

**Witness Statement of: Mahmoud Al-Karad**

**No. of statement: 2**

**Exhibits: 0**

**Date of statement: 18 February 2020**

## **GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF MAHMOUD AL-KARAD**

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I, **MAHMOUD AL-KARAD**, will say as follows:

1. I was a resident of Grenfell Tower. I lived in Flat 112 on Floor 14 of Grenfell Tower with my close friends Omar and Mohammad Alhajali. Tragically, Mohammad died as a result of the fire at Grenfell Tower. I am making this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.
2. I made a statement to the Metropolitan Police dated 23 February 2018. I made a further statement in Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry (reference IWS/821) dated 26 June 2018.
3. This statement addresses the issues within module 2 (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 4 to 42, and Module 4 in paragraphs 43 to 129. This statement should be read in conjunction with my Phase 1 statement, which also deals with issues relating to Modules 3 and 4. I reserve the right to make a further statement in relation to Module 8 (the deceased).

### **Module 3**

#### **Living in Grenfell Tower**

4. I moved into Flat 112 Grenfell Tower with my friends Omar Alhajali and Mohammad Alhajali on 1 September 2016. I have described the ownership of the flat and the cost of

our private rental agreement at paragraph 4 of my Phase 1 witness statement. The flat was an ex-council property owned by Mohamed Azab. We found the property through an agency called MAS Property Services. We looked at a couple of other properties first, but we did not like them. We really liked the view from Grenfell Tower. It was a nice refurbished flat; it was big and suitable for our needs. We did not know anyone in the Tower or the area before we moved in, but it was close to where we were all working at that time. Mohammad was working in Westfield, Omar was working not that far away in Hammersmith and I was working in Edgware Road, which was only one train away.

5. The tenancy was in all three of our names. We paid £1,700 monthly to Mohamed Azab between us. Our tenancy was an assured short hold tenancy. Our bills were paid separately to the rent, directly to the utility companies. As far as I am aware, we did not pay any money to the TMO.
6. Mr Azab informed us when we moved in that him and his friends had just refurbished the interior of the flat themselves and that we were the first to live in the flat since he refurbished it. I am not sure when Mr Azab bought the property or if he rented it out before he refurbished it.
7. Of the three of us, Mohammad was the one who was dealing with things on behalf of the flat, such as bills and contact with Mr Azab. Mohammad was an organiser; he liked to do these things. I was not really in contact with Mr Azab myself. If we had a problem, we would always contact Mr Azab, not the TMO or RBKC. Mr Azab would always answer the phone or call us back.
8. I did not know anything about the TMO when I moved into Grenfell Tower. I knew they had an office downstairs in the building, but I did not know what they did. I think Mohammad spoke to them when we experienced problems with the gas in our flat, which I cover in further detail in paragraph 16 of this statement. I was not in communication with RBKC or the TMO at all.
9. I have described my relationship with others in the Tower at Paragraph 8 of my Phase 1 statement. I lived in Plymouth when I first came to the UK and then moved to London,

so I did not really know anyone in the area. We met people when we moved in and we knew our neighbours well enough to say hi to, but no more than that.

#### Flat 112

10. I have described the layout of Flat 112 at paragraph 9 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement.

I also exhibited a floor plan of the flat to my Phase 1 statement as Exhibit MAK/1 (reference IWS/819). I have described the state of Flat 112 at paragraph 10 of my Phase 1 witness statement. It was a well-decorated two bedroom flat and had great views across London. The flat was open plan, so there were no doors in the living, kitchen and dining area.

11. I remember the boiler being located in a black wardrobe the kitchen, on the wall next to the storage cupboard. There was an electricity metre next to the front door.

12. I state at paragraph 12 of my Phase 1 statement that there were no problems with electricity supply or power shortages in my flat.

13. I explained in my Phase 1 statement at paragraph 13 that there were two extractor fans in Flat 112: one in the ceiling of the bathroom and one in the window in the kitchen. I want to clarify that the one in the bathroom was not exactly a fan, it was more of a vent which did not work that well. If we used hot water and there was steam which would not clear that well. The fan in the kitchen window was not always on. We had to press a button to turn it on when we needed it. It worked fine and was not particularly noisy.

14. At paragraph 13 of my Phase 1 statement, I mention that I could sometimes smell cooking from neighbouring flats from my flat and on our landing. We did not know where this was coming from or how it was coming into the flat. We did not find this concerning at the time and I did not report this issue to the landlord or TMO, nor did my flatmates as far as I am aware.

