

**Witness Statement of: Omar Alhaj Ali**

**No. of statement: 3**

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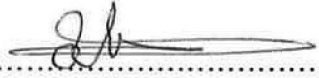
## **GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF OMAR ALHAJ ALI**

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This statement is a factual statement prepared for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry dealing with modules 3 and 4 in Phase 2 only. It does not, and is not intended to set out my experiences on the night of the fire or the impact that these events and the aftermath have had on me (and my family).

Signed  .....

I, **OMAR ALHAJ ALI**, will say as follows:

1. I was a resident of Grenfell Tower. I am a survivor of the fire that started on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017. My brother, Mohammad Alhajali, died as a result of the fire. I am making this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.
2. I made two statements in Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry (reference IWS00000781 dated 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018 and IWS00001052 dated 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018). For the purpose of this statement, I refer to my 'Phase 1 Statement' meaning the statement dated 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018.
3. I made two statement to the Metropolitan Police dated 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2017 and 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018.

4. This statement addresses the issues within module 3 (fire safety within the Tower and communication with residents) and module 4 (aftermath) from the Inquiry's stated Phase 2 schedule. I deal with issues relating to module 3 in paragraphs 5-34, and module 4 in paragraphs 35-140. I reserve the right to make a further statement in relation to Module 8 (the deceased).

#### Life in Grenfell Tower

5. In paragraph 1 of my Phase 1 Statement, I explained Mohammad's background and mine. We were both born in Syria and came to the UK in 2014 following the conflict in Syria. Mohammad and I first lived outside of London, in Halifax, and moved to London in the spring of 2015. My youngest brother Hashem was living in London since 2014. Mahmoud Al-Karad had also fled to the UK. Mohammad and I had been friends with Mahmoud since school in Syria. We decided to rent a flat together in London.
6. Within paragraph 2 of my Phase 1 Statement, I explained that we started living in Flat 112 Grenfell Tower in the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2016. We found the flat on Zoopla and saw pictures of it before we moved in. The flat was really nice. It was fully furnished. We liked the view from the 14<sup>th</sup> Floor. You could see right out across central London from our flat.
7. We rented the flat from Mr Mohammad Azab. Mohammad and I were the point of contact with the landlord, although Mohammad would speak to him more than I would. The tenancy was in all three our names. I do not remember receiving any other paper work than our tenancy agreement when we moved in. When we first moved in, we did not know that the block was owned by RBKC. The only contact I remember having with RBKC at this time was to pay the council tax.

#### Flat 112

8. Within paragraph 7 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I describe Flat 112 Grenfell Tower. It was a two bedroom flat with an open plan kitchen, dining and living area. It had been fully refurbished before we moved in. I exhibited a floor plan of the flat to my first witness statement (reference – IWS00000780).

9. Within paragraph 8 of my statement, I describe my neighbours on Floor 14. We knew our neighbours and were friendly when we saw them before the fire. I would say hi to them if I saw them around the Tower.

#### Health before the Fire

10. Before the fire, Mohammad and I were both in good health. We were happy living on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of Grenfell Tower and had no issues with using the stairs if the lifts were not working.

#### Refurbishment

11. I did not know any details of the refurbishment before I moved into Grenfell Tower. We moved in September 2016 after the works were completed. One of my friends lived nearby to Grenfell and told me that it had been refurbished recently. I thought this would have been a good thing. I thought the Tower looked like a nice new, building from the outside.
12. Our landlord had recently refurbished the interior of the flat himself, and the flat was really nice. After we moved in, we noticed issues in the Tower and Mohammad, Mahmoud and I discussed this. We noticed that the cleaning service was not very good as there was always rubbish in the stairwells and in the lifts.

#### Doors

13. I described in paragraph 4 of my phase one statement how a worker did work to our front door a couple of months after we moved in. This would have been around December 2016 or January 2017.
14. We did not complain about the door. Mr Azab informed us that work needed to be done to the door to make it close by itself. He booked the appointment himself for someone to come and look at it. It took a long time from when Mr Azab told us it needed to have work done and the door actually being fixed.

15. I remember a woman came from the Council to look at the door and check whether it closed by itself. After this, workers came to fix the door. I do not know where these workers were from; at the time I thought it was a private company.
16. The workers fitted a metal bracket to the top of the front door. I think this was meant to make the door shut automatically. The door did close automatically at first and would close behind you. After a while, the door did not do this and you would have to push the door to close it.
17. We did not have any issues with the door apart from this.

#### Windows

18. I described some details about the windows in paragraph 3 of my first witness statement. The windows in our flat were thick, good windows. They blocked a lot of noise from outside. However, we had a problem with two of the windows.
19. When we first moved in, the weather was warm. As it was not windy, we did not notice any gaps or breezes. As it turned to winter, we started to notice the two windows on the northeast side of the flat had air coming through this. This was the window in the kitchen and one in the living room. This might have been about November or December time. There were gaps around the outside of the window that meant air came through even if the windows were closed. The gap was in the frame of the windows – on the left side if you are standing opposite the window.
20. We reported the problem with the windows to Mr Azab. He told us at the time that he did not have to pay for this to be fixed, and I think he said the Council would have to do the work on the windows. Mr Azab must have reported this on for us. Mohammad spoke to someone in the office downstairs about this too. This was the office at the bottom of Grenfell Tower. He told me he went down to speak to them two times, I think.
21. My recollection is that it took a long time for the gaps in the windows to be fixed. I got the impression that the workers who eventually came were from the Council. The



problem was not fixed completely. Less air came in and the gap was smaller, but it was still there. It seemed like a temporary fix. We spoke to Mr Azab about this, and he told us to speak to the office downstairs, which we did. The issue was never fully resolved before the fire happened.

