrificing mother.

11 In the early 1980s, my daughter, then 18 years old,
12 found me through JIGSAW, a service connecting adopted
13 children with their birth parents. We have a close
14 relationship but I will never forgive St Mary's for
15 taking her away from me.

16 A further important aspect of why I am giving this
17 evidence is that I present this information not only
18 for myself but also on behalf of our Support Group,
19 New Zealand Mothers of Loss to Adoption for Justice.

20 Our group includes adopted people who lost their
21 identities and whanau who were separated from their
22 mothers by the act of abduction.

23 The information in this statement is not only about
24 my own experience. There are others who have similar
25 experiences and whom have provided me their story and
26 given consent for me to contribute their experiences to
27 the Royal Commission of Inquiry. For privacy reasons,
28 I do not identify these others by name.

29 This statement is a demand for justice and peace on
30 behalf of the women and children who simply did not
31 cope with what happened to them - and either committed
32 suicide or existed with the burden of mental anguish,
33 unsupported, invalidated and unrecognised.

34 My experience of abuse in care. In 1964, I fell
35 pregnant with my first child. I was 19 years old. The

1 father of my baby refused to marry me and joined the
2 Army. He volunteered to be posted to Vietnam.

3 I was therefore in Whakatane living with my parents.
4 They were ashamed and did not want to tell anyone that
5 I was pregnant out of wedlock. They made me stay in my
6 room and out of sight. They told their friends and
7 associates that I was away in Wellington. This meant I
8 could not leave the house and I had to stay hidden from
9 the community.

10 My mother would not take me to see our family
11 general practitioner. This was all part of her wanting
12 to hide my secret. Instead, she arranged for another
13 local doctor to come to the house and discuss how I was
14 to proceed re my pregnancy.

15 The doctor recommended to my parents that I be sent
16 away to an Anglican home called St Mary's Home for
17 Unwed Mothers in Otahuhu, Auckland.

18 We were not a religious family and I am certainly
19 not a religious person.

20 The doctor described this place as a safe haven, a
21 sanctuary. He told my parents that I would be cared
22 for in the home. So, when my parents decided to send
23 me there, they expected a certain level of care.

24 It was neither a haven, nor a sanctuary.

25 St Mary's Home for Unwed Mothers. On the 16th of
26 January 1964, I was admitted to St Mary's. My parents
27 drove me to the home from Whakatane. I lived in the
28 home for 6 months and was discharged on the 27th of
29 June 1964. The areas of St Mary's that were public
30 facing, such as the office and the maternity wing for
31 married women, were nice and created the perception
32 that it was a good place.

33 There was a birthing suite and a public maternity
34 hospital on the premise where we birthed our babies.

1 The rest of the home resembled a concentration camp.
2 It was bare, with very little furniture. We slept in
3 dormitories. The home was always damp because of the
4 constant wet mopping.

5 The orphanage was a disgusting place, it was cold,
6 and we were not allowed to play with the children. The
7 children were crying out for attention. When I walked
8 past, they would run to the fence, but we were not
9 allowed to touch them.

10 The orphanage was full of the unadoptable babies,
11 which were mainly twins and Māori children and children
12 of mixed race.

13 Matron Rhoda Gallagher. The home was run by Matron
14 Rhoda Gallagher. I understand she is now deceased.

15 When I first met Matron, she seemed to have my
16 interests at heart and created the appearance in front
17 of my parents that she would look after and provide
18 care to me.

19 However, upon entering the home it became clear that
20 Matron's homey front room did not mirror the hell hole
21 out the back.

22 It became very apparent quite early on in my time at
23 St Mary's that the unwed women would not be able to
24 keep their babies and they would be forced to have
25 their babies adopted.

26 I found this out from the girls at the home, we
27 would talk about it. I was horrified and in distress
28 because I always wanted to keep and raise my child.

29 Matron was a vicious woman who would always shout at
30 us and say the most awful things to us. She would tell
31 us that we were selfish to want to keep our children.
32 She would refer to our babies as her babies. She would
33 say things like "someone better than you wants your
34 baby" and "there are lovely married couples just
35 wanting to give baby a home".

1 Matron would sneak up behind us and scare us
2 shouting in our ears, she would say the most terrible
3 things to us. She would tell us that we were fallen
4 women and that she would make decent women out of us.

5 The language that Matron used featured words such as
6 selfish, used, tarnished, illegitimate.

7 Another requirement Matron imposed was that we could
8 not be called by our own given names. Christian names
9 were changed and surnames disappeared - we all had to
10 take Matron's surname.

11 Communal clothes had to be worn from a shared box of
12 clothing. One's own garments could only be worn on a
13 Sunday if a visitor was coming.

14 When I look back on this, I see that the process of
15 institutionalisation was instant and we were
16 dehumanised.

17 There would have been between 18-22 unwed women at
18 St Mary's at any one time. They were young pregnant
19 girls in the home. They were told to say that they
20 were 16 years old if anyone asked them. There were
21 also a number of intellectually handicapped girls in
22 the home. This signalled to me that these girls may
23 have been raped but as far as I know there was no
24 support provided to them.

