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Republican chief turns a deaf ear to Omagh plea

McGuinness refuses to ask former IRA men to help arrest bombers

By Alan Murray

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Never forget them: A family lays flowers at the memorial to the 29 people murdered in the Omagh bombing 10 years ago

Sunday August 17 2008

MARTIN McGuinness has again refused to urge republicans to come forward and provide crucial information about the [Omagh](#) bombers.

On Friday, Mr McGuinness, the Deputy First Minister in [Northern Ireland](#), told the father of one of the young victims of the bombing that the group responsible for the devastating attack had recently declared him a "legitimate target".

And he questioned whose agenda the [Real IRA](#) was working to then and now.

The exchange with [Victor Barker](#), whose son James was one of the youngest victims of the bombing, took place as families gathered in Omagh to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Real IRA attack.

In a message to Mr McGuinness, Victor Barker said it would be a good day for [Sinn Fein](#) to answer the question and indicate if it was now time for him to urge people to come forward and give statements to the police about those responsible with a view to securing a criminal conviction.

And he told the man who security forces believe was a member of the [IRA's](#) ruling [Army Council](#) for over a decade to examine his conscience and help bring the bombers to justice.

In a series of text messages on their mobile phones [Martin McGuinness](#) and Victor Barker briefly discussed the Omagh bombing.

Mr McGuinness said he supported [Michael Gallagher's](#) call for an independent tribunal to examine all aspects of the Omagh bombing.

He added: "The group responsible for the Omagh bomb recently declared me a legitimate target, I often wonder whose agenda they were working to 10 years ago and now." Victor Barker replied: "Martin the police did not plant the bomb your former associates did now is the time to examine your conscience and to help us secure a criminal conviction."

Victor Barker said yesterday that once again he felt that Mr McGuinness had failed to step up to the mark and take the steps that would help bring the Omagh bombers to justice.

"I have been here before with Martin McGuinness. What he said to me yesterday by text was largely what he has said before. He won't take that further step to help bring these killers to justice.

"I have met Martin McGuinness, [Gerry Adams](#) and [Gerry Kelly](#) and of those three Martin McGuinness has been the one who appeared prepared to help but he hasn't taken that vital step to get republicans to bring forward the evidence," he said.

Victor Barker said he first met Martin McGuinness in a hotel in [Buncrana](#) shortly after his 12 year-old son was murdered in 1998. "He wanted to come round to the house to pay his respects but I didn't want that

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and we met in the hotel. Since then we have communicated intermittently over the years and I did meet him with Gerry Adams and Gerry Kelly but that meeting was not a terribly good one.

"Nothing came of it and I was very disappointed by the response from Adams in particular. On Friday I decided to send a text to Martin McGuinness to again ask him to give that vital assistance and urge his fellow republicans to give the information that would convict the bombers but again he wouldn't agree to that. But when Sinn Fein does take that step it will show that they are genuinely into peace and a system of justice which should protect everybody, Catholic and Protestant," he said.

Sinn Fein said yesterday that Martin McGuinness told Victor Barker that he supported the call from the Omagh families for a tribunal to be put in place to investigate all the aspects surrounding the bombing. Michael Gallagher, whose son Aiden was killed in the explosion, said he couldn't attend Friday's civic ceremony because the Sinn Fein chairman, [Martin McCoolgan](#), was performing the opening of the memorial garden.

Mr Gallagher said: "Sinn Fein has done nothing to help bring the bombers to justice and to see their mayor opening the memorial garden was too much for me to take."

- Alan Murray



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