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Omagh relatives demand cross border inquiry

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Sunday August 17 2008

Relatives of the victims of the Omagh bombing gathered together today to mark ten years since the Real IRA bombing, which killed 29 people and unborn twins.

During the memorial service this afternoon, there were calls for a cross-border public inquiry, with family members saying it is the only proper tribute to relatives bereaved by the atrocity.

Grieving father Michael Gallagher told mourners in the Co Tyrone town that the system has failed everyone and its leaders should

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hang their heads in shame because of the lack of progress,

Mr Gallagher, whose son Aidan, 21, died, said "The only proper tribute to Omagh's dead, ten years on, must be that full cross-border public inquiry".

"We call on public figures to back our call; otherwise the system continues to fail everyone and should hold its head in shame. They will be judged not on their token gestures but on what they have or have not done to actually bring justice to Omagh, not wreathes."

At a separate gathering in the Co Tyrone town on Friday, boycotted by some of the families present today, Taoiseach Brian Cowen, Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward and Stormont Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness remembered the dead alongside thousands of others.

Mr McGuinness joined other political representatives in demanding an independent probe on Friday.

Meanwhile there are still concerns about the alleged failure to follow up on warnings given before the deadly car bomb blast and the police's handling of forensic evidence and a civil legal case taken by the families and other legal matters are still active.

Families, including Mr Gallagher, were engaged in a dispute with Omagh District Council over the wording on memorials in the town unveiled on Friday.

This was the first ceremony in the new garden of remembrance close to the blast site and included several hundred people.

"Over the past ten years we have taken control of our own lives," Mr Gallagher added. "We could not allow terrorists to dictate to us, we will continue to do what is right for us."

Former Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman Dame Nuala O'Loan was among those present. She penned a critical report on the police handling of the investigation.

There was an interdenominational service lasting around 30 minutes including prayers in Hebrew, Spanish and Irish.

Among the dead were schoolchildren from Bunrana, Co Donegal, in the Irish Republic and Spanish exchange students, shopping in the busy market town. The British, Irish and Spanish governments were represented today.

A minute's silence in remembrance was held as well as a moving reading, "Do not stand by my grave and weep", from Carol Radford, whose 16-year-old brother Alan was killed.

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