25 We were made to attend chapel twice a day for our
26 sins. Matron would deliver the service at chapel. I
27 recall one time another one of the unwed mothers
28 fainted in the chapel and Matron just told us to just
29 leave her there on the floor, no assistance was
30 provided to her.

31 Male missionaries would company into St Mary's from
32 time to time and they would attend our chapel service.
33 They made me feel dirty too. They couldn't keep their
34 eyes off our stomachs and breasts.

1 Rules were fiercely enforced and an inflexible daily
2 routine, along with a controlled "one way only",
3 Matron's way, of carrying out every function and
4 occupation one was assigned to.

5 The fear of being caught doing a chore a different
6 way to what Matron expected was overwhelming. Matron
7 had the ability to arrive silently and scream
8 recriminations if she spotted a variation.

9 The regimented discipline was excessive, cruel and
10 incapacitating. Any personality one may have arrived
11 with quickly dissipated.

12 We were institutionalised to the degree that we
13 became controlled by the punishing, oppressive,
14 authoritarian regime that was allowed by the overseeing
15 Anglican organisation.

16 We were treated as the proverbial dirty girls and
17 were punished daily with a heavy work schedule. It was
18 run in a military style. We were dictated to by a bell
19 that rang to indicate to us when it was time to get up,
20 eat, and go to work.

21 I worked hard in the kitchen orphanage and laundry.
22 This included laundry from the public maternity annex.
23 I cleaned and wet mopped constantly. I bottled the
24 produce from the harvest festivals. The work was
25 relentless and only with very basic equipment and
26 tools, even when we were heavily pregnant. This was
27 unpaid labour and the conditions were something out of
28 Dickens. This was taken as part of our punishment.

29 I experienced the hypocrisy of two chapel sessions a
30 day taken by Matron. When the culture of St Mary's was
31 cruel, punishing and stigmatising and there was no
32 compassion. As a single mother I qualified for a
33 Sickness Benefit from the government which was paid
34 directly to the home. I was allowed a small amount of

1 pocket money per week from that, enough for a packet of
2 barley sugars and some wool.

3 We were effectively locked up in the house and not
4 allowed to go anywhere. Whilst not physically locked
5 up, with no other options or money. This was the
6 practical effect.

7 For the majority of us there, the home was a prison
8 for sad girls with no choices and no advocacy. It was
9 a place of fear and punishment.

10 Food was a scarcity, we weren't given enough to eat
11 because Matron wanted us to have small babies so there
12 was no problems during delivery.

13 I had an obsession with food and would cut pictures
14 of food out of magazines and hide them under my bed.

15 I was not given any education about pregnancy or
16 what our births would be like. Matron did not allow or
17 give any opportunity for advice from anyone.

18 Letters were vetted by Matron coming into or leaving
19 the home. This meant that we were isolated and
20 controlled by her.

21 Social workers were meant to visit the home but they
22 were frightened off by Matron. I was told at a meeting
23 once in 1994 by an ex-social worker who is now
24 deceased, he apologised to me and told me that they
25 knew terrible things were going on at St Mary's but
26 they did nothing.

27 Hidden in the home were pregnant underage girls.
28 They were told to say they were 16 if asked. There
29 were young women with intellectual disabilities. They
30 were bewildered and lost. No-one asked about how it
31 was that these young girls came to be pregnant. I
32 consider this is a question that the Church should have
33 been asking.

34 Matron accompanied the girls when their allocated
35 doctor visited, which successfully stopped any

1 communication by me and others to the doctor about what
2 was happening or to seek information about the birth
3 and the fact that I wanted to keep my child.

4 My intent was always to have my baby and raise her
5 myself. There was a Pacific Island woman who worked in
6 the kitchen at St Mary's and she looked after her
7 daughter living on-site. I loathed St Mary's but to
8 keep my child I thought that I may be able to live and
9 work at St Mary's, just like the Pacific Island woman
10 in the kitchen. I spoke to Matron about this plan and
11 she seemed supportive and agreed to my request. I
12 believed that Matron was going to let me work in the
13 orphanage and raise my child.

14 However, Matron had no intent on following through
15 on her word. My mother visited me at Easter time.
16 Matron spoke to my mother and told her that "I was not
17 the type to cope with a child".

18 Later in my pregnancy when I happily disclosed to my
19 parents that Matron was going to support me to keep my
20 child, they told me that she was not going to assist.
21 They told me of the conversation they had with Matron
22 at Easter time.

23 I got in trouble one day when I got upset at a
24 fellow resident. As a consequence, I was placed into
25 an isolation room and given some sort of medication in
26 little "drops" to bring on my birth. I do not know
27 what these drops were called.

28 In 1964, I gave birth to my baby girl. My allocated
29 doctor attended the birth. He leaned on the counter on
30 the other side of the delivery suite while Matron
31 delivered my child.

32 It was a difficult delivery and I was torn to bits
33 inside. I was physically left in a mess with no
34 postnatal treatment or support.

