

Witness statement of: Nabil Choucair
Exhibit: None
No: 1
Date:

IN THE GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF MR NABIL CHOUCAIR

I, Nabil Choucair, date of birth [REDACTED] will say as follows:-

Background information

1. This statement relates to tragic events on the 14th June 2017, I understand that this is being dealt with in Phase 1 of the Inquiry and the other matters on which I would like to comment on are being dealt with in Phase 2 of the Inquiry. I am an active core participant in the Inquiry.
2. [REDACTED] I am one of four children including Nadia (my sister who tragically died in the fire). I am the eldest sibling, my sister Sawsan is next, followed by my brother Hisam. Nadia was our youngest sister. We all grew up in south west London and particularly the borough of Kensington and Chelsea. [REDACTED]
3. In 2003 I married Malak [REDACTED] and we started our married life together in London. We now have three children; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
4. Nadia married Malak's brother, Bassem and they also stayed in south west London. They did temporarily move to north London but then came back to Kensington and Chelsea and moved into Flat 193 on the the 22nd floor of the Grenfell Tower with her

husband and their three children, my nieces: Mierna (13 years), Fatima (11 years) and Zainab Choucair (3 years).

5. My mother, Sirria Choucair had mobility issues as she was incapacitated with arthritic pain and she also had high blood pressure. She was prescribed strong pain killers for the arthritic pain as it was extremely debilitating for her. She had acquired tenancy on the same floor in Flat 191 with my sister Sawsan who was not at home on the night of the fire. They moved in maybe 3 or 4 years after Nadia.

Concerns about the building prior to 14th June 2017

6. I cannot remember the exact date Nadia moved in but I remember at the time that they were not entirely happy with the accommodation. It was not in a good state of repair and it required extensive decorative work to be done. I would say that the tower refurbishment works did make the building look a lot better, but then again looks can be deceiving.
7. A few months before the fire Nadia had said that there were problems with the electrical equipment in the kitchen and their kitchen appliances packed in due to faulty electrical works. She had to buy a new washing machine and fridge about four months prior to the fire due to these issues as electrical problems which would render the appliances unworkable. I think this was something to do with the power surges after the refurbishment works.
8. I know there were also problems with the water pressure which was very very weak in all the taps. There simply wasn't enough of a flow and Nadia and my mum had to report and complain about this issue. Eventually they had water pressure motors fitted under the bath tubs, to bring a better flow of water through the taps. This was also

around the time of the refurbishment works although again, I cannot narrow down the dates.

9. There was a serious issue with the new windows fitted as part of the renovation works. It was clearly noticeable that they had not been fitted to a satisfactory standard and I would describe that job as 'shabby'. I noticed the job was not done properly and I recall seeing screws missing. It looked like a rushed job. There were gaps in the window frames and they were very drafty. You would assume that a double glazed window would keep the external noise levels down, but it was so noisy; you could hear the wind howling and feel the wind. In the winter, the heating would have been kept on for longer in order to keep the chill out through the gaps and the flats lost so much unnecessary heat.
10. The new front door was another issue. Sometimes it would just slam shut such was the draft from inside and it was almost frightening. Again, the new front door did not fit the old frame and there was a huge draft that came from under the door. Bassem had to fit draft stoppers to my mother's front door as well as theirs flat as it was very drafty, and also because my sister had a fear of mice coming into their home. The gap was so big you could squeeze your fingers between the bottom of the door and the floor.
11. My mother was very disappointed with the repositioning of the new boilers after the refurbishment work. The new boilers were placed in the entrance corridor along with the fuse box directly beneath it. It was most unsightly and bulky. This was deeply concerning because this new position was so near to the front door that if anything disastrous ever happened there, then your escape route would have been blocked. There were gas pipes, water and electricity all placed together – in the event of a fault it was a recipe for disaster. It worried me as my mother used to take off her shoes in that area and I always thought it was dangerous that if she were to bend down and there was a fault then it would have been in line with her face.

12. The lifts were always problematic. If one was working the other wasn't. Sometimes both were out of order so I would have to go away and return some four hours later after the maintenance teams had been in. This was a regular occurrence. During the refurbishment work there was one occasion when the lifts were out of order and we demanded Rydon to provide an alternative service. The alternative services would be to literally carry young children up to the top of the stairs or by assisting residents by carrying their shopping bags.
13. The hallways were always extremely noisy, this is due to the extractor fans. Whenever it was windy you could hear a howling noise in the communal areas it was like a horror movie.
14. I was aware of other complaints the residents had but I was not actively involved in any meetings.
15. I used to visit Nadia and my mother several times a week. We were so close especially as Nadia married my wife's brother. If we did not go there then they would all come to ours. Sometimes if I was busy then Malak would take the children to see them. The children were all so close. We would spend birthdays, Christmas and holidays together. We would go out together or spend weekends in together. We spoke every day and further, we texted and whatsapped each other all day long.

