

WITNESS STATEMENT OF IBITISAM ALFAWAZ

1. I, Ibtisam Alfawaz of [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk W11 1WD will say as follows: -
2. I make this statement because, at the time of the fire, I was a temporary resident at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk W11 1WD. Before that I lived in Barandon Walk for 2 years.
3. I witnessed the early stages of the fire spreading and the emergency response.
4. I had direct involvement with other Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk residents prior to the fire, including those who sadly passed away.
5. 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.
6. I am a Core Participant of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.
7. Some of the issues in relation to fire safety and the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire have been dealt with in my Phase 1 Witness Statement – IWS0000006.
8. I did not make an MPS statement.

MODULE 3

Fire safety systems

Flat doors at ■■■ Hurstway Walk

9. I always had issues with my front door, I could never lock it properly. I could lock the door using the first lock, but the second lock was always stuck because of the way the wooden frame was installed.
10. The wooden frame looked like it was of very low quality because it was not smoothed before it was put on the door and it looked like you would be able to get a splinter easily.
11. My landlord was the Notting Hill Housing Association and a private landlord, Richard, owned the property. This made it very difficult for me because if I had repairs that needed to be carried out, I would not know whom to complain to. I never made any complaints about my doors. This is because of the difficult complaint process that I had to go through every time I complained about anything. I was told to report any issues I had with the building to the TMO by writing a letter and dropping it off at their offices in the Tower. If I had any maintenance issues with the Housing Association, they would either send a contractor in or tell me to contact my landlord. Sometimes I would bring up issues with the TMO they would say "we are not your landlord". Therefore, if I needed any help with the flat, I would always ask my family to help.
12. There were no big gaps around the doors, only a big gap on the side of the lock.
13. I never had any new doors installed in the flat at the time of living in Hurstway Walk.
14. My door would not close by itself when I opened it, I had to make sure to close it when I would enter or leave the flat. The door was not heavy and was flimsy.
15. This is different to the flat I used to live in Barandon Walk, I remember that my front door closed by itself there. I am not sure why there were differences in fire safety in Barandon and Hurstway Walks considering they were so close to each other.
16. I do not remember if my front door had smoke seals or intumescent strips.

Communal doors at Hurstway Walk

Communal door connecting the Walkways

17. There was a communal door which connected Hurstway Walk to the outside and to the other Walkways together, this door was a self-closing door, when I opened it, the door would close by itself.
18. The communal door to the outside should always have been locked and you would normally press the green button to unlock the door when it was locked. The communal door would often stay unlocked. One month it would be locked and then for the next 6 months the door would stay open and the lock would not work.
19. This was a big problem because it would allow access to anyone who tried to enter the property. The local drug dealers would take advantage of this and try to sell drugs.
20. I do not understand why the TMO would not check the door as they were always around, and their offices were just next to the Tower.
21. I am sure that my [REDACTED] neighbour who lived upstairs from me reported this, as he would report all the issues around the building on behalf of all his neighbours in Hurstway Walk.
22. I think that on the day of the fire, the police were able to come in through the communal doors because they were unlocked.
23. I do not remember if this communal door had any smoke seals or strips.

Communal back door at Hurstway Walk

24. We also always had a problem with the communal back door, which faced the back garden. This door was always locked and sometimes the cleaner would put rubbish in front of the door. This door was a fire door, because there was green signage, but we never thought about this before the fire.
25. I remember one time, my [REDACTED] neighbour, who lived upstairs complained to the cleaner from the TMO about leaving the rubbish in front of the door. He said to me that

more of us should complain when there was a problem in the communal areas so that we would be taken seriously by the TMO.

26. I do not remember if the communal door had any smoke seals or strips.

Fire Alarms / Smoke alarms

27. The maisonette I lived in had the kitchen downstairs and the bedrooms upstairs. I had two fire alarms or smoke alarms in my flat, one in the kitchen downstairs and one in the corridor upstairs.
28. I am not sure whether they were smoke alarms or fire alarms, however I think they were fire alarms because they had a button on the bottom.
29. I never had any problems with the fire alarm/smoke alarm in the kitchen before. This was because every time I would open the oven or make any smoke in the kitchen, it would go off.
30. I realised that my fire alarm/smoke alarm was not working in the corridor upstairs, when I burnt Arabic charcoal and smoke came out and the fire alarm never went off.
31. When I went to my sister's house, I noticed that her alarm always went off, they always needed to keep the window open to stop it from going off.
32. When I called the TMO between 2013-2014 to report it they said that I probably needed to change the battery of the fire alarm myself. I received no help from RBKC with this.
33. I bought a new battery for the fire alarm and changed it. Nobody from RBKC/TMO called to see if I managed to do this correctly or inspected it after the battery change.
34. I never received any fire safety advice other than to change the battery of the fire alarm myself.