### Lifts

22. The lifts in Grenfell Tower would break down often, meaning we would have to use the stairs to get to the 14<sup>th</sup> floor. I remember many times where the lift was not working. Sometimes both lifts would not be working, or sometimes it would be one of the lifts which was not working. It would take a maximum of three days for the lifts to be fixed, but it would not take long before the lifts broke down again.

### Gas Issues

23. Within paragraphs 5 and 6 of my Phase 1 witness statement, I explained the issues we had with our gas supply. After we moved in, in October 2016, I remember there was a gas leak so gas to our corner of the Tower was turned off.
24. We were informed of this gas leak either by Mr Azab or the gas company. I cannot remember who now. To start with, we were just told it was a leak that would stop gas going to the flats on our corner of the building. We were not told how long it would take to be fixed. The gas leak meant the cooker in our flat did not work for 8 months. The oven was electric so this still worked.
25. We would call the gas company every two days to check what was happening with the gas. Mr Azab would call for us as well. They eventually told us it would take a long time to be fixed. During this time, we brought our own small replacement electric cooker. Mr Azab provided us with a gas replacement cooker.
26. I remember people from the gas company coming to check the flat about a month before the fire, in May 2017. They told us at this time they would need to check the external pipes. I was then told that the pipes in the building could not be fixed and instead they would fix new pipes inside the flat. They were unable to put these new pipes in the wall;

I was told this was because it would cause damage to the building. They instead put the pipes externally on the walls of the flat.

27. These new gas pipes came from the communal area above the front door, along the corridor and into the kitchen. In the communal area, they were on the wall between our flat and Flat 111. I was shocked and surprised at the how the gas pipes would be put on the outside of the walls, and Mr Azab was not happy about it. To me, they looked unsafe and exposed. Mr Azab suggested putting a wooden box up to covered the pipes. Workers did this and I felt a little better when these pipes were covered. But, I did not feel 100% safe as the box did not cover the pipe by the door and the pipes in the communal area remained uncovered.

28. After pipes were fitted, we were told we could not use the gas until a gas metre was fitted. The metre was due to be fitted on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The gas was never switched back on again whilst we lived there.

#### Fire Safety Signage

29. I explained in paragraph 9 of my Phase 1 Statement that I never saw any notices about fire safety measures in Grenfell Tower. There was a green fire exit sign by the staircase; however, due to the smoke on the night of fire I could not see this.

#### Smoke Alarms

30. In paragraph 11 of my Phase 1 Statement, I explained there was a smoke alarm in our flat hallway between the bathroom and my bedroom. It was put in two or three days before the fire. I am not sure who put it in or where it came from. It was working after it was installed. We were not told about checking that the smoke alarm was working.

31. I do not remember there being smoke alarms in the communal area. As far as I was aware, there was no other way of notifying residents in Grenfell Tower that there was a fire.

### Fire Safety Advice and Evacuation

32. In paragraph 10 of my phase 1 statement, I explained how we were never given any specific fire safety instructions or paperwork about what to do in an emergency or if there was a fire in Grenfell Tower. The paperwork I received when I moved into the flat contained a lot of detail but I do not remember anything about fire safety or health and safety. No one, including RBKC or our landlord, told us what to do in the event of a fire. I did not know the policy in Grenfell Tower was 'Stay Put'.
33. I was not at all aware of any fire safety checks in Grenfell Tower.
34. Before the fire, I did not give much thought to what I would do if there was fire. I did not really consider anything like what we would do in a fire or our evacuation route. Fire Safety was not at the front of my mind and I had never lived in a Tower block before. We did not make any complaints about fire safety. We were not aware of what fire safety measures we should have, and what we did not have.

### Module 4

14 June 2017

35. On 14 June 2017, Mohammad and I were in Flat 112 in Grenfell Tower. I survived the fire and exited the Tower at 02:45:02. My brother Mohammad died as a result of the fire at Grenfell. I do not wish to repeat the events of the night in this statement – I provided details about this in paragraphs 12 to 42 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement and in my oral evidence to the Inquiry on the 16 October 2018.
36. After I exited the building, I stayed next to the Tower at first, for around 20 minutes. I was then moved to an area for medical treatment. It was a tapped off area which was beyond the ramp on the south west side of the Tower. No one was allowed to come into this area. I was not sure how long I was there for in total, it may have been about 45 minutes.
37. I was told not to lie back and to keep sitting up, but I kept feeling like I wanted to lie back. I was coughing and my breathing was not good – I was struggling to breathe and



get oxygen into my lungs. After a while, I was given an oxygen mask but I remember that this made me feel worse. I felt that I did not inhale much oxygen or air from this mask. The medical people told me to use the mask two or three times. Someone also kept giving me water, but I don't know who this was. As far as I can remember, no one checked me for any other physical injuries in this area. I do not recall being given any medical advice, aside from being told not lie back. Someone came up to me and asked me why I was there. I told him that I had been inside the Tower and he told me to stay there. There was uncertainty as to who was from the Tower and who was not. I did not have to give my flat number to anyone.