1 A nurse let my baby stay in the room with me for a
2 short time. I placed my hand on her as she slept.
3 This was a big deal as she wasn't allowed to do this
4 and would have been in trouble if Matron had caught
5 her.

6 When I fell asleep my baby was abducted by Matron
7 and concealed from me.

8 I was drugged without consent, I was given
9 medication to stop lactation. My breasts were also
10 bound tight.

11 My baby was given to an Anglican woman who was a
12 member of the Auckland Diocese. I was called to say
13 goodbye to my daughter when they took her, but I was
14 not allowed to hold or touch her.

15 In 1964, eight days after the birth, I was taken to
16 the lawyer's office in Ōtāhuhu with no explanation
17 about what was going to happen. I was driven to the
18 lawyer's office by Matron. I think this was after my
19 daughter had already been taken away from the home.
20 There is a Church record that confirms this date.

21 I did not receive any explanation about my rights
22 under the Adoption Act 1955. I was not given any legal
23 advice or told of my rights as guardian to my daughter.

24 I was made to sign legal documents and made to swear
25 on the Bible and say that I was never going to try to
26 find my daughter. This aspect of being made to swear
27 on the Bible was common practice. While not legally
28 binding, this was very effective, emotional and
29 spiritual blackmail.

30 The lawyers that were used to draft the papers
31 during my time and up until 1970s are redacted. As I
32 have said, Matron took me to the lawyer's office along
33 with the papers. I know the name of the lawyer and the
34 person who acted as a witness.

1 I understand that the lawyer was a trustee of St
2 Mary's at the time and was also the partner of
3 (redacted). I consider there was a blatant conflict of
4 interest.

5 On the adoption papers it was recorded that "I
6 thought it was better for my parents that my baby was
7 adopted" and it also refers to me being
8 "disillusioned". These were the words of the author
9 lawyers or the social worker, they were not my words.
10 I was able to obtain a copy of these papers in the
11 1990s from a woman at Child, Youth and Family. She was
12 not meant to give this to me but she was generous of
13 spirit, as she herself had been through a similar
14 process.

15 I did not want to sign but I felt that I had to.

16 It is a legal axiom that consent not freely given is
17 not consent at all, and the history of the adoption
18 corruption in New Zealand relied upon invalid consents
19 obtained under pressure, manipulation, threats, illegal
20 practices, emotional blackmail and stand over tactics.

21 The fact that I swore on the Bible that I would not
22 try to find my daughter meant that I felt I could not
23 never take the steps to do so. I am lucky my daughter
24 took steps to find me.

25 The New Zealand Adoption Act 1955 states that the
26 mother cannot sign adoption consent until 10 days after
27 the birth. It wasn't legal if the mother signed before
28 then. That still is the law in New Zealand. It has
29 never changed. I was forced to sign the adoption
30 papers when my daughter was only 8 days old.
31 Therefore, I consider the adoption has always been
32 illegal.

33 I was discharged from St Mary's without my baby two
34 weeks after the birth. I was discharged bleeding, both
35 physically and mentally.

1 I was told by Matron that I would get back to a
2 normal life and I would forget about her. This has
3 never been the case.

4 After the birth of my child I realised something was
5 very wrong. I was bleeding profusely. I did not feel
6 like I could go to the GP because the birth was not
7 recognised, so I didn't seek any help for a
8 birth-related problem.

9 In summary, the treatment at St Mary's was bad
10 enough. But to walk out with empty arms, baby gone
11 forever, was the most horrendous walk of my life. As a
12 victim, I was punished. That punishment has continued
13 throughout my life.

14 The impact of the abuse on me and others. Life
15 after leaving St Mary's Home. I returned to Whakatane
16 for a short time. I phoned Rhoda Gallagher many times
17 from my parent's home pleading with her to get my child
18 back for me. My appeals were met with repudiation, the
19 deed had been done.

20 I found employment in Auckland and after saving I
21 went to live in Sydney Australia.

22 The bleeding was constant and a worry, so on the 6th
23 of January 1966 I made an appointment to see a
24 gynaecologist at Eastern Suburbs Hospital Clinic in
25 Sydney. I can't recall the name of the doctor, but he
26 told me that because of the tearing at the birth of my
27 child, I would be unable to conceive another child. I
28 was unable to afford his care and was terrified of
29 hospitals, so I persevered with living with the
30 bleeding.

31 I met up with my old and dear friend Graeme and we
32 decided to marry. At that time, I was working at the
33 Manchester Unity Sydney and during this period
34 mentioned to a co-worker that I was unable to have
35 children.

1 It was suggested that I see the Unity doctor,
2 Dr Green, at his Point Piper residence. Dr Green was
3 an elderly European and was semiretired. He was
4 horrified and angry at the extent of the damage. He
5 told my husband that if I had been left in that
6 condition in Australia, he would investigate and make a
7 complaint.

8 I then underwent a series of procedures cauterising
9 to repair and damage. This process was extremely
10 distressing, painful and expensive.

