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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF DIEGO ORTIZ**

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1. I, Diego Ortiz 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. I am a Core Participant of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.
4. At the time of the Grenfell Tower fire on 14 June 2017, I was a resident at [REDACTED] Grenfell Walk and lived there for approximately one year. I lived there with my partner, Marlyn Lopez and my daughters, [REDACTED] and Marlyn's mother, Esperanza Lopez.
5. Even though I had lived in Grenfell Walk for a year, I have been in an [REDACTED] relationship with Marlyn Lopez for 10 years, so I was very familiar with the community and the Lancaster West estate.
6. I was at home with the family on the night of the fire and having been evacuated, I witnessed the early stages of the fire spreading and the emergency response.
7. In this statement I have specifically addressed what the Inquiry has asked me to address, namely Modules 3 and 4.
8. I did not give a statement in Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.
9. I did not give a statement to the MPS.

## **MODULE 3**

### **Fire safety systems**

#### Flat door

10. I knew about refurbishments that were done to many of the Grenfell Walk flats around 2015. There were new doors, new windows and kitchens installed. Esperanza was living in one of the only flats who did not have this refurbishment done.
11. The doors on the bedrooms were thin and hollow, you could punch through them. There was no sound proofing either.
12. There were no gaps between the doors from what I can remember. There was a self-closing mechanism on the flat door so they would close by themselves.
13. We had a problem with the front door, if we wanted to lock the house, we would have to lock it from the outside, even when they were slammed shut. There was only one lock and one key. You could never get locked out.
14. There were no smoke seals or intumescent strips on the door as far as I can remember.

#### Communal doors

15. We did not have to use a communal door, we usually just walked up the steps in through the front door.
16. The other communal doors in the building were heavy with glass in the middle and needed a fob to get in.

#### Emergency lighting

17. I remember that the lighting in the corridor and on the stairs would not work all the time. On occasion there would be no light.

18. I did not complain about this and I do not know of anyone complaining about this. I just wondered why it would not work. I thought it might be because of an electrical fault.

#### Fire alarms/Smoke alarms

19. We had two battery operated fire alarms, one in the kitchen upstairs and one downstairs in the little hallway outside the bedrooms.
20. I knew they were fire alarms because they were round with a button on the bottom that you could press to test it.
21. I do not think we had any smoke alarms because the two fire alarms looked the same.
22. We had to test them when something is burning. When cooking it would go off. It was down to us to make sure they were working; we would test both of the alarms and believe they worked.
23. RBKC or TMO did not come to check whether the alarms were working.

#### Fire safety signage

24. I did not pay particular attention to fire safety signage, but I had no knowledge of any fire safety signage in Grenfell Walk or in or around Grenfell Tower. I do not recall seeing any.
25. There was nothing to tell us where to go in a fire, only signs which showed the location of particular numbered flats, and signage in relation to how to get up and down the stairs. It did not tell us where to go in the event of a fire.
26. I suppose they should have had some during the refurbishment of the tower, but I have no knowledge of that.

### Fire safety checks/inspections

27. I cannot recall any fire safety checks or inspections, this is something Esperanza, Marlyn's mother would be more aware of as I was at work during the day.

### Fire safety advice

28. I was not given any advice. I cannot recall any letters being sent to us or any information about advice provided.

### Fire safety complaints

29. I did not ever think to complain about this to TMO or RBKC. There was no particular reason to complain.
30. In case of a fire, I would use my common sense to exit the building, I would turn to the right after I exited the front door and then right again to exit the Walk.
31. The stairs were very narrow and dirty, there was a regular smell of urine. I believe it would be difficult if many people would try and use those stairs at the same time in an event of a fire.
32. The other exit was to go out via the ramp to Latimer Road station, but this was a dangerous exit option because it is completely exposed and on the night of the fire if you had escaped the fire that way you were at risk of being injured from all the debris that was falling from the tower.
33. I heard someone say on the night of the fire about how important it was to switch the gas off to ensure there was no gas explosion. I remember seeing gas vans on standby. I remember it said 'Gas Safe' on their vans. The utilities were interconnected between the tower and the walkways, so I was worried something might happen.

## **MODULE 4**

### **Initial relief Centres**

34. After being evacuated on the night of the fire we found out that we would not be coming back to Grenfell Walk. The fire brigade said that to the whole family.
35. We witnessed our neighbours and friends, people complaining about not being able to get their medication and belongings and baby essentials as left in their Grenfell Walk flats.
36. A day or two after the fire we were allowed to go into Grenfell Walk for 10 minutes to pick up medication, glasses and a few clothes.
37. An hour or so after the fire was put out, I do not recall the exact time, me Marlyn and our daughters were put in Clement James Centre to stay there overnight. We saw everyone who did not have a home go into the Clement James Centre, so we followed. We were wandering outside at first and were told to stay there overnight.
38. The only people who we saw after the fire that were helping were the locals. I saw shop owners, who were providing water. Others were donating clothes.
39. We only went to the Clement James Centre and Westway, we did not visit any other relief centres.

### **Placements in hotels**

40. I remember that Marlyn was making phone calls to find out what we needed to do. The locals were telling us who we needed to call at the time. We only found out from Marlyn calling who the locals told us to call, nobody from RBKC reached out to us.