38. I remember looking back at Grenfell Tower when I was in this cordoned off area. I wanted to go back to the Tower, but I was stopped many times. I was extremely upset. I did not know what to do, whether to stand up or sit down. I was panicked and didn't know how to respond. I was just moving around; I tried to run back to the Tower but the police stopped me every time. It was exhausting and impossibly emotional trying work out how to respond to knowing that my brother was trapped. I was thinking that I should do something but I couldn't. I didn't know what to do.

39. I don't know who called the ambulance. Someone, either the police or ambulance staff, told me that I had to go with them and I went into the ambulance. I felt like I had lost my mind. I was exhausted and devastated. I couldn't handle thinking anymore. I was feeling too much. Watching the fire get closer to the flat we were in over time was too much. I had no energy to do anything else, I went with them. My friend Farah Alfarhan came with me in the ambulance. Everyone else wanted to stay to search for Mohammad.

40. I do not remember any details about what treatment I received in the ambulance, but the London Ambulance Service records (Reference – LAS000000113) say that I was suffering from smoke inhalation, vomiting and dizziness. It was as if I was not completely awake and I was not really taking in what was going on around me. I know from my London Ambulance Records that I was taken in an ambulance to Kings College hospital at 04:26. I arrived at the hospital at 04:45.

41. When the ambulance arrived at the hospital, I was put on a trolley and taken out of the ambulance. I tried to hold my phone and call Mohammad but my phone would not



connect in the hospital. Many doctors in the entrance to the hospital were looking over me. I kept checking my phone and was trying to make calls, but I lost the signal when I was in the hospital. I think they initially put me in a room by myself and checked me. I had really bad pain in my throat and chest. I don't remember Farah being with me while I was being assessed by the doctors.

42. I do not remember what medication I received in hospital but my hospital records say that I was given paracetamol, an oxygen saline drip, and Ketorolac.

43. I was coughing all the time and I felt like I wanted to vomit. I was finding it difficult to breathe, and I had pains in my chest. They gave me something to cough into and I kept coughing up black phlegm.

44. In the room, a doctor or someone from the mental health team came back to check on me after some time. They came to talk to me and asked me what happened. I told him and started crying, and he started crying with me for a long time – nearly half an hour. It was very hard. He said to me that I should pray for Mohammed.

45. I don't remember many details about what happened when I was in hospital. Around early morning time, I tried to make a lot of phone calls, but I don't remember speaking to anyone. I think this might have been because there was a bad connection on my phone. I don't think I slept properly. My memory of this period is not very good.

46. Relatively early in the morning, Farah came to speak to me, to update me with information. I was told that they were still searching for Mohammad. My aunt, Reem, came from Scotland to see me in the morning or afternoon.

47. I did not really eat in hospital. I had no appetite and did not feel like eating. My aunt brought me some fruit and told me that I had to eat.

48. I think that late on the 14<sup>th</sup> June, Farah told me that Mohammad had died. Farah told me that she had received a photograph. I later found out that photographs of Mohammed as he was lying on the ground had been put up on social media. Hospital records say that she took my phone off me because she was worried I would see pictures of

Mohammed on Facebook and other social media. When I first heard from Farah that Mohammed was dead, I was in shock and couldn't speak for a long time.

49. I find it very upsetting to know that photographs had been taken of my brother lying on the ground and put up on the internet. However, what upset me the most was knowing that Mohammed had been left lying on the ground outside Testerton Walk. I didn't know how long he had been left there, but he must have been left unattended otherwise someone could not have taken a picture of him. I found this very distressing. I think my brother should have been treated with more dignity and respect. I am still not sure if he died straight away or if he was left for a long time and then passed away. I feel that he should have been taken to an ambulance or something rather than being left on the ground. I am very upset and angry at how they treated my brother's body, and how they failed to show respect or care for him. I know that there should never have been a possibility for someone to take a photograph of him.

50. A police officer called Dan introduced himself to me in the hospital and said he was a Family Liaison Officer (FLO). He was with another female police officer. I don't remember seeing any other police officers while I was in hospital. I think it was Farah who told Dan that Mohammad had died, I overheard her showing him the pictures outside the room. I did not fully understand why the police were there at the time. They kept telling me that they were responsible for me. I didn't know what that meant.

51. I do not remember much of the conversation between me and the police. Dan did not want to tell me a lot of information about Mohammad, but I did not really ask him very much. I already had got the information I needed from Farah. I did not feel like talking to the police at that time. Dan looked serious and difficult to talk to. He looked like a very formal official who would only give me information when he had to. My hospital records state that police left at 20:10.

52. Later, I was moved into another room in the hospital. I shared this room with another person, although I do not think this other person was from Grenfell Tower, but I do not know. I cannot remember many more details about what happened that night or whether I slept. Hashem came late on the 14<sup>th</sup> and stayed overnight with me, and slept on the floor. We didn't talk about Mohammed. It was difficult talking to Hashem that evening.

I was crying most of the time and he was more patient. He didn't want to show me that he was upset as well because he was trying to support me.