11 I know through my advocacy and lobbying work in
12 New Zealand, that many women experienced the same
13 treatment that I did at St Mary's. They have written
14 to me in support of an Inquiry into Adoption within
15 New Zealand. One woman who was at St Mary's in 1969
16 shared with me a similar experience to mine, where she
17 was peeling the potatoes one night, Matron smacked her
18 on the knuckles with a bamboo stick to indicate that
19 she was peeling the potatoes too thick and therefore
20 wasting money.

21 She often went without meals as punishment from
22 Matron and was regularly smacked around her legs and
23 knuckles for small, silly little things.

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

30 At this point, I believe it appropriate to
31 acknowledge the women who took, or attempted to take,
32 their own lives after losing their children, women who
33 suffered the unending grief and psychological wounds
34 from being systematically dispossessed of their
35 children who went on to realise that they could not

1 just "get on with their lives and forget", as they had
2 been reassured by social workers and by Matron.

3 Disenfranchised and isolated, trivialised and
4 discounted, in many instances their pain was
5 overwhelming.

6 Subsequent discoveries that their children had also
7 suffered from being placed with inappropriate adopters
8 and in some instances simply returned to the State as
9 unwanted chattels and/or who suffered years of abuse or
10 were simply treated as second best, compounded by the
11 unending distress of these women. I/we/they feel
12 betrayed and conned.

13 I consider I have been controlled, deliberately
14 discounted, and betrayed by the representatives of the
15 Anglican Church, who consider their status and
16 philosophy and their bottom line beyond question. The
17 responses from the Church, as I describe in my evidence
18 below, have continued to invalidate me. For all these
19 reasons, I have been grappling with the ongoing grief
20 and depression.

21 My husband has stood by me, my sturdiest support.
22 My children from my marriage were left with a mother
23 who was deeply depressed and suicidal and there were
24 many times they did not cope.

25 Attempts to get redress. In this section of my
26 evidence I will describe the personal remedy I have
27 sought from the ATWC, Anglican Trust for Women and
28 Children, and their response.

29 I also talk about the attempts to get redress
30 through political avenues.

31 Attempt to get response from the Anglican Trust for
32 Women and Children. In the mid-1990s, I was driving to
33 work one morning listening to the National radio when I
34 heard an interview with a person who attended an
35 Anglican Synod at Hamilton. The person being

1 interviewed spoke about the Anglican decision to accept
2 homosexuals. Big of them I thought but what about the
3 terrible punishment doled out to me and other young
4 women for daring to have any sexuality.

5 I contacted St Mary's, I was furious. I spoke with
6 and subsequently met the manager who had taken over St
7 Mary's and had turned it into a training facility.

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

11 He wrote to the then Bishop of Auckland, Bruce
12 Gilbert [sic], to tell him that I was very angry and
13 suggested that an apology may appease me".

14 Q. Can I pause you there. We will bring up the document
15 which is Exhibit 8002. This is a letter dated 29 June
16 1992 on the letterhead of the Anglican Trust for Women
17 and Children.

18 In terms of the last paragraph on the bottom of the
19 first page, could you please expand that?

20 This is a reference to the current Chairperson
21 having been a regular visitor to St Mary's Home at the
22 time of Maggie Wilkinson's term of residence. The
23 letter states, "Keitha's comments are not inconsistent
24 with those contained in former trustee Dr Roger
25 Bartley's letter. Keitha recollects that the Matron of
26 the time wielded total power and authority over staff
27 and residents, and that outsiders were likely to
28 observe only that which the Matron chose to have them
29 see." And the last sentence beginning, "Keitha
30 expresses no surprise at the contents of Maggie's
31 letter".

32 And then the second paragraph, "The question
33 is - how best to respond to Maggie Wilkinson and, where
34 appropriate, to other women for whom the Church's care
35 was as damning and as damaging as that which she

1 experienced? I would very much like you to hear the
2 sad details from her personally, largely I guess
3 because you are by virtue of your episcopal role
4 uniquely placed to be able to listen and respond on
5 behalf of 'the Church'."

6 The second to last paragraph, "Just a detail in
7 closing. Maggie was cruelly duped into giving up her
8 baby for adoption. When in recent years she made
9 contact with her daughter she found the adoption had
10 not been all together successful, and that the child
11 had been severely burned in an accident. So the child
12 given up now bears physical scars which accentuate the
13 emotional scarring expressed in resentment at Maggie
14 not having kept her, thus Maggie gets to lose twice
15 over." And concludes, "I would be very grateful Bruce
16 for the opportunity to discuss this with you".

17 **MS CATO:** "In time I received a phonecall from Bishop
18 Bruce Gilbert [sic] who presented me with a verbal
19 apology. I was not satisfied with the verbal apology
20 and requested a written acknowledgment and apology
21 which was duly carried out."

22 Q. And can I have you please call up document 8003? This
23 is a media article from 1992, in November, and the very
24 last paragraph, "Mr Jackson said experiences such as
25 Margaret's should be acknowledged by the Church with
26 sadness".

27 **MS CATO:** "I believe that apology was only spoken and
28 written to merely keep an angry woman quiet.

