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Bush urged to back \$1bn terror lawsuit

Monday, June 16, 2008

By Lindy McDowell

George Bush flies into Northern Ireland today — to a direct appeal from victims of IRA terror to back them in a billion dollar court action.

The US President whose term in office has been defined by his self-proclaimed "war on terror" will be personally asked to throw his weight behind a court action against Libya being taken in the US courts.

The case, which is being taken by American and UK victims of the IRA's bombing campaign, relates to attacks where Semtex supplied by the Libyan regime of Colonel Gadaffi was used.

If successful it could potentially lead to over 3,500 local victims of Provo bombings sharing in a compensation package worth billions of dollars.

And one victims' spokesman today warned that if Mr Bush fails to give his backing, some victims' relatives who are currently serving with British forces in Iraq and Afghanistan are prepared to leave the army in protest.

Willie Frazer from FAIR said: "A number of serving soldiers who have lost relatives have made it clear that if George Bush does not back local victims in this case they will leave.

"Their argument is why should they continue to fight terrorism alongside Americans if America turns its back on terror victims here."

The legal team representing the victims are H2O — the lawyers who are currently representing the Omagh families in their historic civil action.

The class action is being taken in the US courts because among the 180 claimants are a number of US citizens.

In recent weeks the US State Department has upped the pressure on Gadaffi by making it clear that Libya will not come off its list of states sponsoring terrorism until it has settled all outstanding civil actions in the US involving US citizens.

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Today George Bush is being urged in person to ensure that the case is kept high up the agenda and crucially, that claimants from Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK are not excluded from any settlement.

Supporters point out that when the British government negotiated the Lockerbie settlements with the Libyans, they did so on behalf of all victims whatever their nationality, and in particular on behalf of US victims.

They argue that there should be a similar US/UK alliance in relation to the current action and that it would be morally wrong to make a distinction between US and local claimants.

Willie Frazer says: "I think the American victims of the IRA would be shocked if local victims were not included in any settlement with Libya. I do not think they would be too happy if George Bush didn't back local victims. But I do not believe it will come to that. I believe he is an honourable man and that he will do the right thing."

Michelle Williamson, who lost her parents in the Shankill bombing 15 years ago, agrees: "This case is not about money. For us it is about getting some degree of justice. It is so important that George Bush backs us. We have been let down by our own government. Mr Bush has had to deal with terrorist atrocities in his own country. The suffering of American victims is no different from the suffering of victims here."

Lawyer Jason McCue from H2O says: "International terrorism demands international solutions. This applies to the past as well as the future. Settlement of this case will send out a clear message from the US and the UK that state-sponsored terrorism will never pay and that those states that do sponsor terrorism will only be allowed into the law-abiding world of nations when they right the wrongdoing they have done. That is what settlement of this action is about."

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