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Omagh relatives set for civil action

Relatives of the Omagh bomb victims will tomorrow take their landmark civil action against alleged terrorist chiefs to Dublin as they continue their long-running fight for justice.

The unprecedented lawsuit — the first time evidence from a Northern Ireland case will be heard in the Republic — will see more than 50 gardaí summonsed to the Four Courts to testify.

Twenty nine people died, including a woman pregnant with twins, and hundreds more were injured when the Real IRA bombed the Co Tyrone town on a busy Saturday afternoon in August 1998.

Over the next two weeks dozens of witnesses, including detectives, will be called as the families seek Stg £14 million (€17.6m) in damages from five men allegedly linked to the terror group.

Nobody has been convicted for the atrocity but named on the lawsuit are Michael McKevitt, the alleged leader of the Real IRA, the man said to be his number two, Liam Campbell, and Colm Murphy, Seamus McKenna and Seamus Daly.

All deny any involvement.

Michael Gallagher, whose 21-year-old son Aidan died in the blast, said the move was important because it shows that the Court Service can work on both sides of the border in the interests of victims.

“It is a unique process because not only is it the first time that victims will have taken a case against alleged perpetrators but also the court will have sat in Belfast and then moved to Dublin so a lot of barriers have been broken,” he said.

“It’s seven years since we launched the case and there’s been a number of hurdles. It’s always been a challenge but we’re delighted to be in a position now where we are coming to Dublin.

“We would appeal to all of the witnesses, whether in Dublin or Belfast, to co-operate and share all the knowledge that they know about the events of Omagh with the courts.”

The landmark action, against the five believed to be responsible for the blast, is the first time the victims of terrorism are confronting the alleged perpetrators.

The only man to be charged with the Omagh murders is not among those accused by the families.

Sean Hoey, a South Armagh electrician, walked free from Belfast Crown Court last December after a judge acquitted him of all charges related to the bombing and a host of other Real IRA attacks.

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