



Families accuse Orde of snub

(Barry McCaffrey, [Irish News](#))

Omagh families last night (Thursday) accused the secretary of state and chief constable of snubbing them since Sean Hoey's trial collapsed.

The Policing Board met Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde behind closed doors yesterday to discuss the fall-out from the case.

Police officers were found to have "beefed up" witness statements in what Mr Justice Weir described as "deliberate and calculated deception".

Michael Gallagher, whose son Aidan was killed in the 1998 blast said: "The chief constable and the Policing Board are sitting up there in Belfast discussing the Omagh trial but they haven't once attempted to ask the families how we feel."

"Not one of them has had the decency to even pick up a telephone to speak to us.

"We sat through 59 days of the Omagh trial and not once did I see Sir Hugh Orde, Shaun Woodward or Sir Des Rea there.

"I would have thought we would have been better placed to talk about the failures of police investigation and the farce of the prosecution case than people who couldn't even be bothered to turn up to the trial or to speak to the families afterwards."

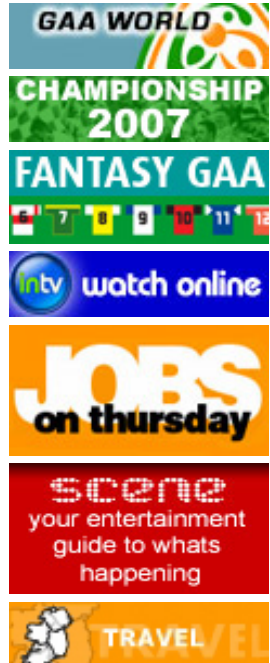
It is understood the chief constable will now meet Mr Gallagher next week.

Meanwhile, Mr Gallagher gave a guarded welcome to comments from Mr Hoey, that he supports the families' campaign for a public inquiry: "Everyone with evidence of the events surrounding Omagh should be allowed to contribute to an inquiry, including Sean Hoey."

"I would welcome him giving evidence at an inquiry, just as I would welcome anyone from any of the security agencies on both sides of the border giving evidence.

"It has to be a properly inclusive inquiry, involving everyone connected to the case."

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Questioning the governments' reluctance to establish an inquiry, Mr Gallagher said: "How long can the British and Irish governments resist it?"

"The criminal justice system has failed the families and there aren't many other options left.

"Even at this late stage they should do the decent thing and establish a public inquiry so that we can get to the truth of what has been allowed to go on."

A Policing Board spokesman said last night it would be writing to representatives of the Omagh Support Group "providing them with the decision taken by the board as outlined in its statement today.

An NIO spokeswoman said last night: "The secretary of state made it clear at the time of the judgment that he understood the families' desire for justice but that we needed to proceed with care and diligence.

"Since December 20 ministers have been giving careful consideration to the judgment and discussing the implications with the agencies concerned.

"We intend of course to discuss all these issues with the families who remain uppermost in our concerns."

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