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## Local & National

### Sir Ronnie in apology to families over Omagh bomb

Thursday, January 24, 2008

By Matthew McCreary

Former Northern Ireland police chief Sir Ronnie Flanagan - who once said he would commit suicide if criticisms about the Omagh bombing investigation were justified - last night apologised to the families of those killed and injured in the blast over the failure to bring anyone to justice for the attack.

Sir Ronnie, however, said he would not resign from his current role as top Home Office adviser on policing, despite a judge's recent damning condemnation of how the RUC investigated the August 1998 bombing.

"I absolutely publicly apologise to the families in Omagh," he told Channel Four news last night.

"I am desperately sorry that we have not at this point brought people to justice for that dreadful attack. I publicly apologise to all those families and all those victims; to all those who were injured, without reservation."

It was the first time the ex-RUC Chief Constable publicly apologised for the investigation into the bombing that claimed the lives of 29 people.

Following a critical report into the Omagh investigation in 2001, by then Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan, Sir Ronnie said that if he believed the criticisms in the report were justified he would not only resign, but would "publicly commit suicide".

He later apologised for the remark.

Last month south Armagh man Sean Hoey was cleared of numerous charges related to the atrocity and a series of other dissident republican attacks.

Trial judge Mr Justice Weir delivered a damning assessment of the RUC following the lengthy trial which ended last month.

He highlighted malpractice at every stage of evidence gathering procedures during the case.

Sir Ronnie said last night that he would not be stepping down as head of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

However, he did admit responsibility for the RUC's failures under his command.

"Of course as Chief Constable, I have to take responsibility for the shortcomings that the judge highlighted and I take responsibility for those shortcomings," he said.

But when asked if he would resign, Sir Ronnie replied: "I don't think that is appropriate."

Sir Ronnie was speaking after a meeting with Victor Barker, who lost his 12-year-old son James in the bombing.

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Mr Barker, who has been demanding Sir Ronnie's resignation, said the apology didn't go far enough.

"He apologised that no-one's been brought to justice, that's very different from apologising for his own involvement in the case," he said.

"I don't think he can morally justify remaining in his current position when he was the major responsible officer for an investigation that fell so short of what the relatives should have expected."

Michael Gallagher, whose son Aidan was killed in the bombing, said: "It is important that Sir Ronnie Flanagan takes responsibility for his failings in the investigation.

"This was a long investigation...and we haven't seen any of the perpetrators of the bomb being brought to court. We feel the only way the families will get all of the answers is in a cross-border public enquiry."

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