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Monday, August 18, 2008

Victim's father tells service justice not done



Relatives of Omagh bombing victims at yesterday's service at the memorial garden in Omagh.

Photograph: PA

DAN KEENAN, Northern News Editor, in Omagh

"WE HAVE not received justice in Omagh. Sadly, it is not wreaths that we need, it is justice."

With that simple but powerful message Michael Gallagher, father of bomb victim Aiden, called on his fellow bereaved and the townspeople to recall the horror of a decade ago.

The short and dignified service, held "to remember and to honour those who died and those who are still suffering", was the first to be held in the new memorial garden.

It is just a minute away from the narrow street where the Real IRA left its bomb.

Those who lost relatives and some of the hundreds who were hurt that day mixed with people from the Shankill Road, bombed five years before Omagh.

Campaigner for loyalist victims William Frazer stood among the crowd of a few hundred, as did former Policing Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan, the woman whose report on the failed police investigation added controversy and new dimensions of disbelief to the tragedy.

The four victims' commissioners appointed by the Stormont Executive mixed with senior civil servants from Dublin, Belfast and Madrid, there representing their political bosses who were at the same memorial garden on Friday. The ceremony was short, uncomplicated and uplifting. There were prayers, poems, hymns and readings in English, Irish, Spanish and Hebrew. There was no hint of anger or bitterness, just a sense of loss and an unspoken determination that solidarity would be maintained, with or without the TV crews and the government

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ministers.

A letter from Anglican envoy and former Beirut hostage Terry Waite was read aloud. It suggested a new scholarship in peace studies should be established. Such a move would be a living memorial, the letter said. The names of the dead were read slowly and received in silence. Those injured or traumatised were mentioned in connection with "all victims of international terrorism worldwide".

Fr Donal Gibson called on those present to "go forth into the world in peace". He told them to "be of good courage, hold fast to which is good, to render to no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted, honour all persons," he said.

Michael Gallagher thanked everyone and invited them to tea before the crowd slowly melted away.

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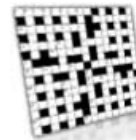
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