29 In July 2014, I requested my medical file from the
30 Anglican Trust for Women and Children. I wanted to
31 know what the medication was that they gave me to stop
32 the lactation whilst at St Mary's.

33 I am aware through my research that the synthetic
34 oestrogen diethylstilboestrol, known by the acronym DES
35 or as stilboestrol, was administered to single mothers

1 without informed consent in hospitals where unmarried
2 women gave birth.

3 I was told by a woman named Kate at ATWC that those
4 records no longer exist because there was a fire.

5 I also made my request to the Anglican Archives. I
6 heard back from a woman named Mary who told me that the
7 papers could not be found and she said they were
8 destroyed when a hot water tank burst in the room where
9 the files were kept and it was flooded.

10 While I was looking at the ATWC website to look for
11 names and numbers to call, I read the history written
12 by Diane Kenderdine in 2011. St Mary's is not
13 mentioned in their history.

14 In 2015, at the recommendation of a dear friend, I
15 engaged with law firm, Cooper Legal, to seek financial
16 compensation from the Anglican Church for the treatment
17 I suffered at St Mary's and the unlawful abduction of
18 my baby girl.

19 I attended a mediation session with a representative
20 of ATWC, a lawyer for the Anglicans, my lawyer
21 Courteney Scott from Cooper Legal Wellington and my
22 husband Graeme Wilkinson.

23 I was offended by the Anglican Trust Women and
24 Children's representative's question. When I walked in
25 she asked me, "Margaret, were you brought up in the
26 faith?" I didn't feel this was relevant or
27 appropriate. The mediation experience was awful. As a
28 consequence, my depression intensified.

29 On the 21st of March 2016, Hesketh Henry sent a
30 letter to Cooper Legal.

31 Q. Can we please call up Exhibit 8004?

32 **CHAIR:** Just noting the date was the 1st of March, not
33 the 21st of March.

34 **MS CATO:** My apologies.

35 **MS ANDERSON:**

1 Q. Just noting this is a letter on the Hesketh Henry
2 letterhead dated 1 March 2016. It begins by raising
3 the concerns raised in correspondence from Cooper Legal
4 and advises that that letter has been carefully
5 considered by the Anglican Trust for Women and Children
6 and the Diocese of Auckland.

7 Could you expand, please? "First, we reiterate the
8 acknowledgment in our letter of 2 November 2015 of the
9 profound effect that Mrs Wilkinson's experiences have
10 had on her life. Her pain and her grief are very
11 evident, and neither the Trust nor the Diocese has any
12 intention or desire to trivialise or disregard her
13 experience or her suffering."

14 The second paragraph, this next paragraph
15 confirmation that the trust is seeking to find the most
16 appropriate response to what is both a deeply personal
17 matter for Mrs Wilkinson and an issue which affects a
18 large number of people who lived through this period in
19 our history.

20 The next statement is, "In making that response, the
21 Board and Diocese must also bear in mind the objects of
22 the trusts for which they are responsible and the needs
23 of present and future beneficiaries".

24 The next small paragraph, "Your letter states in a
25 number of places that St Mary's Trust broke laws or
26 breached a legal duty to Mrs Wilkinson. We disagree".

27 Turning over to page 2, second paragraph, "However,
28 whether those practices were unlawful, or breached a
29 legal duty, must be determined on the basis of the law
30 in 1964." And then concludes, "Legal standards of care
31 and medical treatment reflect the professional and
32 social practices of the time".

33 And then the paragraph, third to last paragraph,
34 "While the Trust and the Diocese does not believe that
35 a payment of compensation is an appropriate response to

1 this claim, they remain very willing to engage in a
2 process that may lead to reconciliation. The offer of
3 grief counselling will remain open to Mrs Wilkinson,
4 should she wish to take it".

5 **MS CATO:** I felt that the Anglican Diocese of Auckland
6 deflected responsibility by saying that the practices I
7 described would not be permitted today. I consider
8 that the approach of "that's what happened then" is an
9 attempt to deflect responsibility. It is also,
10 however, an implicit condemnation of the people who
11 represented the Church at the time. It seems to be a
12 cop-out.

13 The response letter from the Anglican Trust implies
14 that I was not merely placed in St Mary's as a boarder.

15 Q. Is that I was merely placed?

16 A. The response letter from the Anglican Trust implies
17 that I was not merely placed in St Mary's as a boarder.
18 St Mary's was not a boarding house. They only took in
19 unmarried pregnant women. They made them pay for the
20 cost of their board through their Sickness Benefit but
21 also forced them to work as domestics as well.

22 I take great exception to the inference that it was
23 perhaps the fact that I was a rather pathetic child and
24 that was the reason I did not cope with the treatment
25 at St Mary's. St Mary's in the time of Matron Rhoda
26 Gallagher could not be with a strict boarding house.
27 In hindsight, I would go as far as saying my soul was
28 raped when I was at St Mary's.

29 The letter also attempts to reduce Matron's part in
30 her betrayal. My mother simply echoed Matron's words.
31 Up to that point I believed I had Matron's support to
32 keep my child. This inference is an old attack of
33 using "transference" in an attempt to turn Matron's
34 actions back on myself and my mother.

