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Recent dissident victims 'paid the price for Omagh inquiry failure'

By Victoria O'Hara Tuesday, 17 March 2009

The two soldiers and a police officer murdered last week by dissident republicans may have "paid the price" for a public inquiry not being held into the Omagh bomb atrocity, it has been claimed.

Michael Gallagher, whose son Aiden was one of the 29 people plus unborn twins killed in the 1998 Real IRA attack, was speaking after attending the House of Commons' Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at Stormont.

Mr Gallagher had travelled to Belfast as part of the Omagh Support and Self Help Group for a series of evidence sessions with MPs.

Mr Gallagher, who was described by chairman of the committee Sir Patrick Cormack MP as an "impressive and powerful witness", said the families of Omagh victims were in need of a public inquiry to bring them much-needed closure.

However, Alasdair McDonnell MP asked Mr Gallagher if he considered a public inquiry not having a positive outcome for the grieving families.

Mr Gallagher, who was accompanied by Godfrey Wilson, who lost his daughter Lorraine in the bombing, told the committee: "There are so many anomalies that need to be addressed by a public inquiry.

"We need closure. What we have is a catalogue of failings and shortcomings over the last 10 years and that has to be addressed in a proper and transparent way.

"The only way that can be done is engaging a judicial framework."

Mr Gallagher alleged the intelligence agencies are holding back in their pursuit of those behind the Omagh bomb,

"With the Omagh intelligence there's so many discrepancies here that we are at a loss as to why these bombers and the people associated with them were not put in jail," he alleged.

The Real IRA has admitted shooting two soldiers dead at an Antrim barracks in a recent escalation of its campaign.

Sir Patrick added that the committee would "reflect very carefully" on what was said.

Speaking after the session Mr Gallagher said he tried to remain positive a cross-border inquiry will take place.

"We have to at least learn the lessons of Omagh, learn what went so badly wrong that not one person was convicted of the murders in Omagh.

"And those people who have continued to attempt to murder over that 10 year period sadly have succeeded. And I think possibly the people that died in the last fortnight have paid the price for us not having a public inquiry earlier."

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