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Omagh family drop out of lawsuit

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

Almost half of those involved in a multi-million-pound civil action against alleged Real IRA leaders accused of involvement in the Omagh bombing have dramatically withdrawn from the case.

The family of Esther Gibson (36) said they were frustrated at long delays and claimed authorities have "conspired" to prevent the action ever getting to court.

The setback comes as legal sources say it is unlikely that a verdict will be delivered this week in the criminal trial of Sean Hoey – the only man charged with the 1998 bombing – before the courts close until September.

Relatives of Ms Gibson, who was among 29 people, including a woman pregnant with twins, killed in the Real IRA atrocity, made up seven of the 19 people taking a civil case for £10 million in compensation.

Ms Gibson was the eldest of 11 children. She had gone to Omagh on the day of the bomb to be photographed with her fiance Kenneth, whom she was due to marry the following year.

In 2001 her family joined the action suing alleged Real IRA leaders Michael McKevitt, Seamus Daly, Liam Campbell, Colm Murphy and Seamus McKenna.

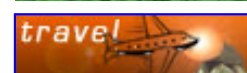
The British government provided £800,000 to help fund the case, which was supported by Barry McGuigan, Bob Geldof and former secretaries of state Peter Mandelson and Sir Patrick Mayhew.

However, the proceedings did not open until January 2005 and since then have been dogged by delay. The trial is not expected to begin properly until January 2008 at the earliest.

In an unexpected move at the High Court in Belfast, the Gibson family announced they were withdrawing from the action.

In written statements to the court, Ms Gibson's brothers and sisters said: "The ongoing delays in the matter getting to trial

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are causing me unnecessary stress to the extent that I feel I have no option other than to withdraw from the action.

"I do not believe that due to the ongoing criminal proceedings the trial will take place this year.

"In addition, for some time now I have been very concerned that all relevant authorities (north and south) have conspired to prevent this matter ever getting to trial and I have no confidence that the court will be able to compel them to assist."

Michael Gallagher, whose son Aidan was killed in the bomb, insisted the families' civil case would continue.

"People have dropped out of the civil action before because of personal reasons and we respect that," he said.

However, Mr Gallagher said the Omagh families were becoming increasingly frustrated at legal delays.

"We are hearing now that there might not be a verdict in the Hoey trial until September," he said.

"It seems to be delay after delay. It is very hard for the families to cope."

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