1 The whole process cost me \$10,000 in legal costs to
2 Cooper Legal which the Anglican Church refused to
3 contribute towards. All they offered me was six
4 counselling sessions.

5 I felt re-victimised by engaging with the Anglican
6 Trust for Women and Children.

7 On 9 November 2015, I contacted the Waihi community
8 constable and requested that the Police investigate the
9 possibility of taking criminal action against the
10 Church for kidnap and abduction.

11 On 11 December 2015, I met with a Detective who
12 explained to me that I could not bring a charge against
13 the Anglican Church for abduction or kidnapping.
14 However, if Matron Gallagher had still been alive, I
15 may have been able to bring charges against her.

16 Attempts at political solutions. Calls for the
17 reform of the New Zealand Adoption Act 1955 have
18 occurred over a lengthy period of time motivated by a
19 wide range of interest groups. Changing social needs
20 and expectations has prompted reviews of the Act in
21 1979, 1987, 1990 and 1993. However, none of these
22 reviews led to legislative change.

23 I was a member of Movement Out of Adoption (MOA)
24 which was setup by Robert Ludbrook in the 1990s. This
25 group no longer exists. MOA had the support and
26 assistance of a membership of 110. Its main aim was to
27 educate the population about the Adoption Act 1955.
28 MOA hosted conferences, met with various groups,
29 including doctors and other Social Services, plus
30 politicians across the board. MOA worked through
31 community development to highlight the flaws, inequity
32 and harm perpetuated by closed adoption through the
33 Act.

34 Part of MOA's lobbying was to tell the stories of
35 those that abduction/adoption had impacted on, and

1 these stories were published in the Woman's Weekly in
2 1994.

3 Q. Can we please call up Exhibit 8005? This is a magazine
4 article with the title, "Hell at St Mary's" and
5 identifies, relates to the pain and suffering Maggie
6 Wilkinson endured as a young unwed Mum in the Anglican
7 Church former St Mary's Home still with her 30 years
8 later. It is a report by Judith Thompson. Can we
9 expand the bottom right-hand quote from Maggie? The
10 quote is, "It's an anger that demands an answer as to
11 why we were punished so badly, why we were expected to
12 silently disappear, to remain burdened with the grief
13 of suppressed maternal feelings after we had been
14 robbed of our most precious gift". And a reference
15 that I'll read out, doesn't need to come out on the
16 screen, "The home had an overwhelming atmosphere of
17 guilt and punishment and the conditions were
18 Dickensian."

19 Bottom right-hand extract, page 3, "Maggie describes
20 her experiences as an abuse inflicted by the Anglican
21 Church which she believes chose either to condone or
22 ignore what was happening. She also believes Social
23 Welfare workers chose to turn a blind eye".

24 The article ends, "I do not accept what has
25 happened, she says, I simply live with it".

26 **MS CATO:** "The work of MOA was consistent with Joss
27 Sawyer's book *Death By Adoption* 1979 for the practice
28 of closed adoption.

29 The practice used birth certification to disown
30 children's biological roots and was accompanied by
31 forms of pressure and force on women to sever their
32 immediate and ongoing relationship with that child's
33 life, which is legal fiction.

34 The practice is and was sustained by its secrecy
35 which childless couples or those choosing not to have

1 their own children. This activity was enabled by a
2 cloak of public shame around single parenting.
3 Significantly, it proved to disadvantage Unwed Mothers
4 and their biological children for the benefit of
5 others.

6 The practice nevertheless represented a truth that a
7 number of people involved in individual closed adoption
8 acts, were advantaged by securing children and held
9 moral or social investment in that activity.

10 It is in *Death By Adoption* that the stories and
11 experiences of women who lost children via adoption
12 began to be heard and communities concerned with
13 adoption as social injustice formed.

14 In the mid-1990s, there was growing concern to
15 investigate closed adoptions. There were many other
16 support and lobbying organisations operating, such as
17 JIGSAW, Adoption Support Link, Siblings Affected by
18 Adoption, and Aotearoa Birthmothers Support Group.
19 These support groups advertised their services in the
20 front pages of telephone books and in national and
21 local newspapers.

22 In May 1999, the current events TV show 60 Minutes—
23 Q. Can I correct that, it should be 1994.

24 **MS CATO:** Sorry, 1994, the current events show 60
25 Minutes offered a two-part story, a special
26 investigation into the history of New Zealand adoption
27 procedures, case studies of adoptions that went
28 horribly wrong and a call to change the adoption laws.

29 **MS ANDERSON:** Commissioners, it's an extract from that
30 documentary that will be shown at the end of this
31 evidence, which we are unable to transmit via the live
32 stream, so we will move into turning off the live
33 streaming when we come to that part of the evidence.

34 **CHAIR:** Thank you.

1 **MS CATO:** "I wrote about my experience in St Mary's and
2 sent that manuscript to Renee Taylor. I also put other
3 women in touch with Renee. She used the stories as a
4 base for her book titled Does This Make Sense to You
5 published in 1995. This book was later made into a
6 film A Piece of My Heart, released in 2009.

