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Thursday, January 22, 2009

Victims' relatives will tell Brown to support cross-Border inquiry

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GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

RELATIVES OF the Omagh bomb victims will tell British prime minister Gordon Brown next month that he must support their calls for a cross-Border tribunal of inquiry into the full circumstances behind the 1998 Real IRA bombing, according to spokesman Michael Gallagher.

Mr Gallagher, who lost his son Aidan in the bombing which killed 29 people including a woman pregnant with twin girls, said Sir Peter Gibson's report was a "missed opportunity" to help get to the truth behind the bombing.

"It appears there is an attempt to shoot the messenger," he said of the British intelligence services commissioner's criticism of the *Panorama* programme about the investigation into the bombing and the role of the security intelligence monitoring agency, GCHQ.

"There is no doubt in anybody's mind that there are serious problems connected with Omagh. [*Panorama's*] John Ware merely highlighted that to the wider public. The families have known that for 10 years," said Mr Gallagher.

Northern Secretary Shaun Woodward has arranged a meeting of the relatives with Mr Brown next month. Mr Gallagher said they would avail of this opportunity in Downing Street to again argue the necessity of a detailed cross-Border inquiry.

"We will present the prime minister with some very difficult questions. But we need answers and we will be saying to him the best way of bringing a conclusion to Omagh is not to continue to have inquiries looking at individual sectors of the case but to have an overarching inquiry," he said. "Both governments must put all of their information on the table openly . . . so that we can bring a public end to Omagh," added Mr Gallagher.

DUP West Tyrone Assembly member Thomas Buchanan said it was clear that "many of the claims which were made in the *Panorama* programme in particular have not stood up to scrutiny". "Unfortunately, as yet another investigation has been carried out and another report published, those who suffered most as a result of the bombing are

no further forward in their quest that justice might be served on those who carried out this atrocity," he added.

Sinn Féin West Tyrone MP Pat Doherty said he was not satisfied with the official report on the *Panorama* programme, while SDLP Assembly member Alban Maginness called for further examination of the role of the security services in Omagh.

In a statement last night, the BBC said: "We stand fully by the *Panorama* programme. Both the programme and Sir Peter Gibson's report raise many new questions of significant public interest about what happened before the Omagh atrocity and in the aftermath.

"Nowhere does the report or the Northern Ireland Secretary's statement deny that interception was being carried out by GCHQ or that any intelligence flowing from it did not reach the investigating officers.

"The thrust of the programme has therefore yet to be addressed – at least publicly – by the government.

"Contrary to what Sir Peter and the Northern Ireland Secretary have stated we did not assert that the bombing could have been prevented. Instead we laid out a series of important questions flowing directly from the knowledge that some mobiles had been intercepted, including whether the bombing could have been prevented."

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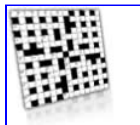
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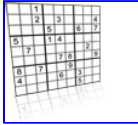
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