

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY


STATEMENT OF OSCAR MILLAN GONZALEZ

Preamble

1. This statement is made from my own personal knowledge and from matters that I have been told about by others; where the information does not come from my own personal knowledge, I make this clear below.
2. In this statement I focus upon my background - living on the Grenfell Tower estate and most particularly, the events of 14 June 2017. In the event that the Inquiry seeks oral evidence from me in relation to both phases of the Inquiry; I do not wish to give live evidence at the inquiry, but I am happy for my statement to be read to the inquiry. I did provide a statement to the police. A detective came to visit me at my hotel where I am presently staying and I gave a full statement. I did not make a 999 call as the police and firefighters were already there. I did speak to the BBC you can find the clip on YouTube. I also received phone calls from Columbian radio and Latino radio. They still call me and someone from Channel 5 called last week, but I do not wish to give any more interviews.
3. I make this statement because I was a resident of Grenfell Tower. Myself and my daughter Stephanie lost everything as a result of the fire.

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Oscar Millan Gonzalez

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Dated: 15/05/18

Personal Background

4. I was born on [REDACTED] I am 60 years old.
5. I have two children. One son does not live with me anymore. My other daughter Stephanie is 27 years old.

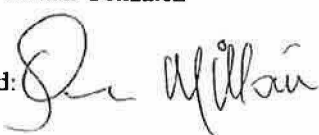
36 Grenfell Tower

6. I moved into this flat 36 years ago. The flat was on the sixth floor at the tower, which had 23 storeys. I was happy in the flat as it was very spacious and had a big sitting room and I raised my two children there [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I together with Stephanie lived in flat 36. Our flat had two bedrooms, a Kitchen, bathroom, toilet, living room and a hallway. There was also a cupboard storage space. There were five other flats on the same floor as ours and they were numbered 31-36 which included ours. There was one central staircase and two lifts which weren't always in working order. I had a lot of happy memories there. My tenancy was with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Tenant Management Organisation

7. I had rented the flat from the Tenant Management Organisation (T.M.O) since 1981. T.M.O were responsible for the upkeep and upgrade of the property and up until the renovations took place about four years ago, I would report any problems or issues to the reception. The reception was removed during the renovations and so to report a problem I would either call TMO or go to their office which was about 100 metres from the building. There was no sprinkler system within the building and TMO had not provided me with any information regarding a fire or safety drill in the event of an

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emergency. In the time that I have lived there, there had never been a fire drill practice or assembly point in the event of a fire and it was more a case of fending for ourselves.

Works in the building

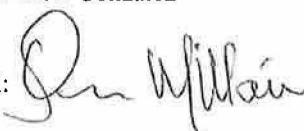
8. Before carrying out the works, the TMO showed us what the flats will look like. How the boiler will be and the windows. I liked the photos I saw, as compared to the old system it was better. I used to give Rydon my spare key to do work in my flat as I wasn't always there. The entrance and exit to Grenfell Tower was on the ground floor and access was made by a key fob and two doors. Before the renovations there were more exits to the building, three, but this was reduced since the work was carried out although I do believe the doors were fire doors and the key was required to access them. Within my flat, more of the doors were specified as being fire doors, but I do not know if the main door to my flat was a fire door.
9. The refurbishment work took place around 2013 and the surrounding area with the building of the leisure centre, Academy and the upgrade of the Tower. This included the renovation of the external cladding, insulation, windows, central heating system and numerous pipework. This work had been recently completed but some of the gas pipes were still being worked on.
10. There was a ventilation fan in the window that had been fitted in my kitchen and it was working the night of the fire. My boiler was fitted by my front door. We complained about that as it looked so ugly. There were so many pipes all round the flat, in the kitchen, bathroom. The gas was supplied by British Gas. There were even pipes in the landing outside my flat, round the top level. There were gaps within the piping.

Windows

11. The windows were double glazed. Some people did complain about the windows, but they were better than the previous ones. They were large windows which were very wide. They had a security bolt for the children. I didn't notice any gaps round the windows. I was happy with the windows and they were easy to clean.
12. Overall, I was happy with the renovation work and I assumed that it had passed all of the safety and fire tests.

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13 June 2017

13. I finished work as a mini bus driver about 5.30pm and I went home. At this time, I was the only person in the flat as Stephanie was with her boyfriend in North London. I started doing some cooking and later that evening my friend Ramiro arrived with his [REDACTED] friend, who was visiting from Spain and we all had dinner together about 7pm. Ramiro had been staying with me for a few days, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
14. At about 11am, I went to my room to go to bed as I was due to get up early in the morning. Ramiro and [REDACTED] Claudia stayed in the living room.

14 June First Awareness

15. I woke up around 1am. I heard the smoke alarm going off in the kitchen. I had two smoke alarms, one in the kitchen and one in the hallway and they were provided and fitted by TMO. The hallway smoke alarm did not go off. I had the kitchen window open a little that night because it was a hot night. I thought something might have gone off from perhaps me leaving the cooker on.