Fire Alarms/Smoke Alarms on 14 June 2017

35. I remember that I did not hear any fire alarms/smoke alarms going off from the direction of Grenfell Tower, but as soon as the smoke blew over to Grenfell Walk and some of the Walkways, I heard many more fire alarms/smoke alarms going off from there.

36. Maybe this was because the smoke reached the fire alarms/smoke alarms in those flats.

Fire safety signage in Hurstway Walk

37. I have seen some fire safety signs such as the fire exit door signage. The fire exit door in Hurstway Walk was frequently locked.
38. I never saw any other fire safety signs around Hurstway Walk.

Emergency lighting

39. We never had any lighting in the back garden, as it was always broken. This was a problem particularly in the winter because it would get dark, and my kids would always play outside with the kids from the Tower in the back garden of the Walkways. We always needed to call RBKC to fix the lights. I think my [REDACTED] neighbour from the flat above complained about this as well. They fixed the lights after a long time.

Fire safety checks/inspections

40. There was only one fire safety check since the time that I moved into the property, by Notting Hill Gate Housing Association. They only checked the gas cooker and checked if the two fire alarms/smoke detectors worked. They did not give me any information about fire safety when they came to inspect my house.
41. One day the TMO did come and check the gas, because of a gas safety check, I am not sure when this took place. I do not know of any fire safety checks or inspections that my neighbours had in the Walkways.
42. Having been moved by the RBKC thirteen times, I now realise that the fire safety in Hurstway Walk was so much worse compared to the places I have been moved to after the fire, such as Monarch House and Phillimore Gardens. I could see they had clear fire safety signs in the buildings and fire blankets. Why did the RBKC neglect the Lancaster West Estate? We pay the rent and we work. How did it get to this stage?
43. I am in contact with people who still live in the Walkways and went back into their properties and they say that living there is not the same as it used to be. As far as I know, RBKC now clean the windows; they check the fire safety and they installed new kitchens.

It feels like they are taking much more care with the properties and tenants compared to when I lived in Hurstway Walk.

Fire safety advice

- 44. I never received any fire safety advice from anyone apart from to change the battery on my fire alarm/smoke detector when I noticed that it was not working.
- 45. I was not given any information regarding fire safety when I first moved into my flat.
- 46. I was not given any information in relation to escape routes in case of emergency, but I knew the way out of the building because I lived in Hurstway Walk for a long time.
- 47. I did not know what the fire safety policy was in the building.
- 48. Fire safety advice has also been dealt with in paragraph 14 of the Phase 1 witness statement.

Fire safety complaints

- 49. I made one complaint with regards to the fire alarm or smoke detector not working to the TMO. I complained once on the phone.

MODULE 4

Clarification of my Phase 1 witness statement

50. In my Phase 1 witness statement I have set out mine and my family's experience of the night of the fire. I would like to clarify paragraph 17 in my Phase 1 statement. The background to me and my family finding out about the fire is that [REDACTED] friend [REDACTED] who lived in Grenfell Walk with Hanan and Hicham texted her.
51. My friend referred to as Fatima in my Phase 1 witness statement is called Fatma.
52. I would like to add to my Phase 1 statement that I inhaled a lot of smoke on the night and I was afraid that the building might collapse on me when the fire had spread all over the building or that a piece of cladding, insulation or other particles would fall on top of us as the way they were flying was unpredictable.
53. I was also very scared after 2am that the building would fall down on us and on my house, my sons were sleeping at home before we evacuated because of how the fire spread. This was true especially because of the policeman who shouted at us to evacuate the building.