15<sup>th</sup> June 2017

53. The day after, Amal came to visit me. At some point that day, I was moved onto a big ward with lots of different people. No one came to me on the ward and offered me any psychological support or medical advice.
54. I think I was discharged in the late afternoon. Mahmoud and my friend Ahmad Alhamawi also came to the hospital. I met them as I was on my way out and they walked out with Hashem and me. My friends had brought me some clothes for me to wear, which I changed into. When I was discharged, I was given some paracetamol by the doctor, to take if I needed it.
55. I did not feel I should have been discharged from the hospital when I was. I was still finding it difficult to breathe, I was taking deep breathes and coughing a lot. I was still coughing up black phlegm. I did not have any energy and I felt drowsy. I still felt dizzy. I had not been able to eat anything but fruit. Being discharged at this time made me feel that I was not being taken seriously. My breathing continued to be really bad and I carried on coughing for nearly two months.
56. No one in the hospital referred me to any breathing specialist, psychiatrist or psychologist for support. No one said anything about being concerned about the chemicals that I may have breathed in from the smoke.
57. Dan and another police officer met us at the hospital. They drove me and Hashem and, I think, Mahmoud from the hospital. At this time, Hashem was receiving calls from lots of news outlet and I remember Dan was not happy about this. Dan said to Hashem that he thought it was better not to speak to the media or share information with them. Hashem said to him that the media had told him that speaking to them would help to bring our family over to be with us for our brother's funeral.



58. We did not know where we were going with the police when we got in the car. They took us to the Westway, and they told us that we could get help with everything there. They then left us there. This made me unhappy and confused. I still did not really understand what I was meant to be doing at the Westway.

#### Westway Centre

59. At the Westway Centre, there were lots of crowds and a lot of people carrying boxes of donations like water, clothes, and food. I think it was volunteers and people from the community. The street in front of the entrance to the Westway was cordoned off, and could only be accessed by a check-in point. We had to check-in and sign a piece of paper. I think the Red Cross were at the check-in. I think it said my name and I was asked about what flat I was from. I did not know who was organising things at the Westway, and nobody introduced themselves to me.

60. The person at the Red Cross table gave me a wristband and told me to go inside but didn't tell me what I was meant to do inside. I was confused and there were too many people. I felt that it was very upsetting. I went first to the gym downstairs where I saw lots of mattresses on the floor. I thought that I would have to sleep there or stay there at the beginning because no one explained anything to me. No one came up to ask me how I was. No one asked me if I had any money to buy anything. When I had left the flat, I had my wallet with me, with my bankcards. I stayed in the Westway for hours, but I cannot remember exactly how long.

61. After seeing everyone running around, and no one speaking to me, I came out of the entrance to the Westway and sat down alone on the street, behind the cordon. Mahmoud and Hashem were somewhere else at this time. I think they were checking to see what we were meant to do.

62. I did not know what I was meant to be doing. I just kept asking myself why I was there and what was happening. I had a lot of fears, like whether I will be homeless now, and what will happen next. No one came up to me to talk to me about what help I needed. That was what I needed. No one knew anything about me, like whether I had been in the Tower or not.



63. I didn't see anyone from the Council, any doctors or hospital staff, or any officials at the Westway. There were no information desks. It was just lots of people who looked like they were volunteers or from the community, but who weren't able to give me any advice about what I should be doing. I did not speak to them or anyone from the TMO. I didn't see anyone who was offering financial assistance there. There were a lot of food and clothes and toiletries as well, but I did not take anything. I felt like I should not have left the hospital because I felt unwell. It was emotionally difficult to be with so many people. I just wanted to be by myself with my family and friends, somewhere safe and private.
64. While I was sitting outside, someone then came up to me and gave me a number to call about a hotel. I do not know who gave me that number. I called them up and spoke to someone who I think was with the Council. They said they would look into finding me somewhere to stay and would call me back. They did not ask me anything about what location I needed to stay in, or if I had any needs or anything like that. I told them Mahmoud needed a room as well.
65. While I was waiting a call back from the Council, I got a call from another unknown telephone number who were offering me a hotel in Ladbroke Grove.
66. I also received a call from someone saying that they needed to speak to me outside the check-point, because they couldn't get through the cordon. I do not remember who called me. I went outside and the BBC said they wanted to speak to me. This was the first TV interview I had done in my life. They wanted to talk to me and they knew what had happened to Mohammad.
67. I did not receive any advice at the Westway about talking to the media. I felt like I wanted to talk, I felt that no one knew what had happened to my brother. I started answering their questions on camera. Hashem was next to me. I was talking and crying, I could not control myself during the interview. I wanted people to know what happened to Mohammed; I wanted the truth to get out. I didn't know at the time whether we would be getting help or where the help would come from. I'm not sure if it was the BBC who told me this, but some journalists said that it might help to bring attention to what was

happening and mean that my parents might get some assistance to come to the UK for the funeral.

68. I went back inside the cordon on the street and returned to where I was sitting before. The Council then called me back and offered me and Mahmoud a room at the Holiday Inn in North End Road, Fulham. It was confusing to be offered two different rooms. We decided to go to the Holiday Inn in North End Road, because it was close to my cousin, Aasem's, home. I think I then got a text message with the details of the hotel.

69. While I was sitting on the ground on the road, I saw a friend from university. She was walking by and saw me there. Her name was Hadeel. She offered to take me to the hotel. Up until this point, I had not been offered help with transport to get to the hotel. Just after she offered, Aasem turned up with his car and offered to take me as well. Hadeel and Aasem drove Mahmoud and I to the hotel. When we were on the way, I remember my breathing was still bad [REDACTED]

70. It was busy at the Westway and there was so many people in the crowd, including people who were not from Grenfell. Not having someone to assist me and tell me what to do made me feel that I was lost in the crowd.

