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Garda will help Omagh case - Lenihan

[Elaine Edwards](#)

Minister for Justice Brian Lenihan has insisted the Garda Síochána will help "to the maximum extent possible" the civil case being taken against a number of men over the 1998 Omagh bombing.

Mr Lenihan was speaking today after representatives of victims of the bombing expressed concern at media reports that gardaí, on the basis of legal advice, might not give evidence in their private civil action.

The Garda Commissioner has confirmed that the gardaí will help in every possible way
Minister for Justice Brian Lenihan

Twenty-nine people, including a woman pregnant with twins, died on August 15th, 1998, in the bomb attack on the Co Tyrone town.

The Omagh Support and Self Help Group is taking its own civil action against a number of men it alleges were involved in the bombing.

Mr Lenihan said today gardaí would need to take advice and be guided by it before taking part in any civil case.

"The Garda Commissioner has confirmed that the gardaí will help in every possible way," he told reporters.

"There still are possible criminal proceedings, so clearly they have to take advice before they give evidence in any civil matter.

"But they are anxious to help in every possible way. But clearly, at every step of the way, they will have to take advice and be guided by it. But they are anxious to help and the Commissioner made it clear the gardai will help to the maximum extent possible."

A report in the *Sunday Times* newspaper last weekend said Garda Commissioner Noel Conroy had been advised by lawyers that the Garda investigation into the bombing might be compromised if gardaí were to give evidence in a civil case.

The support group has so far spent nearly £2 million preparing its case and was hoping to have it heard next year. The action was due to begin in April but is on hold pending a decision on the fate of Sean Hoey, the only man charged in connection with the bombing. Mr Hoey's lengthy trial concluded in Belfast in January and a judge is due to deliver his decision later this year.

Those named in the civil action include "Real IRA" chief Michael McKeivitt, Colm Murphy, Seamus McKenna and Liam Campbell, all from Co Louth, and Seamus Daly from Cullaville in Co Monaghan.

Michael Gallagher, chairman of the relatives' support group, yesterday expressed surprise that relatives had learned of the possible setback to their case through media reports.

"This came as a complete and utter shock. We were given no indication whatsoever that the Garda were unwilling to co-operate - in fact the opposite," he said.

"Our solicitors met with the Garda just a few weeks ago and had a very good meeting with them, and there was no indication at that time that they weren't prepared to come forward and support us.

"We weren't aware of any new leads, there was no imminent arrests or prosecutions so we're at a loss to see how the Garda co-operating with the civil action could in fact prejudice an ongoing criminal inquiry which of course we wouldn't want."

In a single-line statement yesterday, the Garda Commissioner said his position had "not changed" since he last met with the families of the Omagh bomb victims.

"The Garda Commissioner wishes to point out that the Garda Síochána position has not changed since he and other officers of An Garda Síochána met with relatives of the victims of the Omagh bombing and that no statement has been made to any media outlet," the statement said.

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