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Monday, October 20, 2008

British PM to face renewed pressure over alleged Omagh phone intercepts

GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

IRISH AND BRITISH parliamentarians today are due to exert further pressure on British prime minister Gordon Brown to force the disclosure of intelligence information that could assist relatives of the Omagh bomb victims.

Politicians at the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body conference in Newcastle today are expected to endorse a motion from Fine Gael TD Brian Hayes and Labour MP Andrew McKinley calling for the release of intercepted intelligence reportedly held by monitoring body GCHQ.

Pressure has been mounting on Government Communications Headquarters since BBC's Panorama programme recently reported that the British security intelligence monitoring agency intercepted mobile phone calls of the Real IRA Omagh bombers on the day of the attack and prior to the attack.

It also reported that tapes and transcripts of these calls were not made available to RUC detectives investigating the August 15th, 1998 bombing which killed 29 people including a woman pregnant with twin girls.

The British prime minister ordered a review to establish whether such intercepted intelligence material was in the hands of GCHQ and other British security and intelligence agencies. The British intelligence services commissioner Sir Peter Gibson is due to report on the matter in mid- to late December.

Mr Hayes however said that this would be too late for the families taking a civil action against five men they say were implicated in the Real IRA bombing. He said the case was due to wind up in late November and there was still time to present new evidence. "Time is of the essence. It is crucial that all information, documents and transcripts from the surveillance at the time leading up to and after the Omagh bombing be given to the family's legal team," he said.

"The Omagh victims have waited too long for justice. The current civil action provides an opportunity for intercept material to be made

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known to the court so that a verdict can be made based on all evidence in this case," said Mr Hayes. "Not enough has been done to help the families of Omagh over these last 10 years. Given the terrible loss of life at Omagh and the cross-Border nature of the crime that occurred, the British government must co-operate in releasing the Omagh tapes," he added.

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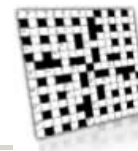
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