#### Emergency Accommodation & Staying with Relatives

71. We arrived at the Holiday Inn and staff checked us in and gave us a room key. Nobody talked to us about the fact that we were from Grenfell and nobody introduced themselves as a someone who would be able to give us help and advice. No one was there from the Council or TMO, and there were no medical staff. It was just the hotel staff. They didn't tell us how long we had the room for and they did not give us any information about what we could eat. I didn't know who was going to pay for the hotel. I don't think that I thought I had to pay for it but I didn't know who was going to pay for it.

72. We were allocated one room with two single beds. It felt depressing because it was only the two of us, and no one with us. It was a quite a small room and it was dark. It looked impersonal. It felt strange that I would be staying somewhere else now. I wasn't used to the place and I didn't feel good about the room when I walked in. I didn't like the

atmosphere because it felt strange, unfriendly and impersonal. I did not feel able to stay in this room. Aasem said I could stay in his flat five minutes away. I preferred to do that so that I could be with my family. Mahmoud stayed at the room because there was not enough space at Aasem's house.

73. Aasem was sharing his flat with one of his friends who I know well. Me, Hashem, my aunt Reem, and Aasem all stayed there. We would all sleep where we could. I would either sleep in the living room or Aasem's room. Mahmoud visited us during the day, but continued to sleep at the hotel. I stayed with Aasem until my parents arrived about on 20 June.

74. A group of people came to visit me while I was staying in Aasem's flat. They were people of all different nationalities. There were about six of them. They came to give me clothes and money, maybe around £1000. I did not accept the money but I accepted the clothes as the group told me that they could not be returned. They were just nice people who had heard about my situation and came to find me with their donations. It made me think about how they managed to think about me and the needs of my family, and to find me, and to provide for me, but the Council had not.

75. I did not do anything when I was staying at Aasem's. My family and friends were managing things like my clothes, food and laundry. A lot of people came to visit me in the flat and it was very busy. I was always in contact with my family in Syria by WhatsApp calls. I remember I could not speak much because I was too upset to talk to my family about what had happened. I did not want to leave the flat because I felt so sad.

76. I found living at Aasem's very difficult. I wanted to be with my family, but it was very a busy flat and this made me feel worse. It would have helped me to be offered a place where we could all stay together and where perhaps I could have had some private space as well. However, at this time, I was not aware this was something we could have potentially asked for, or if it was being provided. I had my cousin and aunt for support, but I was not in contact with anyone who lived in the Tower, or the Council. Neither Dan (my FLO) or anyone from RBKC were in contact with me while I was staying at Aasem's.



77. I did get lots of texts, WhatsApp messages and Facebook messages after I was seen on the news. I was also contacted by news and media but I could not bring myself to look at these messages.

78. I remember that Mahmoud went back to the Westway but I don't think that I went again before my family came.

#### Arrangements for Family and the Home Office

79. Shortly after the fire, a woman from our community, Mirna Ayoubi, started a petition to bring my family in Syria to the UK for the funeral.<sup>1</sup> The petition was promoted on Facebook and Whatsapp. The petition now has over 100,000 signatures.

80. Following the petition, on the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> day after the fire, about Sunday 18<sup>th</sup>, Hashem got a call from the Home Office. I do not even know how the Home Office had his number. They asked him if we wanted our family to come to the UK and when. Hashem told them as soon as possible. The Home Office asked if my family would need help getting from Syria to Lebanon as Syria did not have an airport, and Hashem told them that this would be fine but they would need help from Lebanon as did not have visas. Hashem was told to book a ticket for the family and Home Office said they would organise a visa. Mirna got in touch with my solicitors and the Home Office to help arrange the visas.

81. We contacted my family in Syria, told them we would book their flights, and told them to say goodbye to everyone. My uncle Haytham, helped with the cost of flights, which was approximately £1,500.

82. My mum, dad and two sisters flew to the UK on and arrived on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2017. Aasem and his friends let us use their cars to drive to Heathrow to pick them up and we met them at the airport. We went from the airport straight to the hotel. My family were not told how long they could stay in the UK for, I think the visa was for 6 months.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.change.org/p/home-office-get-grenfell-tower-victim-s-parents-to-the-uk>



### Mohammad's Funeral

83. I didn't know how to organize a funeral and I did not know where they were keeping Mohammed's body. Nobody had contacted me about any arrangements. I thought that Mohammed's body might be with the police but I wasn't certain. I was worried about whether he was being looked after. I wanted my family to come over and for Mohammed to be buried as soon as possible. I had never organized a funeral before.
84. I think it was Mirna that was helping organizing the funeral. She also found out about Eden Care and about funeral directors.
85. A man and a woman from Eden Care came to visit me while I was at Aasem's house, on the weekend before my family arrived. They brought their brochure and explained what they would be doing, saying we didn't need to worry about anything as they would handle it. They told me I didn't need to worry about the cost. That made me feel peaceful. They said if I agreed they would contact the police and get Mohammed's body from them. They told me that Mohammed could be buried at whichever graveyard I wanted. I asked for the Garden of Peace because I had heard about it from my friends. I said to them that we wanted the funeral to take place as soon as my family arrived, perhaps the day after. I told them my family was coming on 20<sup>th</sup> June so the funeral would take place on 21<sup>st</sup> June. They said they would take care of all the ritual washing and preparations. I signed the documents with them. During that time from 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> June, a charity organized a donation drive for the burial, which was online. I heard about it but I didn't look at it myself. They spoke to my brother Hashem about it.
86. Eden Care called me on 19<sup>th</sup> June and said that we could see Mohammed's body if we wanted to. That day, I went with Hashem and my solicitor Jules, to see Mohammed for the first time in the funeral director's office. I went to Eden Care and they had Mohammed's body and I saw him for the first time.
87. After my parents arrived, on 20<sup>th</sup>, my brother's body had been washed, and my family and I went to see him at East London Mosque.

