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Omagh marks 10th anniversary of deadly bombing

Thousands turn out to remember Northern Ireland conflict's bloodiest massacre

[Rachel Stevenson](#)

[guardian.co.uk](#), Friday August 15 2008 16:35 BST



Workers prepare a memorial for the victims of the Omagh bombing ahead of today's unveiling. Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

The streets of Omagh were packed with thousands of people today as the town marked the 10th anniversary of the Northern Ireland conflict's bloodiest massacre.

The families of victims joined well-wishers to remember the 29 people and two unborn twins killed in the Real IRA bomb that ripped through the town centre on a busy Saturday afternoon in August 1998.

Ten years on, those responsible have not been caught and police on both sides of the Irish border have faced heavy criticism for their handling of the investigation. One person was charged with the murders but was cleared in December last year.

Speaking at a memorial service near the site of the explosion, Shaun Woodward, Britain's Northern Ireland secretary, said, "The events of August 15th 1998 will forever be indelibly marked in the minds and hearts of all decent people. The dignity and courage of the families and friends of those who were murdered has, with the towering response of the people of Omagh, shown the world that terrorism has no place in a decent world."

Relatives of the some of the victims boycotted the official service in protest at the wording of inscriptions on new memorials unveiled today.

An inscription at the bomb site in Market Street does not mention who perpetrated the attack, and another at a nearby garden of remembrance says the victims were "murdered by a dissident republican car bomb". The phrase is placed in inverted commas and attributed to the Omagh Support and Self Help group, which the families claim indicates that the Sinn Fein-dominated Omagh council is not prepared to acknowledge republicans were responsible for the atrocity.

The council has defended its handling of the issue, saying an independent fact-finding group recommended the form the memorials should take.

A council spokeswoman said today's event was designed to provide an opportunity for all those affected by the bomb to come together to remember. "Furthermore, the event will recognise the tremendous steps which have been made by individuals and by the community as a whole in rebuilding lives in our town, and a key element of the ceremony will be a communal dedication to peace," she said.

A "garden of light", containing light-reflecting mirrors representing the dead, was officially unveiled today as well as a glass obelisk at the site of the explosion.

A host of dignitaries including the former Lebanon hostage Terry Waite, Martin McGuinness, Northern Ireland's deputy first minister, and Brian Cowen, the Irish taoiseach, attended the memorial service. The Spanish president, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, sent a message of support. Among those killed in the bombing were an exchange student and youth leader from Madrid.

Families belonging to the Omagh Support and Self Help group have organised an alternative commemoration event on Sunday.

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