First Observation of the Fire

16. I got up and put on my dressing gown. I opened the bedroom door and went to the kitchen and I saw flames coming through the kitchen window. The flames were trying to get inside the flat from the storey below because it was windy. I could hear the noise of the flames. The flames were a funny colour, a yellowish colour. I saw the fire going upwards past my window up the building. I grabbed a small extinguisher which I keep in my tools room and I tried to get the fire out, but the flames were too strong, and the fire extinguisher didn't work. Ramiro got up with his [REDACTED] friend and he tried to tackle the fire with a bucket of water at the window, but it was no good.

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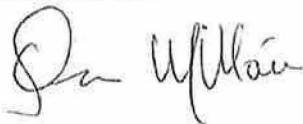
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How the fire spread

17. We were in the flat for about 10 to 15 minutes from when I realised there was a fire. There was no black smoke inside the flat. The flames were now growing very quickly and coming into the kitchen, so I made the decision to leave. I put my shoes on and grabbed my passport and phone. The firefighters were inside the building at the time, but the fire was outside. I said to Ramiro 'Lets go, there is nothing we can do'. On the night I left the front door open as Ramiro and [REDACTED] Claudia were following behind me. My front door was not self closing, you had to pull it closed and lock it. It was a wooden door. Ramiro tried to go upstairs. He asked the firefighters who were outside our flat on the landing if he could go upstairs to fetch his daughter Jessica who was on the 23rd floor. The firefighters said 'No'. They told me to 'run'. This was at an early stage of the fire around 1.10am. At no time did the firefighters knock on my door. I knocked on my neighbour's door and then left. At no time did anyone tell me to 'stay put'. I do not recall seeing any fire extinguishers on any of the floors but there was a fire hose outside at flat 33. I do not know if the firemen used it. The fire was outside at the time. There was no sprinkler system within the building and TMO had not provided me with any information regarding a fire or safety drill in the event of an emergency.
18. We then pushed the communal fire door open and ran down the stairs. The stairs were clear at this time with no smoke. I got to the ground floor and left by the main exit, going out onto the grassed area by the academy. I looked up and saw the fire on the outside of the building which had started on the 4th floor and the cladding had caught light and was alight up until about the 7th floor. Within minutes the cladding had caught light and the fire had gone to the top of the building. I did then record two video clips of the outside of the building on my phone. Both clips last about a minute. I saw two firefighters walking away from the fire going in the wrong direction. (You will see this in the footage I have filmed on my mobile). There were three or four fire engines outside and firefighters nearby but where were the hoses? where was the water? I did

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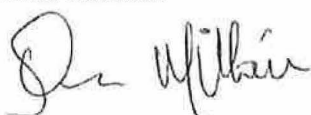
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see a hose that only reached to the 3rd or 4th floor but that was it. I noticed that the fire engines could not get close enough because of the bollards that were outside the building. The bollards blocked the fire engines getting through. The council shouldn't have put bollards there. I stayed just outside the building for about 5 minutes and then the police told me to move away as by now parts of the cladding which were burning were falling away from the building and falling to the ground. I called Stephanie, my daughter who wasn't in the flat that night and I met her with her boyfriend Omer about 10 minutes later in Lancaster Road. We were told to move further back. The time by now was about 1.30am but I cannot be sure and for the next half an hour we watched the fire as it took hold of the building. We started shouting at the people who were still up in the tower to come down. The flames went straight up the side of the building round the right-hand side of the building. The fire went right up to the top of the tower. The cladding was alight and falling down. I could smell smoke outside, but I could see more flames as the fire was so high. A short time later we were all moved back to St Marks Road and we again continued to watch the fire.

19. I then saw Ramiro outside. He had been looking for his wife Adriana and two daughters Melanie (19 years) and Jessica (13 years). I saw a lady in pyjamas screaming 'Jessica, Jessica'. Ramiro and his wife came running with their other daughter Melanie and we all stayed outside. I saw my bedroom had burnt down but the rest of the flat was ok.
20. At this time, I called my cousin Max who arrived around 2 or 3 am from [REDACTED] which is opposite Grenfell Tower. He invited me to his place and we then stayed a couple of days in his flat watching the fire burn opposite in Grenfell Tower. I later heard that Jessica who was 13 years old had died in the fire. A few days afterwards I was given accommodation at the Copthorne Tara Hotel in Kensington with Stephanie who has supported me. I went back to my flat 4 months later with Stephanie, two psychologists, and two police officers so that I could collect my belongings. I noticed my bedroom had gone. All the other rooms were smoke damaged. The police showed me previous photos of my flat. I was informed that my tools, photographs and a few ornaments will be given back to me.

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21. Since this has occurred I have needed to see a psychologist who has helped me deal with flashbacks and depression as well as a sleeping and eating disorder. My keyworker is currently assisting me with accommodation. I am still waiting for permanent accommodation.

Exhibits

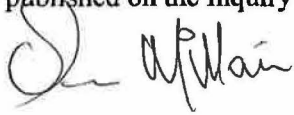
22. There is now produced and shown to me referred to as "OMG1" which lasts for 55 seconds and "OMG2" which lasts for 59 seconds. These two pieces of video were recorded from my mobile phone.

Statement of Truth

I confirm that the content of this witness statement is true.

I confirm that I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.

Signed:



Date:

5/4/19

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