88. There were many things we needed to organize for the funeral the following day, and we were rushing everything to see what we could do. We had previously contacted the Council twice to ask for help with the funeral, and the venue because people would want to come to give their condolence. The Council said they had a space but no chairs and tables so we would have to rent our own, but that would have been too difficult to arrange, as we wanted to have space for people to pray for Mohammed, read Qur'an and to share a meal. Traditionally, we would have hired the space for 3 days, but because of the difficulties, we had agreed to only do it for 2 days.
89. A charity offered to help by giving us a free venue. I am not sure if this offer was made through Eden Care. Mirna helped us to make a funeral notice with the details on it, but when we went to the venue we found that it wasn't suitable as it was very small so we had to find a new venue in the little time we had left.
90. My father, Hashem and I were searching straight after my family arrived on 20<sup>th</sup>. It was very difficult as places were either busy because it was such short notice, or very expensive. We were calling many people and places until we eventually found a venue in Park Royal. My father, Hashem and I went there and negotiated the price with the owner. The venue was usually used for weddings but the owner agreed that we could use it for the funeral. We agreed on £3,000 to hire it for two days. We then had to arrange where the chairs should go, and to sort out the food. We also had to change the funeral notice about the new venue and sent it around again.
91. We also needed to organize transport. We didn't know if we needed to hire cars to go from where we were staying, to East London Mosque for the funeral prayer, then to the burial ground which was around an hour away, and then to the venue. Our friends from the Syrian community offered to help with transport.
92. We were also communicating with Eden Care about timing as well – when burial would finish so that we could go to venue. I think we paid of £1,000 for the food for the funeral. I think this money was paid for by us somehow. We paid the venue after the funeral had finished. By that time, I think we had managed to receive money in donations. No one from the authorities, the Council or the police was with us to help organize the funeral. We were by ourselves with only some friends for support.

93. Because Mohammed was the first person known to have died, the media were constantly trying to get in contact with me. My phone was ringing the whole time. It was a lot of pressure on my family while we were trying to grieve. My father was very tired and upset. To try to organize everything in one day was a very hard time for us. Everything that day was really hard. We did not really find support and had to do everything ourselves. At least if there had been people telling us what to do it would have been much easier.

94. On 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017, there were huge crowds outside the mosque, and journalists. The mayor of London was there. Inside the mosque was also very busy. At the beginning, I did not expect it. I was shocked when I saw the crowds. We thought it would only be people from our community. Then I found out that everyone knew about the date. We felt good that people cared and really wanted to be with us. It was really nice to see that amount of people coming to attend the funeral. My father was really happy – he thought that we would be alone and not have anyone. Even though it felt like quite a lot of pressure with a lot of people there, and even though it was quite hard to have private time there, having that many people there helped me to feel that it mattered. At the beginning, I thought people didn't know and the authorities didn't care. It helped to that see people from the community cared. I didn't see any officials there apart from Sadiq Khan.

95. After the service at ELM, family and friends drove to Garden of Peace where Mohammed was buried. About a hundred people came with us. It was the hardest time to be there and do the burial. People prayed for him. It was a very long day, especially because we were fasting as well because it was Ramadan. It was the hardest day for us.

96. We then went to the venue in west London and stayed there until late in the evening. The next day we went back to the venue. I can't remember what time but I think I was there from 1pm till midnight again, accepting friends and family and prayers and condolences again. Even at the funeral, we were managing things by ourselves. People would come to give their condolences, but we had to organize things by ourselves because we did not have help.



97. After the two days, we went back to the hotel. I don't remember the Council coming after the funeral to offer support. I have mostly forgotten the time after the funeral because it was so emotionally difficult for me and my family, and so much was happening. I remember a lot of people continued coming to the hotel after the funeral to visit us for several days after the funeral. These were normal people from the public, and people from charities. I think the interview I did on the BBC, and the publicity from the funeral, was how everyone knew about my brother's story because everyone had seen it and shared it on social media.

98. I don't remember getting any support or help from the Council. There was nothing apart from giving us the rooms. They were always the last to come. If I had been provided with something, they would come at the end to provide me with the same.

99. A couple of days after the burial, we went back to the Westway. Mahmoud said that no one had been in contact and we needed to know what was happening and could find things out there.

#### Accommodation in the hotel

100. I do not know who contacted the Council about my family staying. It might have been Hashem. My mum, dad, two sisters, my brother Hashem and I were placed in the Hilton Hotel, near Shepard's Bush, on Holland Park Avenue. I don't think when we moved in anyone told us how long we would be able to stay for, although I understood at this time the hotel would be paid for by RBKC. When we arrived, no one introduced us as a point of contact for our stay in the hotel. They simply gave us the keys and took us to the rooms.

