

**The  
Omagh  
Independent  
Facilitators**

**Report**

**to**

**Omagh District Council:**

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2008**

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**1.** Omagh District Council unanimously appointed us on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2007 with the following **Terms of Reference**.

The Independent Facilitators will:-

- (a) Offer a one-to-one confidential meeting(s) to all bereaved families and those injured, traumatised or affected by the bomb to discuss their views on narrative and where it should be located. In addition, those who wish to be represented as a group will also be facilitated with a meeting(s). The facilitators will also invite written submissions.
- (b) Prepare and submit a report incorporating a clear, concise recommendation on narrative and its location, to be presented to Omagh District Council for consideration and approval.

**2. Publicity**

2.1. The project was brought to the attention of the public through a press conference, media interviews and advertisements in local papers, so that as many people as possible knew of our existence and what the Council had requested us to do.

2.2. In the Press Release the Council made clear that no previously suggested forms of words had either been accepted or rejected by the Council. We were therefore starting with a blank sheet of paper.

2.3. Advertisements inviting submissions and one-to-one meetings were placed in local newspapers.

2.4. We wrote to all the bereaved families seeking their assistance, with details of how they could get in touch with us. Most of the families did so, including some who had never engaged in any such discussions before.

2.5. We followed up by telephone those who did not initially contact us, and in most cases this resulted in confidential meetings or in lengthy phone calls.

2.6. Thus we have had conversations with people from almost all the bereaved families, either through one to one discussions, in groups or by phone calls, including the Spanish Consul and the bereaved families in Spain.

2.7. Letters were also sent to those who had been injured offering the opportunity to meet with us.

### **3. Those we met.**

3.1. In addition to the bereaved and injured, we have spoken with people from the front line emergency and medical services as well as police officers and civilians who had to deal with the appalling carnage, confusion and distress on the street, in the hospital and at the Leisure Centre on the day of the atrocity and through the long night and days which followed. People have spoken of the heroic actions of ordinary people who reached out and helped the injured, gave hope to the dying and held the dead.

3.2. We have met business people, local clergy, teachers, members of the caring professions, community group representatives, the Omagh Fund, Councillors and Council staff, as well as victims' support groups and counselling services

3.3. In all we have had over 80 confidential meetings with individuals and groups, the vast majority of which lasted well over one hour. We are immensely grateful to all who assisted us in this difficult task and have respected that confidentiality.

### **4. Comment on the nature of the evidence given to us.**

4.1. In order that people could speak with us frankly and confidentially we did not hold any public meetings.

4.2. It was important for us to hear at first hand from bereaved families, people who were injured and those caught up in what happened on that day and in the years since then.

4.3. We have been deeply moved by what we have heard as people told of being plunged, without warning, into the midst of catastrophic loss and consequent suffering and dislocation to their lives and an uncertain future for themselves and their families. The bomb exploded in a moment of time. For many people life will never be the same again. They will carry the scars for the rest of their lives.

4.4. We listened to moving stories of heartbreak, grief, anger, trauma, physical suffering, courage, endurance, thanksgiving and hope. Some people were so distressed that they could hardly talk about what happened. Some said they were angry because their families had been destroyed as those they love had been murdered. The grief ripples on through the years as does the loneliness and pain. Some described their courageous, difficult and determined journeys towards survival, recovery and the future. We listened to inspiring stories from young people who were seriously injured but who are determined not to let the bomb destroy them. Others spoke of just having to keep going on. We heard stories of loss, love, courage, faith, hope and, for some, peace. People spoke of the important help they had received from their families, friends, victims' groups, Churches, counselling and trauma services, the Omagh Fund, and the members of the medical, caring and support services.

4.5. Many said that the lack of convictions left many questions unanswered and added to the pain.

4.6. Others are tired of the heartache, the enquiries, the trials and the controversy. Some people want to put it all behind them so that their energies can be deployed in rebuilding their individual and family life as well as the life of the town. For these, the perpetrators have done enough damage already without allowing them to destroy the future.

