

Taxpayers' funding to St John of God mission in Africa is suspended

By Michael O'Farrell

INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

THE provision of Irish taxpayer funds to the St John of God order in Malawi has been suspended in the wake of the cover-up of child abuse allegations, exposed by the Irish Mail on Sunday.

The order's Malawi operations are supported by Mísean Cara – a missionary charity that distributes a €16m block grant from the taxpayer-funded Irish Aid each year.

Mísean Cara's accounts show the St John of God order got more than €2.3m in public funds since 2009 – an unknown proportion of which went to Malawi.

In order to receive the funds for Malawi the order – currently led by Brother Donatus Forkan – signed contracts that included statements that child safeguarding poli-

Signed contracts to say child safeguards were used

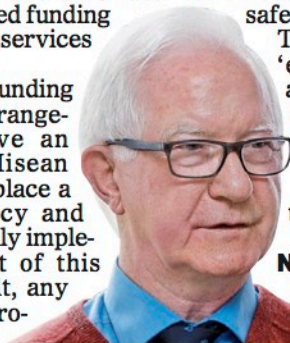
cies are being implemented.

Failure to make a declaration of compliance would have disqualified St John of God (SJOG) from eligibility for funding.

However, while signing these assurances the order was simultaneously covering up 20 child abuse allegations against Brother Aidan Clohessy, principal of St Augustine's school for special needs children from 1970 to 1993.

Even as payouts were made to his Irish accusers, Brother Aidan was allowed live and work with vulnerable children in Malawi for nearly 20 years – while SJOG told Irish authorities he had no contact with children. Mísean Cara told the MoS last night it has suspended funding of St John of God's services in Malawi.

'In entering into funding and contractual arrangements, SJOG gave an undertaking to Mísean Cara that it has in place a safeguarding policy and that this policy is fully implemented in respect of this project. As a result, any funding we have pro-



NO RESPONSE: Brother Donatus Forkan, head of St John of God's

vided to SJOG in respect of this project has now been suspended,' it said in a statement.

'We will be carrying out an audit of compliance by St John of God with their contractual undertaking to Mísean Cara regarding child safeguarding.'

The charity said it was 'extremely concerned about the issues raised' and 'requested a number of clarifications from St John of God'.

The manner in which the order signed the com-

...AND STILL NEW ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE CONTINUE TO EMERGE

THE St John of God order this week reported further new allegations of child abuse against Brother Aidan Clohessy to gardaí and child protection agency Tusla.

The latest allegation – by former pupil Patsy Carville – brings to 25 the number of students who say he abused them at St Augustine's special school in south Dublin.

Five of these cases have been unearthed in recent weeks by a continuing Irish Mail on Sunday investigation and will now be the focus of a Garda investigation.

In a statement, Mr Carville – who was nine years old when he was sent to the Blackrock school – alleges that he was beaten and forced to strip by Brother Aidan.

Like other alleged victims in Africa, he claims that Brother Aidan habitually ordered boys to strip and shower in his presence. He also details an incident when he was alone with Brother Aidan: 'He told



SPEAKING OUT: Joe Devine with his wife Sally last week

me to take down my underpants. Then he told me to turn around and not to look at him. He was not hitting me during this time – just standing behind me. Then after a few minutes he beat the a*** off me with his bare hand.'

The experience appears remarkably similar to that of Joe Devine, another former pupil who broke years of

silence to speak to the MoS last week.

In a statement last night, a spokesperson for St John of God said it had 'reported all allegations it has been made aware of to the authorities and will co-operate fully with any investigation'.

It reiterated 'its unreserved apology to any individual who suffered any form of abuse while in its care'.

pliance statements about child protection appears to echo the manner in which the order lied to the HSE when declaring compliance with pay rules even as bosses were secretly topping up their wages by millions.

Extremely concerned about issues raised

The top up scandal – exposed by the MoS in 2016 – led to a damning HSE audit that recommended repayment of the funds to the Exchequer.

Sarah Blakemore, of Keeping Children Safe, a global child protection alliance, said last night: 'These shocking allegations underline the responsibility all organisations have to safeguard children.'

'Tragically, abusers often target society's most vulnerable children... The extreme imbalance of power between adult workers, on the one hand, and the children in their care, on the other, makes it essential that robust systems are in place to ensure the work of these organisations is beyond reproach.'

Meanwhile, a spokesman for Irish abuse survivors group Reclaiming Self called for alleged abusers to be urgently investigated.

Its statement said: 'Collusion

BROTHER ACCUSED OF ABUSE WAS LEFT IN AFRICA

EXPOSED: The MoS broke the story of Brother Aidan's Malawi operation

between the State and Church continues to protect the identities of over 1,000 alleged abusers.

'Those against whom allegations of abuse were made via the [Ryan] Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse and the Redress Board need to be identified and investigated.'

'There is a particular urgency for alleged abusers who are alive to be investigated, in order to assess, if any, the potential risk posed to children.'

SJOG declined to respond last night to our questions about who signed the Mísean Cara contracts and why funders of its Malawi mission were not told of concerns and allegations about Brother Aidan.

We also asked Brother Donatus to comment on whether the order's decisions in Ireland may constitute reckless endangerment of children in Africa – a criminal offence under Irish law. He did not respond.

An SJOG spokesman last night urged anyone with concerns about safeguarding at its Malawi operations to raise them 'immediately with the order and/or authorities'.

In a statement he said: 'At this time, we are seeking to establish more detail arising from the recent media reports and ensure all appropriate responses are undertaken.'

'We are endeavouring to see if there are people that need assistance. If identified, we will further endeavour to ensure they have access to the supports they require, should such supports be required.'

michaelofarrell@newscoops.org

Opposition (and rural FG rump) will scupper plan

TAOISEACH Leo Varadkar and Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe will have to undertake a series of 'humiliating U-turns' if they want to get two national planning strategies through, the Opposition warned.

Controversy is growing over the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Mr Donohoe's national spatial strategy as he and Mr Varadkar deal with an open revolt from elements of the Cabinet and Fine Gael back-benchers.

However, united opposition to the plan

By John Drennan

from Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, Labour and Independent TDs forged by Alan Kelly and Michael Fitzmaurice poses a far more existential threat to the minority Government's survival.

The Cabinet will tomorrow hold a special meeting on the NPF, but Mr Kelly told the Irish Mail on Sunday: 'The Cabinet are talking about history. That plan is dead. The

Government don't have the numbers, even amongst its own, to get it through'.

Mr Kelly also warned Mr Donohoe 'can put his spatial strategy in the bin too, that is joined at the hip to the NPF: if one goes both go'. He added: 'Our coalition will ensure neither plan will get through.'

'Paschal will have no goodies to give out, he will not have a capital plan unless he shreds the current version.'

Mr Kelly also warned: 'The rural revolt against the NPF will be worse than water

charges. Rural Ireland will revolt against a plan that bears the hallmarks of something devised by six Dublin ministers.'

'Rural Ireland is not exactly a forte of Eoghan Murphy or the rest – they have completely underestimated how serious this is.'

'Towns smaller than 10,000 might as well simply turn out the lights.'

'There will be such a flight from the country within a decade only four counties will be able to field a GAA team.'