101. My family and I stayed in this hotel for over a year. Staying in the hotel was a very difficult time for me and my family. We were grieving as a family for Mohammad and really needed private space where we could all be together but also where we could be by ourselves. The hotel did not have this.



102. We had a number of issues in the hotel, such as the suitability of rooms, the suitability and availability of food, treatment by staff, a lack of information and a lack of privacy.

#### *Suitability of Rooms*

103. We were given three rooms in the Hilton – each sleeping two people. I stayed with my brother Hashem, my two sisters stayed in one room and my parents were in the third room. The rooms were all on the first floor. Initially, we were allocated disabled rooms that we did not need.

104. We stayed in the hotel for over a year as a family. During this time, we all moved rooms at least twice. Hashem and I moved rooms three times in total. The first time we moved was after about two months. The rooms we were allocated were so small, Hashem and I were living on top of each other. We also needed to get a bigger space so we could spend time together as a family. It was still unsettling each time we moved.

#### *Availability and Suitability of Food*

105. The way food was dealt with at the hotel was upsetting and embarrassing for my family and me. Initially, our key worker told us we were allowed to eat in the restaurant up to a certain amount. Breakfast was provided and we would eat lunch and dinner in the restaurant or call for room service. Lunch and dinner menu were the same. It was confusing at the time because the my key worker told us was an amount we could spend as a family on both food and laundry. It was not clear what could actually be spent on food.

106. We also had to eat the same food every day. This food was not what we were used to. Much of the food also was not halal which made it difficult for my family to eat a variety of food at the hotel. The food was okay if you were in the hotel as a tourist, but it did not seem very healthy and it was not good for my father but there was no other choice.

107. We were told much later (although I cannot remember when) by someone from RBKC who came to visit us at the hotel that we had £35 per day per person to spend,

which didn't actually go that far in the hotel. At this time, we were told we could have this as cash. This allowed us to go out and buy Arab and halal food that was better for my family and bring in back into the hotel.

108. We could not prepare our own meals either to start with. There was a small fridge in our room, but no microwave or anything else provided. After some time, mum and dad brought a small cooker for their room to cook a little.

109. Eating was a time we could come together as a family and talk. We would only really be able to do this in the hotel restaurant, as our rooms were too small. There was no privacy to our meals.

#### *Treatment by Staff*

110. Some hotel staff were rude to us. If we ordered food later on in the night, kitchen staff would be rude to us. They would be very judgmental if we lost a room key. One time they shouted at a friend of mine for sitting somewhere he was not allowed to. Some staff were nice and I remember one supervisor being very helpful. However, it felt as if we were being treated differently to other guests like we were being looked down on.

#### *Lack of Information and Clarity*

111. No one from the Council introduced themselves to us when we first arrived at the hotel. We did not meet anyone official from RBKC until much later on at the hotel.

112. We had a key worker allocated to us and could speak to hotel staff but unless you asked, they would not tell you the information. I did not know what questions needed to be asked and I did not know what we were eligible for.

113. We were also being told confusing and different information. For example, we were first told laundry could be done at the hotel up to a certain limit by our key worker. We were then told it was free and there was no limit. It was unnecessary confusion over an uncomplicated issue.

114. We received newsletters to the hotel room. However, it didn't contain the important information I needed. It would say what services were available for children, for example, which was not helpful to me. It would also provide updates with how many Grenfell residents had been rehoused. It was not nice to read this whilst me and my family were still living in the hotel.

#### *Privacy*

115. We did not have privacy in the hotel. This was difficult in a time we needed to be together and grieve for Mohammad. There was no space where we could go and sit as a family to just be together. We had separate rooms that were too small for us to gather. Every other area in the hotel was a public space.
116. After the fire, we had many visitors in the hotel. My family were visited by people from the Syrian community, our friends and our family, charities and volunteer groups, and Roxanne (our Police Family Liaison Officer) would come to have meetings with us. We would have to do all these meetings in the lobby. We are also a large family, and with these guests, it would be a large group so everyone would look at us.
117. My family also have therapists who would come visit us in the hotel. I cannot remember which company they were from but I think this was funded by RBKC. We did not request this, they just turned up one day. They would come until late at night. Some of these therapists would speak Arabic which was very helpful for my parents. This service started about a month after we moved in and stopped a few weeks before we moved out of the hotel. They would sit with the whole family, or talk to us individually if we wanted to. Talking to a therapist was helpful; however, we could not do this in private. It was always in the hotel where other people could overhear or look on. It was incredibly difficult.
118. We asked if there was another space available. During Ramadan, which was in May and June 2018, we were provided with a separate room. However, we had to ask every day if this room was available and sometimes it wasn't.
119. We could not sleep properly in the hotel; people would be talking loudly in the morning and there would be noise from the main road outside. We could not relax or



rest. It was crowded. We could not walk around as we would in our own homes and be casual. We would always have to get up and get dressed because we could not stay in the rooms all day.

