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TUESDAY
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Hopes for Omagh bomb memorial

A memorial stone at the centre of a bitter row involving Omagh bomb victims will be in place for the atrocity's 10th anniversary, the Spanish Ambassador to the UK has been told.

Carlos Miranda heard frustrations over delays in completing the monument at a meeting with relatives of some of those murdered in the terrorist massacre.

But Mr Miranda, who was visiting the town where 29 people were killed - including a Spanish schoolboy and his teacher - in the August 1998 Real IRA outrage, refused to intervene in the dispute over an inscription on the stone.

He said: "I hope they will find a way to satisfy everyone, but it`s not for me to get involved in the decision.

"I`m a foreigner and very grateful my citizens are going to be included in the memorial.

"Next year is the 10th anniversary; things cannot be resolved immediately.

"But the important thing is that with a memorial people are remembered.

"I understand next year, for the 10th anniversary, the memorial will be there."

Victims relatives have alleged the wording they want on the monument is being resisted by Omagh`s republican-dominated council.

No other reason could explain the delay in unveiling a stone on Market Street where dissident terrorists detonated the huge car bomb, they claimed.

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The words proposed were to read: "To honour and remember 31 people murdered and hundreds injured from three nations by a dissident republican terrorist car bomb."

Sinn Fein, which is the strongest political party on Omagh District Council, has denied it is blocking the families plans.

And the local authority stressed that a working group established in late 1999 believed it was essential to create a memorial which reflects the enormity of the bomb`s impact which will be valued and respected by the whole community.

The Ambassador was briefed by Sean Begley, the Sinn Fein chairman of Omagh Council, on plans to have a permanent memorial in time for next year`s anniversary.

A competition to design the monument was launched last week in the UK, Ireland and Spain, with the support of all three governments.

"It must be reverential and reflective but also encompass the optimism and positivity that pervades the town at the moment," Mr Begley said.

"The huge outpouring of love, support, goodwill and healing which the people of Omagh received in the aftermath of the bomb will also have to be reflected, as does the tremendous contribution of those who cared for the injured and bereaved and those who were tasked with the emotional and physical reconstruction of our community."

As the row rumbled on, Mr Miranda also witnessed how Omagh has rebuilt itself after the devastation and laid a wreath in private at town`s Memorial Garden on behalf of the Spanish Embassy.

The Ambassador, who is on a two-day visit to Northern Ireland, emphasised the kinship his country has forged with Northern Ireland.

After the Islamic bomb attack on Madrid in March 2004 which killed 191 people those bereaved at Omagh had stood with Spain in their hour of need, he said.

"The people of Omagh were very supportive and went to Madrid," he said.

"That creates a solidarity. It may be for unfortunate reasons, but there is a kinship between the people of Madrid and Omagh."

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STARRING: Thomas Turgosse, Stephen Graham, Jo Hartely, Joe Gilgun.

DETAILS: UK / 100 mins (18)

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