Leading up to the fire and the fire 14th June 2017

16. I had spent the night of the 12th June with Nadia and on the morning of the 13th June I left in the morning to go home. I was supposed to have gone back on the 14th June but this was never to be.

17. I was asleep on the night of the 13th June when my sister Sawsan rang me to say there was a fire in the Grenfell Tower. It was roughly somewhere between 2:30am – 2:40am. I just did not believe her and so I turned on the television and the news channels were televising the inferno.
18. I tried phoning Nadia but the phone just kept ringing and ringing. I called my brother Hisam to tell him what had happened and to meet me at the tower. I told Malak to keep trying Nadia and her brother Baseem who were inside the tower and I then left home and left Nadia with our three children at home.
19. I then rushed down to the tower. Coincidentally both my brother Hisam and I both arrived at about the same point in time and I parked under the Westway Sports Centre.
20. I immediately saw the tower on fire; the flames had fully engulfed the upper floors. My brother Hisam and I devised a plan to separate and to go opposite ways around the tower in order to increase our chances of getting into the building to save our family members. Our plan was to go in and rescue them. I think this would have been around 3:15am – 3:40am.
21. It was total chaos and pandemonium. The fire brigade were everywhere and kept coming in, everything was cordoned off and the police were shouting at everyone.
22. When I tried to get round them they threatened me with arrest. We just wanted to get in and save them. At the time, it felt that we got so close but in hindsight we must have been about 100 metres away. Nevertheless you could see the fire and you could feel the heat.
23. Although I did not see my family at the time, I later saw the images in the newspaper of Nadia desperately waving a makeshift flag from her window near the top of the Grenfell Tower. She epitomised the indescribable desperation that residents had to be rescued. On the night I did see their flat up in flames.

24. I kept ringing and ringing their phones but to no avail I did not get through to them.
25. The darkness turned into daylight and we heard that local buildings such as the Rugby Club and the Portbello Road Club were opening as contact centres. We searched those centres for any trace of our loved ones and when we did not find them we reported them as missing. We were hopeful they had left the building and they would be found. Every time we heard of a new centre opening we would go and do the same.
26. We heard that there was a telephone helpline and so we started to call that from 9:00am although it took a while for that service to initiate and we finally got through at around 9:30am. We registered our family members as missing once again.
27. The tower was still ablaze when we decided to go to the hospitals and in turn both my brother and I attended all the local Accident and Emergency departments:-
- a. St Charles,
 - b. Chelsea and Westminster,
 - c. Hammersmith and St Thomas' hospital
28. When we left them we continued to telephone the list of hospitals every couple of hours for any new admissions of the Choucair family. We went back and searched the centres.
29. In the preceding days, we spoke to all the news reporters present in order to maximise the opportunity to report our family as missing in the hope that a lead would reunite us all.


30. Eventually we were assigned a Family Liaison Officer. I understand that they had been trying to get hold of us but that we had not been at home. This is likely as we were barely at home; we were relentlessly searching for our loved ones.
31. The preceding days became more and more painful as the reality began to sink in but we still did not give up hope.
32. Sadly however, the news started to filter in of the worst information we could have hoped for. We were called into Notting Hill Gate Police Station with no idea what was to be discussed, and then it was pronounced that my mother had been identified by her dental records as deceased. It was a day I shall never forget. From that day on they asked us how we would wish to be notified of any further news, we told them as soon as possible rather than bringing us all in to the police station again. Eventually, all six of my relatives who were inside Grenfell Tower on 14th June 2017 where the fire broke out and spread throughout the building were confirmed as deceased.
33. I have listened to the 999 calls and I have heard the desperate pleas for a helicopter to save my family and it haunts me that my family did not leave the Tower because they believed a helicopter circling the tower could save them and that they were initially told to stay put. I attended a meeting between the police and bereaved families at the Olympia London in West Kensington on 4th July 2017, with the Metropolitan Police Commander Stuart Cundy and Westminster Coroner, Dr Fiona Wilcox, in attendance. Ownership of the helicopter was raised with Police Commander Cundy at this meeting.
34. This has devastated our lives as more than half of our family have now died. Life will never be the same and it is hard to accept. The pain and suffering is unbearable. I don't know if I can ever come to terms and accept what has happened with this ordeal as the family that we loved and they loved us have gone. I don't wish this ever to

happen to anybody else. I am seeking rehabilitation as a result of what I saw on the night of the fire as I will never be the same again.

Statement of Truth

I believe that facts stated in this witness statement are true to the best of my knowledge.

Signed


Nabil Choucair

Dated


11/9/18