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Last Updated: 10/04/2008 20:00

Judge in warning over Omagh case

The Omagh bomb civil action must not become a private trial, the judge said today during legal discussion on what evidence should be heard in open court.

“This is a public trial and I need to make sure it doesn’t turn into a private trial,” said Mr Justice Morgan.

He was responding to a submission at Belfast High Court from Lord Brennan QC, representing the Omagh families seeking millions of pounds in redress from the five men they believe to have been behind the Real IRA bombing which killed 29 people on August 1998.

The men named in the action are: alleged Real IRA leader Michael McKevitt, his alleged No 2 Liam Campbell, Seamus McKenna, Colm Murphy and Seamus Daly.

All have denied responsibility and while four have instructed lawyers to fight their case, Campbell chose

to ignore the proceedings.

None of the men are present and two are in jail in the south on unconnected terrorist matters.

The court today tried to decide what evidence should be delivered by witnesses call, how much by statements read to the court and how much could be left for the judge to read when he considers his verdict.

Lord Brennan said the case was a matter of the “utmost gravity” and should be on the public record.

Brian Fee, QC, representing McKenna said : “We will indicate any witnesses whose statement can simply be read, any witness statements which can simply be taken as read and any witness we want called.”

The case is expected to take some eight weeks to be completed and Mr Fee said the lawyers would attempt to work together to minimise the number of witnesses to be called so as not to “waste the court’s time”.

After an adjournment during which the legal teams consulted, they returned and the statements of four witnesses were read into the record.

People in Omagh on the day of the bombing spoke of seeing the car in which the bomb later exploded being driven slowly in the town’s Market Street some time earlier.

Darren Gray, assistant manager in a shop in the street, recalled seeing the maroon Vauxhall Cavalier being parked and a man getting out and closing the driver’s door “very gently”.

Another shopkeeper who was driving away from the town when he got stuck behind the Cavalier said: “I had to slow up, it was driving slowly causing me some degree of frustration”.

The case was adjourned until Monday.

PA

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