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Ten years on, the fight for justice continues

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By Shane Hickey
Friday December 21
2007

As the months count down to the 10th anniversary of the Omagh bomb, the relatives of the 29 people killed have yet to see one person brought to justice for the

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The scene of devastation at Market Street in Omagh following the bombing which claimed the lives of 29 people in Northern Ireland's worst ever terrorist atrocity

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atrocities.

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Yesterday, Sean Hoey was found not guilty of the murder of those killed as well as a raft of other charges. He was the first man to face murder charges in connection with the 1998 bomb.

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The 29 who died, including a woman pregnant with twins, came from both sides of the religious divide. The youngest fatality was just 18 months old while the oldest was 65. In addition to the dead, hundreds of people were injured and maimed as a result.

What are these?

A massive police operation was launched following the explosion on August 15, 1998.

International condemnation of the actions of those involved was sharp and unequivocal.

It was "the most evil deed in years", said Taoiseach Bertie Ahern.

Tony Blair said it was "an appalling act of savagery. There is total determination to bring the perpetrators to justice."

"On behalf of every American I condemn this butchery, and hope that the culprits will be brought to justice quickly," said US president Bill Clinton.

The Real IRA, a republican splinter group opposed to the Good Friday Agreement, claimed responsibility, apologising to the "civilians" who died.

Two and a half years later, the families of the victims launched a civil action against the Real IRA. Five men were named as being responsible.

Colm Murphy, who was named among the five, was subsequently found guilty by the special criminal court in Dublin of conspiracy to cause an explosion and jailed for 14 years.

However, a subsequent case where he argued his conviction to be unsafe, was successful and he is currently awaiting a re-trial. Mr Murphy is the uncle of Sean Hoey.

Another of the group named Seamus Daly, from Culloville, Castleblayney, Co Monaghan, was sentenced to three years after being found guilty of membership of an illegal organisation.

The leader of the Real IRA, Michael McKevitt, was jailed for 20 years for directing a terrorist organisation.

The former director of operations, Liam Campbell, from Upper Faughart, Dundalk, was jailed for membership of an illegal organisation.

Seamus McKenna, formerly of Silverbridge, Co Armagh, but with an address at Marian Park, Dundalk, was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for unlawful possession of explosives.

That no one is now jailed directly for the bombing has been the subject of massive criticism of the investigations.

Mr Justice Weir's "deliberate and calculated deception" comment about the police yesterday follows on from former Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan's criticism that police ignored and failed to act upon crucial intelligence.

€2,250 each

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The Omagh Victims group will finally see their long battle for a civil action against the individuals they named for involvement go to court in April next year. "We keep fighting on and trying to get to the truth," said Michael Gallagher, who lost his son Aidan in the blast.

- *Shane Hickey*

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