

Presiding Officer

With your permission I wish to make a statement.

Presiding Officer

I have said often that I am proud to be First Minister for

Scotland. I believe we are the best small country in the world

and that Scotland has made, and will continue to make, a huge contribution to the world.

We are dealing with many of the dimensions of Scottish life that have traditionally held us back. But we must also address those episodes in our history in which we can take no pride.

It is now clear that some children were abused in Scottish residential care homes in the past. Children suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse in the very places that they hoped

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to find love, care and protection, indeed the very places that Scottish society as a whole expected them to feel safe and secure.

Those children, adults today, deserve nothing less than full recognition of what happened to them and an apology for what happened to them. They should not have been abused, they were badly wronged. Such abuse of vulnerable young people whenever or wherever it took place is deplorable, unacceptable and inexcusable.

Members will be aware that there are litigations currently before the courts, in which these issues are being examined. Those proceedings will establish, in accordance with the law, where responsibility lies, and what should happen as a result. It would be wholly inappropriate for me to say anything which would cut across the work of the courts, and that is not my purpose here today.

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We should be eternally grateful to those who, despite their pain, have brought to our attention what happened to them. Because of their experiences, and experiences elsewhere, we now know much more about the propensities of some members of our society to abuse children. There is now a much greater awareness in our society that such abuse of young people did happen, and without the vigilance of all of us, including government and its associated agencies and authorities, could happen again.

It is that recognition of the potential for abuse that has led to alterations to the statutory and regulatory structure in which establishments operate and how we monitor them.

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Much of the abuse we are now aware of happened many years ago. The procedures which were then in place reflected the fact that society then did not have the knowledge that we have now. It would be a mistake for us to try to fit what has happened in the past into the framework of our own knowledge and experience, but some things are and always have been wrong. Now that we know what has happened, it falls to us to acknowledge it. It is for this generation of the people of Scotland to say quite clearly that it was unacceptable that young people were abused whilst being looked after by those whom they should have been able to trust the most.

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That is why today I offer a sincere and full apology on behalf of the people of Scotland, to those who were subject to such abuse and neglect; who did not receive the level of love, care and support that they deserved and who have coped with that burden all of their lives.

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My strong hope is that this recognition that they were wronged and this apology on behalf of their fellow citizens of Scotland will help those who suffered this terrible abuse to move forward in life.

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We are committed to do all we can to ensure no child or young person currently in residential establishments in Scotland suffers abuse . That is why we are ensuring that inspection, regulation and standards are in place to prevent, detect and deal with abuse. And we are <sup>also</sup> anxious to do the right thing by the survivors of past abuse.

**Deleted:** Others will also want to consider whether they ought to apologise for any abuse which took place in the homes for which they, or their predecessors, were responsible and I strongly encourage them to do so. ¶  
¶ Presiding Officer¶

In the Committee debate that follows this statement, Peter Peacock will set out the proposals that we have been developing with survivors of abuse to support them more effectively in a range of ways and to examine the background of what happened to them.

Presiding Officer

Scotland should be proud of the contribution that survivors of abuse have made to ensuring Scotland <sup>today</sup> is a better and safer place in the future. They are truly remarkable people who, despite having suffered in ways no one should ever have to suffer, are making a great contribution to

From today I hope they can continue to move forward in their lives certain in the knowledge we <sup>as a whole</sup> in Government, in this Parliament, among the people of Scotland recognise they were wronged and that we will do more to support them in the future than we have ever done in the past.