## **5. The widespread variation of opinion about the narrative**

5.1. It has been suggested that all the bereaved families are of a common mind regarding the wording for the memorial. From the wide range of views we have heard, this is not the case. It is clear that no single group represents all the bereaved, injured and those deeply affected by the bomb. Many families who also suffered heart breaking and catastrophic loss do not belong to any group.

5.2. Contrary to the views of some we met we were not appointed to mediate between any group and the council, but instead to “Offer a one-to-one confidential meeting(s) to all bereaved families and those injured, traumatised or affected by the bomb.”

5.3. There was diversity of opinion, some of it strongly expressed.

5.4. Some people wanted the names of their loved ones on the Memorial, others said they did not, while others said it depended on the words of the narrative.

5.5 Some people wanted the perpetrators named but disagreed about the designation to be used. Others strongly resisted naming them, saying that they did not want the names of their loved ones associated with those who killed them. Nor did they want those organizations given any publicity. Some wanted them named and shamed while others said that, in the absence of a conviction, the issue was unresolved.

5.6. Others asked that we use words which would engender peace and build for the future rather than tie the town forever to the tragedy of this atrocity and those responsible for it.

5.7. Frequently, people came to us with one view of the narrative that they wanted. However, in conversation with us they realised that others, equally affected by the bomb, genuinely held differing views and were then open to considering alternative wording in order to show respect to other people. Many said, ‘This is more complicated than I thought’. They realised that to impose or to refuse everything that one group or individual wants may cause hurt and pain to others.

5.8. No one could listen to the stories we have heard without being deeply moved. We have listened with care to what has been said to us and sought to respect the diversity of opinion.

## 6. The Narrative

6.1. In our judgement, the purpose of the narrative is to honour and remember those who were killed, tell the story of the bomb; communicate the horror of what happened and the distress and courage of those most affected, and affirm hope for the future.

6.2. The narrative cannot replace the loss of lives or heal pain and trauma.

6.3.. We hope that the narrative will assist people who come to the Garden to honour and remember those who were killed, those who were injured and those changed forever. Here may people find comfort, strength, peace and hope and, remembering the devastating atrocity, reflect on the terrible consequences of violence and resolve that such violence will never happen again. Regardless of the past, every day dawns as a gift laden with its own possibilities, as the morning sun banishes the darkness of night.

6.4. We believe that the narrative can give visitors to Omagh, as well as future generations, the opportunity to pause and reflect on the carnage of that day so that they might have some insight into what happened.

## 7. THE THREE LOCATIONS OF THE NARRATIVE

7.1. **On the street at the site of the bomb.**

7.2 **Between the street and the garden,** there will be a low wall approximately 20 mtrs (60 ft) long with inclined granite coping stones (approx 30" x 15") on which some of the narrative will be inscribed.

7.3 **Inside the garden,** beside the path near the pond, there will be one or two low walls with similar inclined granite coping stones on which the rest of the narrative will be inscribed.

(The exact location and length of the walls in the garden has yet to be finally decided by the architect.)

## 8. OUR RECOMMENDATION ON THE NARRATIVE AND THE LOCATIONS

8.1 *We recommend that the narrative at the bomb site states starkly and simply what happened.* (This may be on a plaque on a wall – the size of the plaque and the lettering should be such that the bereaved and injured will not be further traumatized by constantly having to read it as they walk up the street.)

*We recommend that the narrative at the Garden be primarily a tribute to those who were killed; tell the story of the bomb; and should contain words of reflection and hope.*

8.2 Having been greatly moved by reading the names and ages of the people killed by the bomb, and having studied other memorials, *we recommend that all their names and ages be used and would appeal to all the families to allow this to happen.* Having had the opportunity to read this report and the recommendation, each family should be consulted for a final decision on this matter.

8.3 Since only some of those who were killed came from Omagh, *we recommend that, as well as the names and ages, the names of the townlands, towns or cities from which they came also be recorded.* Each family should be consulted about their choice of townland, town, or city.

