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over intelligence service tapes

By Lisa Smyth
Wednesday, 17 September 2008

Victims remembered



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Michael Gallagher at a press conference yesterday

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The British intelligence service has been given a week to hand over potentially damning evidence about those behind the Omagh bomb or face legal action.

The deadline was given yesterday morning after a documentary revealed that GCHQ, the Government's organisation for intercepting electronic communications, was monitoring the conversations the bombers had during the 90 minutes it took them to take the bomb from the Irish Republic to Omagh.


Members of Omagh Support and Self Help Group met at a Belfast hotel yesterday to issue the ultimatum before returning to the High Court as their civil action against those they believe to be responsible for the bomb resumed.


Chairman of the group Michael Gallagher said: "The 15th of August 10 years ago was earth-shattering for all of us, as it has been for any family whose loved ones are murdered by terrorists. Ten years on and these allegations are just as earth-shattering.

"The programme has raised serious questions. Can the PSNI, Special Branch and the security services confirm or deny the allegations? If calls were recorded, was anyone listening in real time and why if they were, why were the bombers not stopped?


"If the recordings were not listened to in real time, why not? We are aware that the law did not allow the recordings to be used as evidence in a criminal trial but why were they not provided in the crucial first hours of the investigation to help the police? We would prefer not to have to go down the legal route but if the people who know about these recordings are not going to assist the families to get to the truth that will leave us with no option but to examine all possibilities."


The group has been advised by their legal team that they can issue a subpoena in an effort to force GCHQ to hand over any recordings or transcripts.

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Jason McCue, lawyer for the families involved in the civil action, would not give details of the recipient of any such subpoena.

Mr Gallagher also revealed that despite requesting a meeting with Mr Brown in January of this year to discuss their fight for justice, the group only received a letter from Mr Brown's office at the end of last month saying he is unable to meet them due to diary commitments.

"The PM is saying he is too busy to meet with us and discuss these serious issues. This is the same contempt with which we have been treated throughout the years," said Mr Gallagher.

The group also plans to write to the Irish and Spanish governments to challenge them about the revelations made in the Panorama programme.

It also emerged that the group wrote to GCHQ in 2001 to request information about any intelligence on the bombers but, to date, they have not received any response. Yesterday, a spokesman from GCHQ declined to comment on the allegations made by Panorama or the threat of legal action.

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