Initial relief Centres

54. Paragraphs 56-61 of the Phase 1 witness statement deals with the initial relief provided.
55. On the second day a lot of people from the Walkways and families who did not have anywhere to go slept at the Clement James Centre. They were given breakfast.
56. I do not think that I went to any other relief centres apart from the Clement James Centre, Rugby Portobello Club and the Westway Centre.
57. I rejected any food and drink that was provided in the initial relief centres in Westway and Clement James Centre as I felt like this was meant for people who lost their clothes and belongings. I understood that this was also available to me, but I felt like it was not my right to take it.
58. The volunteers in the Clement James Centre were very lovely and supported me very much, they invited me to breakfast and lunch. They also gave out small emergency

funds in cash. A lady who works there, Hannah Starr gave me a Nando's voucher even though I kept refusing it. They kept saying it is your right for you and your kids. They also gave us tickets for the memorial in St Paul's cathedral.

59. I had a lot of family support, especially through my sister and who brought food to the hotel when I would break fast.

Thistle hotel

60. Alison, who used to be my [REDACTED] teacher before the fire and who volunteered at the Clement James Centre contacted a housing officer from RBKC and she told me to go to Thistle Hyde Park, where I stayed for two months with my five children. I picked up the kids from my sister. I was not given a choice as to which hotel to go to, I was just told to go to Thistle.
61. We had a two-bedroom connecting room. It was okay. I stayed there until September 2017. The location of the hotel was convenient, it was in a central area and had many places to eat nearby. The keyworker had arranged for my children to be able to get picked up by a taxi and taken home from school.
62. I only ever had breakfasts at the Thistle hotel. The receptionist told us that this was a bed and breakfast, which is how I found out that I was entitled to breakfast. It was a buffet breakfast.
63. My children did not want to go down to have breakfast because the other people staying in the hotel would always look at them for wearing their school uniform. Some people would even come up to them and ask them why they are wearing school uniform and why they lived in the hotel. This would make my children very uncomfortable and they did not want to go down to have breakfast and be looked at. Because of this I asked if the hotel could bring the breakfast up to our room, but they said that there would be an additional charge for this. We did not pay extra for them to bring it up to the room. This is why my children did not like to eat breakfast at the hotel.
64. I would have lunches and dinners with my family, they would bring us food, or we would order food from restaurants.

65. My keyworker told me after three weeks of being in the hotel that we could buy food from the hotel outside of breakfast food. RBKC put me up in the hotel and that was it, they did not make effort to explain anything to me.
66. Since the fire, and as a result of living in the hotel for a long time, my children are used to eating in the bed and having takeaways.
67. The keyworker told me that the booking in the hotel was going to be extended. Any information was provided to me by my friends who were members of the community, Alison or my keyworker. I did not like to talk to RBKC because I felt like talking to them would make me feel more depressed than I already was.
68. I know more than five people from the community lived with me in Thistle.
69. Me and my kids made the decision to not go back into Hurstway Walk, because we were all scared to go back, it was not safe, and I returned my key. People made their own decisions to go back to Hurstway Walk. From my recollection RBKC did not tell me it is safe to return.

Evacuation from Thistle Hotel

70. Not long after the fire either in July or August 2017, we were evacuated from the hotel due to a fire alarm going off. The hotel had a list of people who were staying there and were trying to make sure everyone was evacuated.
71. The fire brigade was called, and they went into the hotel. After checking the building, they came out and said that it was nothing and that we could go back in. It was terrifying because it triggered the memories of the night of the fire, everyone in the hotel was evacuated. The sound of a fire alarm triggers me to this day.

Provision of food and essentials

72. There was no halal food in Thistle, which was important to me as a Muslim, so we would eat fish and vegetable dishes. I did not order food that much, more often me and the kids would get food from the outside.

73. My sister brought me shampoos and toothbrush and toothpaste. We did not like the shampoo provided by the hotel.
74. I used the laundry service one or two times in the hotel, especially for my kids' uniforms. This was very expensive, and I ended up having to find a laundry service outside of the hotel or give my laundry to my sister.
75. I was told by Alison that I was one of the first families from the Walkways to be put into temporary accommodation after two months in the Thistle hotel. I was horrified at the hotel bills and thought this should be paid to schools and hospitals.
76. As a result of eating out every day I gained a lot of weight, which also impacted on my mental health.

