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# Ahern should quit over RIRA emails, Omagh families insist

By Lesley-Anne Henry Tuesday, 20 January 2009

Families of Omagh bomb victims have called on the Irish Justice minister to resign after it was revealed he had made representations on behalf of the leader of the Real IRA.

Dermot Ahern admitted passing on emails on behalf of Michael McKevitt, one of five men suspected of involvement in the 1998 blast — the Troubles' biggest single loss of life.

The minister, who met victims' families in Dundalk during 2006, has expressed "regret" but has so far declined to apologise for his actions five years ago. Instead he has tried to play down substantial embarrassment over his letters on behalf of the convicted terrorist by claiming he was only passing on an email on behalf of a constituent.

McKevitt, currently serving life in Portlaoise prison for directing terrorism is from Blackrock, outside Dundalk in Co Louth and part of Mr Ahern's constituency. It is understood his wife, Bernadette Sands McKevitt, contacted Mr Ahern after a disagreement on the terms of a temporary release.

Yesterday Carol Radford whose teenage brother, Alan, was among the 29 people slaughtered when the 500lb car bomb ripped through Omagh town centre, said an apology would be futile.

"I am not surprised. Nothing surprises me about Omagh. I think he should resign. He is now the Justice minister and you can't represent the people who carried out the atrocity and the victims.

"I think the only thing Dermot Ahern regrets is the fact that it was made public. To be honest an apology wouldn't make much difference to me."

Meanwhile Michael Gallagher, chairman of the Omagh Self Help and Support Group, who lost his 21-year-old son Aiden, said he felt betrayed by the Irish minister.

"This is just disbelief. This is a man who came to the memorial garden and stood with us in 2005 to remember those who died and were injured and show solidarity with the victims.

"We actually met him in Dundalk in about 2006. Really and truthfully we went away from that meeting thinking this is a man who is going to help us."

Mr Ahern yesterday said that anybody who knew him in public life knew there was virtually nobody who opposed paramilitary violence more than he had.

But he said he also had a duty to respond with compassion to any family who approached him and he had always done that in a fashion which did not in any way compromise his position.

"It would be a dereliction of duty if I was to ignore families when they come to me indicating that, perhaps, there is in some way an infringement of someone's human rights," he said.

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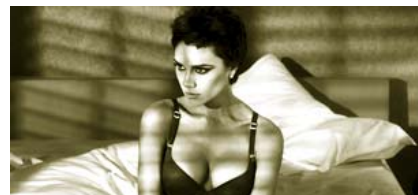


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