
SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF ZOHRA AL-ASSAD

Preamble

1. I Zohra Al-Assad will say as follows:-
2. I make this statement 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.
3. This statement is my second witness statement and supplementary to my first witness statement in which I focussed upon the events of 14th June 2017. In this statement I will focus on the days immediately following the fire and the provision of emergency relief that I received in the aftermath of the fire. I will also describe my experience of fire safety on the Lancaster West Estate.
4. I am a Core Participant of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. I have not given a statement to the Metropolitan Police Service in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire.

Aftermath

5. I refer to paragraphs 48, 51-57 and paragraph 59 of my first witness statement in which I describe in brief detail the events immediately after the fire and I now wish to supplement these paragraphs with further detail below.
6. We were in shock at my daughter's house, we had nowhere to go, we were in our nightwear and we had left everything in our home. We had been in our house for 42 years and we were really lost and we didn't know what to do. We didn't know whether we would go back to our house or not and we didn't know that we would end up outside. We thought after they solved the situation of the fire we would go back home.
7. I think we returned to our home about 2 weeks after the fire. We were not allowed to go to our house until an appointment was arranged, my son was contacting someone on the

phone, I am not sure exactly who. The lock had been changed and there was somebody waiting by the door they let us retrieve our phone and then we had to leave. I felt that our house was never our house. As far as I was aware no one asked about us or contacted us from the council.

Westway Centre

8. We stayed for a month at my daughter's house but would come and go to Westway. There was food at Westway, people were providing food because there were 7 days left in Ramadan to break the fast. I am not sure where the people came from, I think it was a community effort and everyone was helping. They were not really offering clothes, people were too many and it was first come, first served. We didn't take any clothes from Westway only food and drinks. A variety of food was offered, we would take the food that suited us most as Muslims for example there was pork and stuff, but we would take tuna sandwiches. A lot of charities were trying to help, providing fizzy drinks, water. They also offered big boxes of rice and sugar, but we had no house to take this to. A lot of people benefitted from rice and sugar because they had a place to take it to.
9. A lot of people received emergency relief and money at Westway, but we were not told how to access it. Nobody was telling us. There were so many people, a massive crowd and I thought that some people were not even affected by the fire or lived in the area. An Algerian man saw me turning around in circles and he said to me come here you can benefit from some money and they will give you money here and he took me to the desk. I received £500 from Westway and then another £500 both payments were in cash. I don't know exactly but I think the money was from the council. I can't remember but I think I received the payments 3 or 4 weeks after the fire. We did not believe need to be verified they just gave us the cash, lots of people that weren't from the area would have taken the cash. There were vouchers given to the staff who were in charge, but the staff did not hand out any vouchers to us.

Rugby Portobello Club

10. People in the area who had some mercy in their hearts told us to attend the Rugby Club, so we went and complained because we had nothing and knew nothing. My husband

and I were given £1,000 each and my son also received £1,000. At the Rugby Club they said that the money was given by charity, but I don't know where it came from. We gave them our passports and we signed for the payment as well, they checked the passport and then they asked us please to sign to receive the payment. I can't remember when this was but maybe 2 or 3 months after the fire.

11. I thought that the Rugby Club had two faces they were saying to some people that clothes were available and to others that they had run out. I did not receive any clothes from the Rugby Club.

Clement James Centre

12. I think it was after July that we first visited the Clement James Centre. They were providing around £100 to £200 donations. We were told to go there to get money but when we attended, they told us they had run out of money. The second time my husband and I visited a woman took us there and this time we were given £200 each and told that the money was from charity.

Al Manaar Mosque

13. At the Al Manaar Mosque the relief I received was a duvet, two pillows and a box of shower gel. We were not smart enough to go in the beginning, but some people were, they went immediately, and they benefitted from so many things. When we went it was too late and a lot of things had run out. The only hygiene essentials we received were from the Mosque and not from any of the other relief centres we visited.

Latimer Community Church

14. We received some trainers from the Latimer Community Church at the beginning. However, after that we were not allowed to enter. Residents of Grenfell Tower complained that we weren't from the Tower and shouldn't benefit from the relief. After that some people were allowed, and some people weren't. The man in charge would say that only the people that lived in the Tower were allowed in.

Relief Centres in General

15. I felt that we were not given all of the relief we needed at the centres and only some things were available to us. There were items that were offered that we needed like

shoes. We would go and ask for these and we were told that we were not allowed. The people that worked there some people were Muslims as well and they were telling us that we could not benefit from this. I can't remember which centre this was, but I think it was the Curve. I would see cars delivering things to storage near the Curve but when we would attend, they told us they didn't have anything.

16. The relief was based on first come first served and I think some of the workers would keep the stuff for their families and would not give away the shoes. The best items were taken by other people and a lot of people would come and collect. Even the secondhand items they said we were not allowed.
17. I think my son used to go outside of the area to charities to obtain clothes for us. I was weak at that time and not aware of what was going on around me.
18. We did not visit the Notting Hill Community Church or the Harrow Club.