### Travelodge – Wandsworth

41. At first, after approximately two days we were placed in a bed and breakfast, Travelodge. – I think it was in Wandsworth- for two weeks. It was miles away from the girls' school and from the community. We had just one room with two double beds for



me, Marlyn and the kids. We complained to the council that this was too far from the community.

42. We asked the reception what will happen, and they said only breakfast is included and that there is no restaurant in the hotel. We thought this was not healthy for the girls.
43. The whole time at the Travelodge we ate junk food. We got some emergency cash advances from Westway and the Rugby Club, which just about covered our needs.
44. We decided that girls would go back to school. We wanted to maintain as much normality for the girls as we possibly could.
45. RBKC tried to provide the cab service for us but it was not efficient because the cabs would never come on time, so I drove them to and picked them up from [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Primary school every day, but we were late every day because the bed and breakfast was far from Wandsworth. The headteacher was very understanding about this situation, because it was unforeseen.
46. Between dropping the girls off to school, I had to go back to Westway to find out more information about what is going to happen next and about the housing situation. I also picked up some food.

#### Aber Hotel Grosvenor

47. After two weeks we were placed in a proper hotel in Victoria.
48. We got there together with Esperanza, Marlyn's mother who lived with us in [REDACTED] Grenfell Walk.
49. We had a room for me, Marlyn and the kids and Esperanza had her own room. We stayed there for about 8 to 12 weeks.
50. We were entitled to breakfast and dinner at the hotel.

51. There was a lot of discrimination in this hotel, because there was a budget for our food. We had a special menu with four different meals that we could choose from, and we could not order from the main menu. I said to the hotel staff that we cannot be eating the same thing every day.
52. The hotel workers were not very nice and were always looking at us like we do not belong in that hotel.
53. I felt like a refugee there.
54. Ultimately, we had to have a negotiation with the hotel, because we were sick of eating the same things every day. The management in the hotel were very nasty and collectively us Grenfell survivors made a big complaint because we felt we were treated like second class citizens.
55. For example, there was a Chinese restaurant in the hotel, but hotel staff said we were not entitled to eat there.

#### Gloucester Millennium Hotel

56. After 8 to 12 weeks we were placed in the Gloucester Millennium Hotel. We stayed there until August 2018 when they kicked me out.
57. I agreed that I would move from the hotel after Marlyn and the girls would come back from holiday, and they said they will give me time to move everything. Instead, after coming back home one day I found out that they had entered the hotel room without my prior knowledge or permission and took all my belongings and in effect forced me to move out, even though I understood that I could take my time to move out of the hotel. When I asked them to give me my belongings, they would not tell me whether they were, and I had to wait for the following week to have them delivered to Marlyn's place.

58. We had one room which was meant for two beds, they supplied a spare bed instead of giving us a family suite. They put us into a smaller double room with one double bed and two singles, which felt like we were crammed in with little space.

#### Financial support

59. As a family we received emergency cash advances from Westway and the Rugby Club. This was easy to access if you went into Westway or the Rugby Club. Marlyn was the one who mostly dealt with this.
60. I did not receive any financial support from the Council for 6 weeks.
61. We did not want to make a fuss, so we did not ask for any help. I relied mostly on sick pay from my workplace, the Army & Navy club.

#### Clothes

62. It was just the community providing help and support mainly water and people donated clothes. I picked up what I could from the donations, in terms of clothing, as many people were donating jackets and jumpers.
63. Communication was sporadic and limited in terms of what was available. For example, we did not know about the Adidas trucks which supplied clothing and footwear.
64. The key worker was not aware of where everything was and what was being offered and therefore didn't tell us. I got the impression that the key workers were there to talk about the accommodation not about the everyday stuff.
65. We bought personal hygiene essentials ourselves. I do not think I saw them in Westway or in the Clement James Centre.



## **Psychological Support**

66. I was not offered any counselling by the Council, even though I was going through so much.
67. I heard through the community that we could go to the GP to see a psychologist which is what I eventually did. Otherwise I can't recall that it was offered to me. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I did not find her that helpful.
68. I did not know about Hestia, the mental health support team and about the service that they offered.
69. A few days after the fire we were provided with a keyworker. The keyworker only provided properties for us, but they were not appropriate. The property in Ladbroke Grove that was offered to us was problematic. We moved our things there but did not eventually move to the property because there was no hot water and it was infested. I do not think that the keyworker was helpful enough.

## **Information and assistance**

70. We tried to obtain information, about the missing people and the deceased but mostly from the community. I cannot remember if I talked to the British Red Cross.

## **Public Communication**

71. Our neighbours were the most helpful. I heard everything through word of mouth. I saw them in the street, and they would say "you need to make sure to go here or there". The wider community also offered help to stay in their homes or shower there.
72. If I needed to find out anything I would speak to the community or go to the Curve.
73. I did not use the RBKC website and did not see any leaflets or newspapers.

74. The only leaflets I ever saw were very recent, which advertised Grenfell support, but when we needed help the most, they were non-existent.

75. I did not see any telephone helpline numbers advertised.

### **Needs of specific groups**

76. My mother in law's English was and remains very limited. I felt like not enough information was provided to her. It felt like they took advantage about people who did not speak good English because they did not look out for you and give you what you need.

### **Adequacy of response**

77. I don't know why the council did not have a dedicated team with resources in case of an emergency, it could have been handled a lot differently.

78. I think RBKC should have had more resources for emergencies and not provide places that are unsuitable.

### **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: 13/02/2020