*Duration of time in the hotel and permanent rehousing*

120. The problems we faced were made worse because they went on for such a long time and I faced the stressful situation of trying to arrange being rehoused. Whilst we were in the hotel, I was constantly talking with RBKC and my housings allocations officer about housing for my family and myself. I accepted a flat early on because RBKC were scaring me. I felt pressured. I thought if I did not accept the flat, then I would not get another flat. I was offered my current flat after three months; however, I felt I could not move because my family were not allocated a new home and I was the one dealing with my parents housing situation.

Relief Centers

121. I visited a number of relief centres, although my family and friends were initially helping with every day essentials. I did not have anything at that time. I cannot specifically remember when I visited these relief centres.

122. I visited the Rugby Portobello Club whilst I was staying at the hotel. I went there and filled in forms to get things for my new flat, such as a fridge and a washing machine. I would have gone after I was allocated my flat, so a couple of months after the fire. I think Mahmoud told me they were offering help. He would go and speak to Grenfell Residents. RBKC did not tell me this. We were treated well at the Rugby Portobello Club and I went a few times. One time when I visited I was provided a laptop from Apple to replace what I had lost in the flat. I do not know who was coordinating the Rugby Club but it did not appear to be RBKC.

123. We would also go to Al Manaar Mosque for prayers. They were also providing support for residents and we had financial donations provided to us from the mosque.

124. I went back to the Westway, as there were many different departments there. Our post was also redirected there from Grenfell. We would meet with residents and see how things were going.

125. My family provided clothes and other essentials for me immediately after the fire. After some time, we would buy these ourselves with the financial assistance we received. There were clothes available at the Westway and relief centres. Charities would also try to donate us clothes. Generally, they wouldn't be suitable - they wouldn't fit or be what we needed.

#### Financial Assistance

126. My family and I were receiving money in donations and from charities after the fire. I also received £500 from the Westway at one point, but my other family members could not receive this. All the money I received would have to be split with my family because they were not eligible for financial support. RBKC paid for the hotel and food in the hotel.

127. RBKC only visited us and explained the eligibility of financial payments to us after I complained we did not have this information. Initially no one wrote or called to tell us what was available. We received a monthly payment of £1000 from RBKC for each member of the family. This was to cover food, transport, and other daily essentials. I cannot remember when this was but it was much later on and not within the first seven days.

#### Support and Information from Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

128. I do not feel like me and my family were supported by RBKC after the fire.

129. Communication from RBBKC was very poor and only through the key worker. I would have expected other people to make contact with us as well from the start. It was a long time before someone made contact with us from RBKC, other than my key worker. People from RBKC would visit my family, promise things and then disappear. Staff at RBKC changed often.

130. The constant changing of staff was very difficult. We would get to know someone and begin to trust them and then they would leave. We would have to explain ourselves, our situations and our needs all over again which would be upsetting.
131. My first key worker was called Suzanna. She was very helpful and became like a friend to me. I felt she supported me, not just because it was her job but because she wanted to. I cannot remember how and when I first met Suzanna, but it was early on. She would tell me what I could apply for, and she was especially helpful with housing, and for example, fighting for me to get a two bedroom flat. She stopped working for RBKC after about three months.
132. I then had a period with no key workers before being allocated a string of different key workers. When I met with a new key worker, I would have to explain the situation all over again. I remember one key worker would not contact me and I would contact her and she would not answer. Some key workers did not seem to know the answers to my question and I do not feel they understood the situation. Hashem and I would speak on my families behalf. Sometimes I would have to act as an interpreter as they would not be provided for my parents. I now have a dedicated service worker, it is not better at all. It's all the same problems just with a different name.
133. RBKC did not offer any support with my families immigration situation. I would contact RBKC directly for help with housing, and what we needed in the hotel. On the phone, each department would transfer me to another department. I would have to keep calling to get information and support. This was during an already difficult time when I was living in the hotel. I wanted the opportunity to rest, but could not do this as I was constantly calling and emailing to get information.
134. It would have been helpful for my family was daily regular support and consistent people providing us with the information we needed, instead of us chasing for this information. I found people were not honest with us, especially about housing, and their promises ended up being lies. We were not visited regularly, and when they did, it was different people. RBKC did not seem to be organised. I did not know who to contact for what and no department seemed to take responsibility for any aspect.



135. The most reliable and useful information I received was from other residents. A WhatsApp group was created with other residents in it, who would share any information they knew.

#### Family Liaison Officer

136. I was first allocated a FLO called Dan Jordan from the Metropolitan Police Service. I first met him when I was in hospital, on the 15<sup>th</sup> June. There was a time when I did not have a FLO, but then I was allocated Roxanne. Roxanne has remained my FLO up until now. I cannot remember when I was first allocated a FLO.

137. Roxanne would provide me with the updates. She would tell me any police updates about Grenfell, and the memorial updates. She provided me with the information I needed from her.

#### Medical Assistance and Mental Health Support

138. I explained in paragraphs 36 to 44 above the medical treatment I received in the immediate aftermath of the fire.

139. I do not wish to provide details of how I have been impacted by the fire at Grenfell Tower, other than the trauma of the loss of my brother Mohammad, the fire, and the aftermath of the fire have affected me mentally and physically. I lost my home and I lost my beloved brother.

#### Impact of the Fire

140. Mohammad and I moved to the UK from Syria to be safe. I still do not understand how a such a dangerous building could exist in the UK. I want change to happen and I want people who were responsible for the fire at Grenfell to be honest and to be held to account.

**Statement of truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this statement are true.

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:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jh' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

**DATE:** 20/02/2020