

THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF SABAH ABDULLAH

I, Sabah Abdullah, former resident of Flat 143 Grenfell Tower London, W11 1TQ, WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:

1. I make this statement to provide evidence to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry on matters relevant to module 3 (fire safety measures) and module 4 (aftermath) as specified in the document entitled 'List of Issues for BSR phase 2 witness statements'. The statements I make are from my own knowledge or belief unless otherwise stated. If not from my own knowledge I will identify the source.
2. I have not previously made a statement to the Inquiry.
3. I first address fire safety measures before turning to address the aftermath of the fire.

Fire Safety Systems

4. In 1989 I moved into Flat 143, at the time this was on the fourteenth floor of Grenfell Tower. After the refurbishment, this became the seventeenth floor. I lived in Flat 143 with my wife, Khadija Khalloufi, who died in the fire. During our residence at Grenfell Tower we experienced some difficulties which concern fire safety systems. I address some of these below.

Lifts

5. I remember that sometimes the lifts would not work. There were two lifts in the Tower and so if one of them was not working, it was not really a problem. Occasionally both lifts would not work for a couple of days. This did not generally cause any difficulties for my wife and myself, because we could use the stairs, but it was problematic if we had heavy shopping, for example.
6. My solicitor has shown me a document from my housing file, which records that I made a complaint to the TMO about both lifts not working on 30 September 2016. I exhibit this complaint (SA/1:). I do not remember getting a response. But my impression is that generally the TMO did nothing to help us when we raised complaints. I feel that they were just involved to make money out of us.
7. For me, the most important issue in relation to the lifts is that they should not have been working on the night of the fire, they should have been disabled. I always knew that it was very dangerous for people to use a lift in a fire; this is common sense. I am angry that the lifts were not disabled on the night of the fire. This is something I will never understand.

Windows

8. I remember that after the windows had been replaced following the refurbishment, the windows in our flat were very draughty. I think the windows in my flat were better before the refurbishment. I remember that after the refurbishment the wind would come through the windows and we would try to stop this by covering the gaps with old clothes or something. I also remember that the workmanship on the windows was bad and we had to try to cover the mistakes made. My wife did this, she was very practical. I don't remember exactly what she did. I also know that we had to redecorate around the windows and we had to change the blinds.

Fire safety signage

9. I don't remember anything about the fire safety signage. This was not something I thought about before the fire. No one, such as the TMO or the council, had made me aware of any notices about fire. I think they should have done.

Smoke control or ventilation system

10. I didn't know much about the smoke control or smoke ventilation system. It wasn't something I was really aware of or thought about. I think that the TMO should have made me aware of this so that I understood what this was for and how it should have worked to protect me.

Fire safety checks/inspections

11. I remember that the fire alarms in our flat were checked. I don't remember ever seeing any fire safety checks or inspections otherwise. I don't remember anyone checking the plugs in our property or checking our front door. I think that the TMO would have avoided any costs related to proper fire safety checks.

Fire safety advice

12. During the refurbishment I remember receiving updates about the progress of the work. I don't remember reading information about the fire risks. At the time it didn't occur to me that the cladding would be a fire risk. I assumed that the proper checks would be carried out. I thought this would be standard procedure.
13. I just knew that if there was a fire we should get out. I don't remember being told about the stay put advice.

Aftermath

Immediate assistance

14. When I first left the Tower, I remember that I was directed to the Portobello Rugby Club. I was so worried about my wife. I wanted to go back into the Tower to look for her, but the police officers would not let me.

15. I remember that people in the Portobello Rugby Club were very kind to me. I had injured my foot when leaving the Tower. The people in the Rugby Club offered me food and they helped me by looking for my wife. I was then taken to a pub for medical treatment. I do not like going to pubs and I didn't want to go there at first. I do remember that I was treated very well there. But mainly I was so worried about my wife and I didn't know where she was or where to look for her. I didn't know who to ask about my wife or who could help me find her.

Information about my wife

16. On the 14 June 2017 I was placed in a hotel in Earls Court. I was still so worried about my wife. I remember speaking to members of the press in case they could help me to find her. I remember going to the hospitals to look for my wife. I didn't know how to get support from anyone official or where to go to find out about my wife. I would not wish this situation on my worst enemy. I could not think about anything other than finding my wife.

17. I remember that Rachel, my family liaison officer at the time, told me that my wife's body had been found. I think this was on or around 17 June 2017. Because I had not found my wife I had been expecting this news, but it was still a terrible shock.

Accommodation

18. After the first hotel I was offered sheltered accommodation in an old people's home. No one consulted me to find out if I would be happy to go to sheltered accommodation. I just received a phone call from someone telling me that they had found me somewhere to stay and when I went there I realised that it was a care home. I was not happy about this and I felt lonely in this accommodation. I felt that my freedom and independence were restricted
19. After this I was moved to the Hilton Olympia hotel with my son and from there I moved to 91 Tavistock Crescent and later to my current address.
20. Throughout this time I was distressed by my wife's death, by having lost my home and by not having my possessions. I can't describe how terrible it was or how lost I felt.

Psychological support

21. I have received some counselling. I have suffered trauma and psychological harm as a result of the fire and I continue to suffer. I cannot understand how I can ever fully confront the terrible events on the night of the fire.

Information and assistance

22. I found it hard to access information after the fire. At this time I was out of my mind with sorrow. My wife had gone and I wanted to join her. I did not know where to turn for help.

23. I knew that I had to return my wife's body to [REDACTED] for her funeral. I didn't have a passport or my driving licence as both had been lost in the fire. I felt that the only people who could help me were the press. I spoke to the BBC about my passport. I had been told, I think by someone from RBKC, that it would not be possible for me to obtain a passport immediately. However the BBC contacted the Home Office and I was then told that I could attend the passport office and collect my passport. I think it is only because of the intervention of the BBC that I was able to get a passport quickly.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I confirm that I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.

Signed:.....

Dated:.....11.02.2020.....