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Families of Omagh bomb victims vow to continue fight

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FRANK MILLAR, London Editor

FAMILIES OF the victims of the Omagh bombing vowed to continue their fight for justice and "closure" last night after a long, cordial but seemingly fruitless meeting with British prime minister Gordon Brown at 10 Downing Street.

The meeting coincided with BBC *Panorama*'s detailed response to Sir Peter Gibson's recent report and a deepening of the dispute over the key claim that the British intelligence monitoring agency GCHQ withheld vital intelligence about telephone intercepts from police investigating the 1998 outrage perpetrated by the Real IRA.

Tension surrounding yesterday's meeting and doubts about the British government's disposition was also reflected in its reported decision not to permit lawyer Jason McHugh or the campaigner and journalist Ruth Dudley Edwards to attend.

Sources close to the Omagh support group told *The Irish Times*: "They didn't want anybody asking awkward questions." Victor Barker, who lost his son in the bombing, emerged from the meeting to say they had "received a very fair hearing" from Mr Brown. Describing his approach as "very honest", Mr Barker confirmed Mr Brown had told the delegation he did not believe there was anything in available intelligence that would assist in securing a further criminal prosecution of the suspected bombers.

Mr Brown was pressed to review all the evidence before him with a view to making it available to the ongoing civil action in the High Court in Belfast, and reportedly said he would "review" the material while seemingly holding out little real hope of such a development. Michael Gallagher said they had impressed on Mr Brown that "the only way forward" ultimately would be by way of a North/South public inquiry.

A Number 10 spokeswoman said: "Obviously the families raised a number of issues, including a public inquiry. The prime minister listened carefully and said he would reflect on what they had said." Mr Brown was accompanied by Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward and former Northern secretary, Lord Mandelson.

The PSNI Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Orde, was also present.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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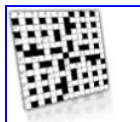
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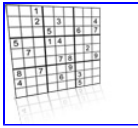
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