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Saturday, August 16, 2008

Omagh remembers dead 10 years after bombing

NIALL DUMIGAN and DAN KEENAN in Omagh

THE SERVICE: OMAGH WAS called to remember the dead of the Real IRA atrocity in the town on the 10th anniversary of the bombing yesterday.

Political leaders from London, Dublin, Stormont and Madrid gathered in steady rain along with the people of Omagh to recall the attack and remember the dead.

The Government delegation was led by Taoiseach Brian Cowen, while the British government was represented by Northern Secretary Shaun Woodward. The Stormont Executive was represented by Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness and junior minister Jeffrey Donaldson. The acting Spanish ambassador and charge d'affaires at the Spanish embassy in London, Javier Carbajosa represented the Madrid government.

Some families of the 29 people killed also took part.

The 45 minute service began at 3.00pm in the memorial garden, with an introductory piece sung by the Omagh Waterford Peace Choir. The choir, formed two years ago, was set up in memory of the atrocity. It draws its members from Waterford and Omagh and has raised funds for various humanitarian causes. A number of greetings were read out. One from Omagh itself, one from Buncrana, Co Donegal, the home town of three of the victims and one from Spain. Two Spanish nationals were killed in the explosion.

Just before 3.10pm, the exact time the bomb detonated 10 years ago, there was a call to remembrance. Those present were invited to take part in a minute's silence. A church bell tolled throughout.

The poem by John Hewitt *Neither an Elegy nor a Manifesto* was then read out. Translations in Irish and Spanish of the final line " *Bear in mind these dead* " were read out from the site of the blast.

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Next the names of each of those who lost their lives were read out in turn, followed by a reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes.

After another performance by the choir, Terry Waite, former envoy to the archbishop of Canterbury, made the main address of the service. Mr Waite touched on the pertinent theme of justice, saying, "No one who has experienced deep suffering will underestimate the power it has. It can blind individuals to reason. It can cause them to cry out for revenge. It can tear communities apart".

He continued: "It is simply true to say that some responses lead to bitterness and virtual self-destruction. Others can transform the situation and lead the individual to new depths of compassion and understanding."

Mr Waite concluded by acknowledging the difficulties in dealing with loss and grief, while offering hope that through the "transforming power of love" individuals and communities can be healed.

A dedication to peace was made by all present, led by the Omagh Churches Forum. The crowd was touched by the words of a bereaved mother, who spoke of her journey through loss and sorrow. She delivered an uplifting message to those listening entitled "Finding the Inner Light".

"When we feel we could not possibly be strong, have courage or find hope, these resources are there within us, waiting to be found," she said.

Possibly the most poignant moment of the day was the unveiling of the Garden of Light memorial. At the site of the bomb, to the sound of a piper's lament, young people scattered rose petals across Market Street.

They then processed to the memorial garden to lay floral tributes. Following the procession the memorial was switched on for the first time.

A heliostat, which tracks the movements of the sun through the day, came to life. Its reflective surface caught the sun's rays, channelling them towards the monument's centrepiece - a glass tower with a heart-shaped core of frosted glass.

Afterwards some of the families laid floral tributes.

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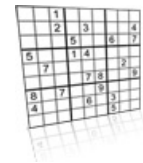
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