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Local & National

Omagh judge may hear gardai evidence in Dublin

Tuesday, April 24, 2007

By Ivan McMichael

The judge dealing with the Omagh bomb compensation case may go to Dublin to hear evidence from gardai who are not being allowed to come to Belfast.

Mr Justice Morgan has yet to decide whether or not to agree to the application which was made by lawyers for families of the dead and injured who are claiming £14m.

If the judge decides to go to Dublin he will hear evidence from up to 30 members of the Garda.

As he has no jurisdiction to preside in the Republic, he will operate on a basis known as "on commission," which means he would have the full agreement of the Dublin government.

The application was made in the High Court in Belfast by Lord Brennan, the London QC heading the legal team representing those bringing the record-breaking compensation claim.

Lord Brennan said: "It is necessary for the plaintiffs to call evidence from many Garda officers who have extensive experience and knowledge of the Real IRA and other IRA entities.






"In particular, it is necessary to obtain corroboration of the evidence of David Rupert and his meetings with Michael McKeivitt and incidents in which he was involved with him."

David Rupert is the American double agent who infiltrated the Real IRA, which carried out the 1998 Omagh bombing which killed 29 people, and subsequently gave evidence which helped convict McKeivitt of leading the RIRA.

McKeivitt (57), from Blackrock, Co Louth, who is serving a 20-year sentence in Portlaoise, is one of five defendants in the multi-million pound case.

The others are Colm Murphy and Liam Campbell, both from Dundalk, Seamus Daly, from Culloville, Co Monaghan, and Seamus McKenna, from Silverbridge, Co Armagh.

The court has already been told that Mr Rupert will not be giving evidence after the FBI, which has him in protective custody, backed out of an arrangement for him to provide testimony by videolink due to risks to his health and security. But lawyers plan to submit his written evidence when the hearing gets under way in September.

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