#### Gas

15. I describe at paragraph 10 of my Phase 1 statement how we had an issue with the gas in my flat. The gas was fine when we first moved in but after about a month, the gas stopped. We were not able to use the gas cooker. We were without gas for 8 months from around October 2016, and did not have a gas supply right up until the fire.
16. Mohammad tried to sort out this issue for us. I do not know who exactly he spoke to and when, but I think he contacted and complained to British Gas, National Grid and RBKC. I think Mohammad went to speak to the TMO desk downstairs about the gas twice, maybe 3 or 4 months after we moved in. I think they told him that there was a gas leak, so they had to turn off the gas, but that RBKC would fix the problem. They were giving out brochures that explained about the process. However, we were left without gas right up until the fire.
17. Mohammad also spoke to Mr Azab a few times about the gas issue. I think Mr Azab may have called either the TMO, RBKC or the gas company, to try to get the problem sorted. Mr Azab took money off the rent as compensation for us not having gas.
18. We had to use a separate gas cooker that we brought ourselves. We also had a separate electric cooker. Mohammad received this, but I am not sure who provided it.
19. Someone came to fit new pipes inside the Tower and our flat about two months before the fire. I thought he was from National Grid, but I am not sure. These pipes came from the Floor 14 corridor, inside the flat and along the corridor, past the cupboard and into the cupboard where the gas metre was. At page 23 of my Phase 1 statement, I elaborate on the fire safety concerns I had in respect of the gas pipes that National Grid installed. We were concerned because they were small, exposed gas pipes.
20. I remember asking one of the workmen installing the pipes if it was safe to put them inside the flat. He said that it was not safe, but the Council wanted them to go there. I think Mohammad raised this with the TMO desk. They said that they would cover the pipes before the gas was turned back on. The pipes were re-connected about a month before the fire, but even then we did not have gas in our flat. Mohamed spoke to RBKC



or the TMO again who said the gas would be working shortly. I do not remember the TMO doing anything themselves in respect of the pipes.

#### Flat 112 Front door

21. At paragraph 11 of my Phase 1 statement, I described the front door to my flat. It was a wooden door. The door had a letterbox that was silver and easy to open. The letterbox would stay shut and after you put a letter through it would slam shut.

22. The door did not change whilst I lived at Grenfell Tower. When we first moved in the door would not close by itself, but then someone came to change the door mechanism. This was about 3 months after we moved in. After this, the door would shut automatically. It was quite a light door. I do not think there were any gaps around the door.

#### Windows

23. I refer to the windows of Flat 112 at Paragraph 13 of my Phase 1 witness statement. There were four windows in the living room area and an additional window in the kitchen area that had the fan.

24. We had an issue with the window that was between the living room and kitchen. There was a gap in this window, which let a draught into the flat. You could hear the wind outside, especially in winter it was very noisy. If you stood next to the window, you could feel the air coming into the flat. I think the gap was on the top left on the window between the frame and the wall, but I cannot remember now. You could see the gap. Water would not come through the gap, just air. We noticed this issue when it started to get cold – maybe 2 months after we moved in. We reported it to Mr Azab soon after we noticed it. I do not remember anyone calling Rydon or the TMO. Mr Azab might have contacted them after we contacted him, but we did not. Mr Azab told us that he would send someone to come and fix the problem.

25. Someone came to fix the gap in the window one day. I cannot remember when this was – as far as I remember, it was quite soon after we first reported it. I do not know who

came to fix it, but it was not Mr Azab. I think he might have put something between the window and the frame to fill the gap. After this happened, there were no other issues with the windows that I can remember.

#### Communal Areas

26. When I moved into Grenfell Tower I was aware that the Council had recently refurbished the building. I read about it online and knew it was finished just before we moved. I did not know any specifics about the refurbishment. The exterior of the building and the ground floor looked new when we moved in. However the corridors and stairs still looked old, and the walls on the stairs had not been painted for a long time. I did not know who Rydon were before the fire and had no reason to contact them.
27. As mentioned in paragraph 15 of my Phase 1 witness statement, the front door to Grenfell Tower was often broken which meant anyone could walk into the Tower without a key fob. The door would not close automatically and it would be left open. This meant anyone could get in to the building. The main door was left open a few times and teenagers came in and hung out in the Tower. I cannot remember if we reported these problems with anyone. I think that Mohammad may have reported this to the TMO desk on the ground floor of the building, but I am not sure.
28. I discuss the lifts in paragraph 16 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement. I would like to add that it was normal that for either one of the lifts to be out of service; sometimes both were out of service at the same time. Usually it took around three days to fix the lifts when they were broken. I did not ever report an issue with the lift to TMO or RBKC. If they were broken, I would use the stairwell and walk to or from the 14<sup>th</sup> floor. Mohammad might have also reported the lifts to the TMO desk on the ground floor, but I am not sure about this.
29. I knew not to use the lifts in the event of a fire. I recall there was a sign in the Tower saying not to use the lift next to the fire. It was next to the lift on the ground floor. Before the fire, I would have used the stairs to evacuate the building in the event of a fire.

