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Last Updated: Friday, August 8, 2008, 08:35

Omagh relatives to boycott memorial event

Some families of Omagh bomb victims are set to boycott a commemoration service to mark the 10th anniversary of the Real IRA atrocity.

Many relatives of those who died in the 1998 attack are angry with the way Omagh District Council has organised the official anniversary event planned for next week.

They are also unhappy at how the council handled the contentious issue of the wording for new memorials erected at the bomb site on the town's Market Street and at a nearby garden of remembrance.

It is understood the families of at least ten of the 29 victims of the bombing will not attend the service next Friday.

Instead the relatives, the majority of whom belong to the Omagh Support and Self Help Group, are holding their own memorial event on Sunday.

Kevin Skelton, who lost his wife, Philomena, said he would have no part of the council event.

"There's a whole range of issues I've got problems with," he said. "The whole wording issue and some of the politicians that are going to be there - I think they've [the council] have made a real mess of it altogether.

"They certainly didn't consult with us about the event. . . . I have no objection with a family going, it's their choice, but I certainly won't be part of it," he added.

Members of the support group had demanded the retention of a phrase engraved on an original tribute stone, which has since been removed from the garden of remembrance, stating that the victims were "murdered by a dissident republican terrorist car bomb".

The council appointed an independent fact-finding team to try and resolve the issue, and councillors unanimously accepted its recommendation to use the phrase on the walls of the garden of remembrance, but not on the glass obelisk at the bomb site.

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Sinn Féin councillor and chairman of Omagh council Martin McLoughlin said it was a pity some families had decided not to attend.

However, he defended the council's approach to the memorial issue. "As a council we have tried to do our best to mark the anniversary. . . . But I can't legislate for how some families are going to react, that's their prerogative."

Ten years on, those behind the attack have never been caught, and police on both sides of the Border have been heavily criticised for their handling of the investigation.

PA

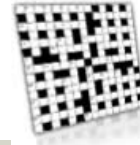
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