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'Heaviest punishment' for Omagh suspects call

BY Staff Reporter

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LAWYERS for relatives of Omagh bomb victims yesterday called for the men suspected of the atrocity to face the threat of the heaviest available lawsuit punishment.

Even though exemplary damages are more associated with cases of state wrongdoing and institutional corruption, the families' legal team argued that their unprecedented civil action should also qualify.

Lord Brennan QC told Belfast High Court that the "outrageous conduct" they rely on, if the trial goes in their favour, included the deaths of 29 people in the August 1998 massacre and the fact that Omagh was the continuation of a campaign which resumed again years later.

In legal submissions, Lord Brennan listed three stages in his analysis: the basic compensatory award, followed by any aggravated damages and finally whether it was appropriate for exemplary damages where the objective is to punish and deter.

This could be in hypothetical cases where soldiers or policemen go too far and the rule of law has to be upheld, the court heard.

But Lord Brennan insisted: "When we come to terrorists they can do what they please and the law does not think, as yet, in this context they should be subject to this kind of remedy. The ordinary person would find this an utterly unacceptable state of affairs."

He said that with such a remedy ready to be used "what better set of circumstances to justify such an approach than those in this case".

His argument came as the families taking the multi-million pound compensation claim prepared to go into the witness box later this week.

They are suing five men they claim were responsible for the Real IRA bombing: Michael McKeivitt, Liam Campbell, Seamus McKenna, Colm Murphy and Seamus Daly.

All five deny any involvement.

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