7 This was a call for community accountability. This
8 should have been enough to alert commenters/politicians
9 to investigate the practice of adoption in New Zealand.
10 However, this did not happen.

11 Government Administration Committee. In 1997, we
12 lobbied for a Government Inquiry into adoption in
13 New Zealand. In the end, the Government Administration
14 Committee did not recommend an Inquiry.

15 It seems that this Committee did not make much
16 attempt to contact the advocacy and support community-
17 based organisations I mentioned. With the many
18 adoption support or lobby groups widely advertised and
19 easy to contact, it is a concern to me that the issue
20 was treated with such indifference.

21 The Adoption Act 1955 has been quietly modified over
22 the years in an attempt to make the suggested changes
23 by those who identify the many flaws, which has been
24 the reason for political statements such as "it's not
25 like that anymore" which in turn seems to be an excuse
26 to rid themselves of their reality of what actually
27 happened and the need to do anything about it

28 These points listed are to note the wider legal,
29 social context around the implementation of adoption
30 which caused harm, that an apology is not enough, and
31 restorative actions should mirror the outcome of the
32 Australian apology.

33 The statutes and practices were remarkably similar,
34 and Australia followed New Zealand's 1955 lead statute
35 bypassing very similar legislation in the 1960s.

1 Unlike New Zealand, however, Australia revised its
2 legislation in 1993, applying a "best interests of the
3 child" principle which is still notably absent in
4 New Zealand's outdated statute.

5 As in Australia, New Zealand's practices had racist
6 elements and the placement of Maori children with
7 Pākehā families was not uncommon, while the reverse
8 situation was very rare. Many Māori children were
9 subject to secret adoption in Pākehā families, some
10 apparently with no regard whatsoever for the impact on
11 these children. In my daughter's case, her father was
12 Māori but it is only now, much later in her life, that
13 she is learning about and connecting with her whānau
14 and culture.

15 I belong to the lobbying and Support Group
16 New Zealand Mothers of Lost to Adoption for Justice.
17 In 2017 we petitioned the government to undertake a
18 full inquiry into the practice of forced adoption in
19 New Zealand during the 1950s to 1980s and that the
20 inquiry include and acknowledge the abuse, pain and
21 suffering caused by the State sanctioned practice of
22 forced adoption.

23 On the 15th of March 2017, we prepared submissions
24 to accompany this petition and in early 2017 I
25 presented them to the Social Services Select Committee.

26 I was devastated when a representative of Oranga
27 Tamariki refused to speak to our submission but instead
28 read the Adoption Act 1955 to us at the subsequent
29 hearing. I found this to be a cynical response to our
30 plea.

31 Our petition was dismissed.

32 A copy of the House Select Committee report, I note
33 that on page 3 it states:

34 "Most of us do not believe that an inquiry is the
35 best way to deal with this issue. Although we do not

1 agree with many adoption practices from the 1950s to
2 the 1980s, we note that these practices reflected the
3 social values and attitudes at the time. We note that,
4 as attitudes and values have changed, so too have
5 adoption practices. Some of us consider that an
6 inquiry would clarify what involvement social workers
7 had in adoptions. An inquiry could help to identify
8 other forms of reparation for women who were forced to
9 adopt out their children.

10 It could also help bring closure for families who
11 were affected by forced adoption."

12 New Zealand Mothers of Loss to Adoption for Justice
13 considered the dismissal unjust, given that women from
14 countries such as Australia, Canada, Ireland and
15 Holland have all been acknowledged and apologies have
16 been made plus support services set in place for those
17 lives that have been impacted by loss due to the
18 abduction of babies and the adoption process.

19 I feel that we had been given hope to have our
20 voices heard, only to have our hopes dashed. This was
21 not the first-time politicians had pushed aside the
22 important history and issues we were raising. The
23 question I have is: what are the forces in the
24 background which appear to me to have had powerful
25 impact, that keep preventing a proper inquiry?

26 The harm done to us is so deep and so extensive that
27 many in the adoption community regard attempts to
28 explain away what happened to them as unconscionable
29 revisionism, politically motivated, and a further
30 attempt to evade moral and political responsibility for
31 the very real wrongs done.

32 Recommendations. I have been asked to comment about
33 how redress for the type of abuse I suffered could be
34 improved in the future.

1 In relation to the Anglican Trust, my comments are
2 set out below. I also comment on what I think the
3 State should do.

4 A July 2016 New Zealand Herald article notes that
5 the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and
6 Polynesia declared assets of \$1.7 million and an annual
7 income of \$1.9 million.

8 With this in mind, I wish for the Church to
9 financially resource an independent counselling service
10 for the mothers and their children that were abducted
11 by St Mary's, and other similar homes. I wish for them
12 to fund these services with no conditions or intrusive
13 questioning of their victims.

14 I also wish for the Church to issue a public apology
15 to all the mothers and children who were affected by
16 their illegal practices and for them to publicly
17 validate the suffering that they have caused for
18 generations.