Financial assistance

77. My friend Farah told me that I was entitled to £500 from the Westway. After two or three weeks I accepted £5000 from the Rugby Club.
78. I appreciate that the inquiry have specifically asked that in my statement I give details about the support that was provided in the 7 day aftermath but I wanted to expand on that because the impact particularly in relation to how the food and financial provision evolved because the period after that reflects how I was treated by RBKC. Later on, so after the fire, RBKC started to give us money for food to eat out, which my keyworker told me about, this was £2000 in the beginning. She gave this to me on a card. RBKC would put the money on there.
79. As soon as I was rehoused from a hotel to temporary accommodation at Queens Gate Mews, Westminster in September 2017, RBKC stopped giving me money for food because they said I now have a kitchen and can cook food for myself.
80. Around the 23rd October 2019 we moved to Park Grand Hotel Westminster because of the damp, the leaks and the mice infestation at Queens Gate Mews. Alison told my keyworker that now that we have moved from a house to a hotel I should be entitled to get money for food. When Alison raised it they started to make food payments, but I think if she did not tell them that I was moved, they would have not given me the allowance for food.

81. I used to work in TK Max as a Sales Assistant. I met my boss after the fire, I cannot remember when exactly, but it was still when I was in the Thistle hotel. When he came to meet me, I told him that I will not be back for a while but do not pay me. I spoke about this situation to Alison and she told me it is my legal right to be paid for sick leave if I provide them with a sick note. RBKC or TMO did not provide me with any help or advice with regards to my situation at work.
82. They paid me paid sick leave for 6 months. I did not like this as I felt like I should have been paid for working. After the initial 6 months they started calling me to ask if I was coming back. I quit the job because I felt I could not take care of my kids at the same time as working, [REDACTED]
83. They said they cannot keep my position for me for more than 6 months, but they were happy to have me come back to work when I am ready. One day I would like to go back to my job.

Psychological Support

84. RBKC never provided me with any psychological support. I did not trust them anyway because of how they treated me. Alison always dealt with them on my behalf.
85. I was unaware that Hestia was present at the initial relief centres, nobody told me about them or how to get psychological support, I went to the GP out of my own initiative.
86. I started counselling with Christie Coho from NHS Grenfell in July 2017, it was called talking therapy at the time.
87. I did not receive any psychological support, apart from my first keyworker, Alison and my family and friends from the community.
88. I got my first keyworker around 10 days after the fire, her name was Elena Pulze. She was a nice lady, she would help me and tell me what I need and what I am entitled to and would talk to my kids. She even helped me buy a school uniform for my kids.
89. I had a big argument with RBKC because they took her away around 19th December 2017 as her position had changed from a key worker to a social worker. Me and my kids cried, we were very attached to her and it was a very sad day.

90. Later on, we got a different key worker and I did not like her at all because she did not do her job properly. She did not help me at all with the kids and did not give me the information that I needed.
91. I did not have a choice about this. I felt like RBKC should have asked us what we needed, and they did not do that. I am not normally a fussy person.
92. Since the fire, I have had 5 key workers.

Information and assistance

93. I asked my keyworker and a lot of people in the community and volunteers in the relief centres about who the survivors were. Nobody had any certain information about this.
94. Me and my daughter asked the British Red Cross, they were in Westway and later in the Curve. They gave us a number and permission to go to Westway because it was not for everyone to enter. We also wanted to know who the survivors were, but we were being told mixed information.
95. We were asking especially about Jessica Ramirez, my daughter's friend who lived in flat 176 on the 20th floor and Nur Huda El-Wahabi, who lived on 21st floor. At first, they said they said she was alive, but later on we would find out both girls passed away in the fire.

Public Communication

96. I did not see any leaflets or telephone helplines about any support that was available. Even when I went to the community, I did not see anything afterwards.
97. When I went to the Clements James Centre and Westway, I did not see anyone handing out any leaflets.
98. I did not see any telephone helpline numbers or leaflets about any services or support that was available.

99. Karima from Testerton Walk added me to a WhatsApp Group on 7th July 2017. I feel like RBKC did not like that we were united as a community. We shared information about meetings.

Needs of specific groups

100. I saw that in the Clement James Centre and Westway they had sitters for the children and they also provided essentials for kids, for example nappies.
101. I felt like my needs as a Muslim were not met as the hotel did not provide us with any halal food.
102. I did not feel like RBKC addressed the needs of other specific groups, I did not see how they would support individuals with disabilities and different faith and ethnic groups.

Adequacy of response

103. Many lessons need to be learnt. My kids are now worried every time they go to a new place how they would escape a building in case of a fire.
104. I feel like RBKC needed to be more organised in providing the help. If nobody knew not to go to Westway and the relief centres, then RBKC would have left us. They were not pro-active, and it seemed like they did not know what they were doing.

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: 

Dated: 14/02/20