8.4 *We recommend that the narrative includes words of hope and healing about the future and the steady determination of the town to continue to recover.*

8.5. Since the Omagh Support and Self Help Group has been active in the matter of the Memorial Garden and represents some but not all of the families of those most affected, *we recommend that the wording which they have requested, “To honour and remember 31 people murdered and hundreds injured from three nations by a dissident republican terrorist car bomb” be reproduced on a granite coping stone in the garden in keeping with the overall design, with the additional words “The Omagh Support and Self Help Group”.*

8.6. The memorial stone which was in the temporary garden does not fit into the design of the new memorial garden, nor is it in keeping with it artistically. Accordingly, *we recommend that the memorial stone should not be placed in the new Garden or at the site of the bomb for the reasons stated in 8.1.*

## **8.7 PLEASE SEE THE APPENDIX FOR DETAILS OF THE WORDING**

### **9. Conclusion.**

9.1 When we were appointed we stated “Our aim will be to attempt to produce a recommendation that everyone can support so that, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bomb when the Memorial is dedicated, all the people of Omagh will stand together and the Memorial itself and the unity, faith and hope of the people will be the most eloquent, powerful and enduring response to those who planted the bomb”.

9.2. For Omagh to be divided on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bomb would be a victory for those who planted the bomb.

9.3 We hope that our recommendations will commend themselves to the Council and will receive the widespread support of those directly affected by this atrocity and by the wider public. While expressing our appreciation to all who have assisted us, we accept sole responsibility for the report and the recommended narrative.

With respect, we submit our report and recommendation to the Council.

**Rev. Dr. John Dunlop (Chairman); Mrs Olive Hobson (Quaker House Belfast) Rev. Brian Lennon S.J.:**

**6<sup>th</sup> March 2008**

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**Appendix**

**DETAILS OF THE WORDING OF THE NARRATIVE**

**AT THE SITE**

A car bomb exploded at this site on Saturday 15 August 1998 at 3.10 p.m. This act of terror killed thirty-one people, injured hundreds, and changed forever the lives of many.

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**ON STREET WALL AT THE GARDEN**

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> August 1998 at 3.10 pm

To honour and remember the 31 men, women and children who were killed, the hundreds injured and those whose lives were changed forever in the Omagh bomb.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5)

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**WALL INSIDE GARDEN:**

**Section 1**

Weather-wise it was one of the best days that summer had seen. Ordinary people were doing ordinary things on an ordinary day.

In one fateful moment all this was changed forever. Time stood still, futures were obliterated, lives were shattered, hearts were broken.

In the carnage, emergency personnel and many ordinary people reached out, helped the injured, gave hope to the dying and held the dead.

That evening a great silence descended on the town.

**Section 2:**

Alphabetical listing of the names and ages of those killed along with the names of the townlands, towns or cities from which they came.

This list will probably be in three columns, each headed by the phrase (One in Spanish, one in English and one in Irish)

“Bear in mind these dead” (John Hewitt)

(“Bear in mind these dead”. From the poem “NEITHER AN ELEGY NOR A MANIFESTO”. P188 “The Collected Poems of John Hewitt”. Ed. Frank Ormsby. The Blackstaff Press Ltd. Belfast. Used with permission)

**Section 3**

In the week which followed, people walked with one another  
in the companionship of shared grief  
as funeral followed funeral.

From all over the world came visitors, messages of sympathy,  
condemnation, solidarity, hope and practical support.

**Section 4**

The Omagh bomb was the largest single atrocity  
in over thirty years of violence in which over 3700 people were killed.

The bomb took place four months after the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement  
of 10 April 1998, subsequently endorsed in referenda  
in both parts of Ireland on 22 May 1998

**Section 5**

In the years that followed people in Omagh and elsewhere  
sought to rebuild their lives, their families, their community, and to create a new future.

Regardless of the past, every new day dawns as a gift laden with its own possibilities,  
as the morning sun banishes the darkness of night.

“To honour and remember 31 people murdered and hundreds injured from three nations  
by a dissident republican terrorist car bomb”. (Omagh Support and Self Help Group)

“What does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”. (Micah: 6:8)

**End**