19 In relation to what the State could do better, it is
20 time that the State or faith-based regime of abuse get
21 acknowledged, without the excuses and dismissive
22 attempt to alienate our physical being and pain of "but
23 that's just what happened then" or "it's not like that
24 anymore".

25 We ask that you hear us, that you hear how women,
26 and known and unknown families, have had to endure
27 terrible injustice, mourning missing members and
28 seeking their inclusion remain experiences which, if
29 unresolved, continue to haunt the pursuit of wellbeing
30 which we must all engage in.

31 We seek restoration of our truth in families,
32 communities, Church and State for we are part of the
33 unfortunate history. We ask for a full Inquiry, report
34 and opportunity for mediation and real robust
35 discussion with those affected.

1 An apology is not enough. Very substantial
2 legislative change is also urgently needed. The
3 failure to take it is a stain, an ominous complicity
4 with the abuses of the past, supportive of the secrets
5 and lies mentally and a culture of secrecy which meant
6 that the faith-based and State's mistakes were easy to
7 cover up, ignore, deny and perpetuate.

8 This submission seeks that the Royal Commission of
9 Inquiry recommend that there be a broad and full
10 Inquiry into the practice of abduction, concealment of
11 babies, which led to forced adoption in New Zealand
12 during the 1950s to the 1980s and that the Inquiry
13 include and acknowledge the abuse, pain and suffering
14 caused by the faith-based and State sanctioned practice
15 of forced adoption."

16 Q. Can you read the conclusion, please?

17 **MS CATO:** "The Church seemed to infer that they
18 provided a service by taking our babies off us so that
19 the secret was hidden forever, with our lives intended
20 to be able to carry on as if our babies had not been
21 born. Maybe there was a minority of young women who
22 went along with that. However, that does not justify
23 the punishment I felt (and as felt by many others in
24 the same position as me). It definitely did not take
25 into account those who desperately wanted to love and
26 raise our babies. No other options of support were
27 given, because Matron was obsessed with our children
28 being given to married couples.

29 In terms of seeking redress, I was not able to get
30 the Church to meet any of my needs. It seems amazing
31 to me. The Church had the opportunity to respond with
32 any terms they thought appropriate. Instead, I was
33 faced with an incredible refusal. The Church has
34 rubbed in the harm, causing me depression. This hardly
35 seems Christian".

1 Q. Thank you. There's a second supplementary statement by
2 Maggie. Could you begin reading that at paragraph 3,
3 please?

4 **MS CATO:** "I would dearly love one of the beautiful
5 stained-glass windows of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in
6 Parnell, one of the prominent windows be dedicated by
7 the Anglican Church to the many mothers destined to a
8 lifetime of grief and to their children who were taken,
9 abducted, by the judgmental philosophy of the Church.

10 To acknowledge and remember with sorrow the impact
11 of that action on those who were harmed by faith-based
12 actions and New Zealand's adoption legislation.

13 Although I would rather a remembrance place not to
14 be a place in a building of religion - I would
15 definitely love an acknowledgment to be in a position
16 of prominence so that people can mull over a practice
17 that was, and is, normalised by religion and society.
18 And so, they can begin to think about the harm done by
19 taking a newborn from his or her mother".

20 Q. Thank you. It's at this point, Commissioners, that the
21 live streaming will need to cease. Before it does
22 cease, Commissioner Alofivae will be thanking Maggie
23 and I think it's appropriate we do that before the
24 livestream ceases.

25 **COMMISSIONER ALOFIVAE:** Sarah, first, can I start with
26 you, to thank you for the eloquent way in which you
27 read Maggie's statement. Thank you for bringing her
28 and her experiences alive for us here in the room this
29 afternoon. Maggie, I understand you are watching and I
30 hope you are there with your survivors. We appreciate
31 that this is a distressing time for you but such as
32 your commitment to the kaupapa of the Commission that
33 you are prepared to share your statement in such a way
34 that we could hear from many voices of women that were

1 in a very similar situation to you that would otherwise
2 have not come forward who were also at St Mary's.

3 We want to thank you, Maggie, for your courage and
4 your bravery. And thank you for your continued
5 activism in your attempt to bring about legislative and
6 social reform, for shining a light on an issue that has
7 become increasingly more important, that of adoption
8 and what's happened.

9 Maggie, on behalf of the Commission, we receive your
10 evidence and we just wish you continued strength as you
11 continue to navigate the processes. Take care.

12 **CHAIR:** Thank you. The livestream can end here.

13 **MS ANDERSON:** Yes, the technical people have that under
14 control, I understand.

15 **CHAIR:** Thumbs have been raised in all directions.

16

17 (Livestream ended and video played)

18

19 I take it that is the conclusion of the evidence?

20 **MS ANDERSON:** It is the conclusion of the evidence.

21 **CHAIR:** Thank you again, Ms Cato, for bearing the
22 burden of reading that very powerful evidence. We will
23 take the adjournment.

24

25 **Hearing adjourned from 2.52 p.m. until 3.10 p.m.**

26

27

28
