# Government's proposed redactions in Omagh inquiry spark fears of undue secrecy



The proposed redaction of junior civil servants' names from documents related to the inquiry into the Omagh Bomb raises significant concerns about access to vital information for victims' families and a perceived attempt by the UK government to limit scrutiny. This inquiry, which addresses the tragic Real IRA bombing that claimed 29 lives and two unborn children in August 1998, is set against a backdrop of political sensitivity and historical issues surrounding transparency in Northern Ireland.

Legal representatives for the bereaved, including Raymond Foster KC, argue that the government's application to withhold names is an effort to "exclude" core participants, predominantly the families who have been advocating for justice for over two decades. In their view, granting this application would introduce an "unacceptable level of secrecy" that undermines the inquiry’s objective of openness and accountability. Foster articulated this stance during the inquiry, emphasising that the expected transparency is crucial for instilling public confidence in the investigatory process.

The UK government has justified the redaction based on fears that disclosures could endanger the lives of civil servants by leaving them vulnerable to attacks from dissident republicans. However, this rationale has been challenged in light of previous patterns where excessive secrecy has overshadowed the need for transparency in Northern Ireland’s investigative efforts. The inquiry has already faced stumbling blocks, with counsel Paul Greaney KC revealing that approximately 700 documents, equating to over 8,000 pages of evidence, have been withheld pending these deliberations on redaction.

Adding complexity to this matter, Irish officials have previously expressed concerns regarding political ramifications tied to the inquiry. For instance, the Irish government recently requested that the UK withdraw appeals for information related to the Omagh bombing, fearing that it might antagonise Sinn Féin and disrupt the fragile peace process. In addition, cooperation with the UK government appears to hinge on sensitive information, as echoed by Irish Justice Minister Jim O’Callaghan who highlighted the need for redacting "security sensitive" content while still overseeing robust communication between both governments.

Despite the absence of new evidence warranting an inquiry in the Republic of Ireland, officials have reiterated a commitment to collaboration with their UK counterparts. This collaboration is vital for ensuring thorough examination of the events surrounding the bombing. There are implications that effective engagement from Irish witnesses, including gardaí, could enhance the inquiry’s integrity.

As scrutiny intensifies over how the Omagh Bomb inquiry is managed, the balance between national security and the right of victims' families to access information remains a critical focal point. The ongoing dialogue surrounding redactions and transparency will ultimately shape the public's perception of the inquiry's legitimacy. Such discussions underscore the enduring legacy of the Troubles and the commitment of those affected to seek truth and justice within a complex legal and political landscape.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Paragraph 5
3. Paragraph 6
4. Paragraph 7
5. Paragraph 8
6. Paragraph 9
7. Paragraph 10

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/proposed-redaction-of-civil-servants-names-in-omagh-inquiry-an-attempt-to-exclude-victims-families-THZHNYVVXJF2JGIJJNT4AB2ESM/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/proposed-redaction-of-civil-servants-names-in-omagh-inquiry-an-attempt-to-exclude-victims-families-THZHNYVVXJF2JGIJJNT4AB2ESM/> - An article from The Irish News reports on a proposed redaction of junior civil servants' names from documents related to the Omagh Bomb inquiry. Legal representatives for victims' families argue that this move by the UK government aims to 'exclude' core participants, such as bereaved families, from accessing crucial information. The inquiry seeks to determine whether the 1998 Real IRA bombing, which killed 29 people and two unborn children, could have been prevented. The UK government's application for redaction is based on concerns that disclosing these names could expose individuals to attacks from dissident republicans.
3. <https://www.irishtimes.com/history/2023/12/29/irish-officials-asked-uk-to-drop-omagh-bombing-information-appeal-files-show/> - The Irish Times reports that Irish civil servants requested the UK government to drop an appeal for information regarding the Omagh bombing. They feared that such an appeal could anger Sinn Féin and jeopardize the progress of the peace process. The appeal was intended to encourage individuals with information about the 1998 bombing to come forward, but Irish officials believed it might have adverse political implications.
4. <https://www.expressandstar.com/uk-news/2025/04/15/omagh-bombing-inquiry-reaches-agreement-with-irish-government-over-co-operation/> - Express & Star reports on the Omagh Bombing Inquiry's agreement with the Irish Government over cooperation. Irish Justice Minister Jim O’Callaghan stated that 'security sensitive' information would be redacted, and legislation might be needed for witnesses, such as gardaí, to testify before the inquiry. The inquiry aims to ensure full access to relevant materials held by Irish state authorities and the ability to summon witnesses to provide evidence.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2023-08-16/no-new-evidence-to-warrant-omagh-bomb-enquiry-irish-minister-says> - ITV News reports that Irish Minister Peter Burke stated there is currently no new evidence about the Omagh bombing that would warrant holding a public inquiry in the Republic of Ireland. However, he emphasized the Irish Government's commitment to fully cooperate with the UK Government to ensure all questions regarding the 1998 bombing are addressed.
6. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41206156.html> - The Irish Examiner reports that Irish Minister Peter Burke stated there is no new evidence about the Omagh bombing to justify a public inquiry in Ireland. Despite this, the Irish Government is committed to cooperating fully with the UK Government to ensure all questions about the 1998 bombing are answered.
7. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/taoiseach-urges-gardai-and-others-to-testify-at-omagh-bomb-inquiry-if-asked-GZSAQI5MDJHIJLWRN5HI56LJOA/> - The Irish News reports that Taoiseach urged gardaí and other witnesses to testify at the Omagh Bombing Inquiry if requested. Justice Minister Jim O’Callaghan mentioned that 'security sensitive' information would be redacted, but the inquiry would have access to unredacted parts if necessary. The government aims to ensure that witnesses from Ireland, including gardaí and former civil servants, provide evidence that can be used by the inquiry.