Accommodation

19. We stayed with my daughter for about 1 month. I am aware that in my first Witness Statement I said that we stayed for a few nights but on reflection I think this was more likely to have been a month rather than a few nights. We could not stay with my daughter forever because she has children as well.
20. We received advice from the staff at Westway. My son spoke to them and they provided us with accommodation at the Millenium Hotel in Gloucester Road. It was a booking for 1 room with 3 single beds. My husband went to check the accommodation and he informed me that it was tiny and not suitable for us. We did not want to stay with our son in 3 beds together as he would be coming and going, and we would not be able to sleep. Our son stayed in the hotel and we returned to our daughter's place for another month. We were lost and overwhelmed, we didn't know where we were going, and we still feel like this now.
21. My daughter and my son were complaining to the council staff at Westway on behalf of my husband and I for us to have a place to stay. I think around 2 months after the fire

we were placed in the Kensington Hilton Shepherd's Bush. We were given a room with a bathroom, a double bed, it was a small room. We did not like it, but we tried to be patient because we had no other choice.

22. The booking at the hotel included breakfast and we would eat our breakfast at the hotel. We were given money for lunch and dinner. I can't remember exactly but I think it was £60 a day from the council. I think the food allowance was £30 a day each for me and my husband and it was paid monthly. We only received food support and no other form of support at the hotel.
23. The room at the hotel was too small so it was not suitable. When we were in the hotel, we would not spend any time in the hotel, I would spend all my time at the Curve. I would leave the hotel in the morning and return in the evening and this was my life for a year and a half. I could not stay in the hotel it was like a prison.
24. We were at the hotel for a year and a half. My husband fell over on the glass table in the hotel room, [REDACTED] This was the first time the council contacted us in person. I think someone senior from the council came and offered a flat to us to stay in for 3 months. We have been at that same flat now for a year and it is where we are currently residing.

Psychological Support

25. I did not receive any counselling from anybody, not in the hotel or not elsewhere. I have not received any psychological support especially because we do not know the language and we are illiterate so even if we see something in writing we would not be able to recognise if it was helpful to us.
26. I am not sure how long after the fire, but we had to wait for months for a key worker to be assigned to us. I was asking my children to call on our behalf to ask for a worker to be assigned. The council kept telling us to wait and be patient, but they wouldn't call us back.

27. Eventually we were assigned a key worker, but she was very tough, I did not think she was very nice or helpful. My son was complaining to her on our behalf and eventually he asked to change our key worker.
28. Our current key worker is better. She tries to help us and sort things out for us. I feel that if the previous key worker was like her then we would have been better off.

Public Communication

29. I mostly found out about relief centres or about missing people through word of mouth. I was going to the Centres and people were telling me where to go for relief, some nice people were telling me what to do sometimes. I would go and get only old clothes and they would tell me this was the leftovers.

Needs of Specific Groups

30. I did not feel my needs as an elderly Muslim woman were met. Nobody cared that I was old and a Muslim and this is what killed me. I felt that I was buried because of this and because I couldn't speak or read English. I reached a stage where I did not want to see anyone and wanted to stay by myself.
31. I think that no one cared to help because people were selfish and wanted everything for themselves, we left our house with no clothes and they kept telling us you cannot benefit because you do not have the right to because we lived on Grenfell Walk.

Red Cross

32. We were given forms to complete by the Red Cross. My son and I completed the forms and we were not given anything. We also submitted our passports and at the end we got nothing. Later, we were told that only the people that were admitted to hospital would benefit from the Red Cross relief.

RBKC/TMO

33. I was not contacted by anyone from RBKC or TMO. I did not notice RBKC or TMO co-ordinating anything at the relief centres. I even asked if they had a stall in the centres, we went there many times. Until present there has been no support, if we don't shout, complain, make a fuss nobody asks about us.

Adequacy of Response and Lessons Learned

34. I feel that the relief centres had help and the assistance that the people needed but the problem was that those that were giving the help were not the right people. I felt like we were like the vegetables on the couscous we were not the main dish we were just additional and on the side.

Fire Safety Systems

35. I refer to paragraphs 13, 14 and 16 of my first witness statement in which I describe in brief detail fire safety and using the lifts inside Grenfell Tower and I now wish to supplement these paragraphs with further detail below.

My Flat Door

36. I had to push my door to close it by myself, it would never close by itself. That was throughout my time of living at Grenfell Walk.

Fire Safety Signage

37. There was no fire safety signage anywhere on Grenfell Walk.

Emergency Lighting

38. There was no emergency lighting on the Estate that I had ever noticed.

Smoke Alarms

39. I had smoke alarms in my flat I think they were installed when the electrics were re-wired recently but before that we did not have any smoke alarms until my son installed them. My smoke alarms used to go off sometimes when I was cooking.

Fire Safety Checks

40. I never noticed any fire safety checks.

Fire Safety Advice

41. We never received any fire safety communication from RBKC or TMO.

Complaints

42. We were complaining a lot about hot water and a lack of water pressure. Sometimes there was no water pressure or hot water.
43. We also complained about the broken cupboards in our kitchen, but they refused to repair anything. My daughter would contact the TMO/RBKC on our behalf, and we asked them to repair the cupboards they said they would repair the cupboard doors, but they never did.
44. In the 70s we had a council but now we don't have any help its useless. I felt that everything was messed up. I was there for 42 years and nothing was ever changed in my flat, I had to change my bathroom myself.
45. There was no way for me to contact the TMO/RBKC as an Arabic speaker, I felt that it was useful for them that I didn't speak the language as they had an excuse not to contact me. I mostly relied on my daughters to contact the TMO/RBKC on my behalf if I had any complaints.

Statement of Truth

I confirm that the contents of this witness statement are 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: Zohra Al-Assad

Zohra Al-Assad

Date: 10/02/2020