30. At paragraphs 17 and 18 of my Phase 1 Statement, I describe how the stairwell had good lighting, but was not clean. I would like to add that the steps in the stairwell were not even, in that some were higher than others were. They were not easy to walk on and they were not flat. I was always worried that people could fall over or have an accident.
31. The lights in the stairwell were always on whenever I used the stairs, so I do not know if there was emergency lighting. The handrail was very low and the stairs were very narrow. Only two people would be able to cross on the stairs at the same time. At the time, I was not concerned at the stairwell being narrow. It was difficult to breathe inside the stairs – there was not good air inside. I did not report this to the TMO.
32. The door to the 14<sup>th</sup> floor lobby opened out into the stairs. This door would shut behind you. When you opened the door, you could feel the air rush into the stairwell. The door slammed shut and if you opened the door there was a sort of pressure or resistance.
33. The lights in the communal area were always working as far as I was aware. I do not know if there was emergency lighting. I was not aware of there being any ventilation in the communal landing.

#### Fire Safety

34. I outlined what fire safety information I was provided while living at Grenfell Tower at paragraph 20 of my Phase 1 statement. Mr Azab showed us the fire exit when we moved in. He showed us the fire exit on our floor and the stairs. He did not direct us to any particular fire escape door on the ground floor. This was the only information we received about fire safety when we moved in to Grenfell Tower. Mr Azab did not mention there being a “stay put” policy at Grenfell Tower, and I was unaware that this policy existed while I lived in the Tower.
35. We were never given information from RBKC or the TMO about fire safety. I do not remember ever receiving leaflets or a magazine from RBKC or TMO that contained fire safety advice.

36. I cover what I would have done in the event of a fire at paragraph 21 of my Phase 1 statement, namely that I would have left the building straight away via the stairwell. Grenfell Tower was a big building with many floors and in a fire you would not be able to use the lift. However, I did not really think about what I would do in the event of a fire when I was living there.

37. I remember there being emergency exit signs above the doors in Grenfell Tower. There was also a sign next to the lift downstairs about what to do in the event of a fire and what steps to take. I remember seeing this sign when I lived in Grenfell, but it is hard to remember what it said now.

38. I was not aware if there was an assembly point outside the Tower if there was a fire.

#### Fire Alarms

39. At paragraph 22 of my Phase 1 statement, I explained that there was a smoke alarm inside Flat 112 of Grenfell Tower. It was in the kitchen area. I do not think anyone ever checked the fire alarm to ensure it was working. The TMO or London Fire Brigade did send anyone to check it was working. Mr Azab did not talk to us about the fire alarm when we first moved in. I did not ever hear this alarm go off when I was living in Grenfell Tower.

40. I am not sure if there was a communal fire alarm system in Grenfell Tower. I never heard an alarm in the communal area of Grenfell when I lived there.

#### Cladding

41. I was not concerned about the cladding at Grenfell Tower. I just did not think about it at the time. I could see that the exterior of the building was new and very clean, but at the time, I did not know anything further about the insulation or cladding.

#### Module 4

14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and 15<sup>th</sup> June



42. I cover my experiences during the night of the fire at Grenfell Tower in Paragraphs 24 to 40 of my Phase 1 Statement. I spent the whole night watching the fire take over the tower, listening to the screams of those trapped inside, whilst speaking on the phone to my two close friends who were also trapped inside. I had seen that Omar make it out of the Tower, but was extremely anxious when Mohammed did not come out after him and then he stopped answering my calls. I had been trying to get information from the police at the scene, but without success. My memories of that night are very hard to cope with.
43. As outlined at paragraph 41 of my Phase 1 statement, I remained outside the Tower until around 9am on 14 June 2017. I was with Mohamed's fiancé Amal, who had a friend with her called Noor, and my friend Aasem. We knew that Omar had been taken to hospital, but we had no information about what may have happened to Mohammed or who else we could speak to.
44. Not knowing what to do, we decided we decided to go around hospitals to look for Mohammad. My friend Aasem drove us in his car. We went to Westminster and Chelsea Hospital first and asked if they had a patient of Mohammed's description from the fire at Grenfell Tower. They told us he was not there. They told us the names of the other hospitals where the injured from the fire had been taken to. One of these was Hammersmith Hospital, and another was Charing Cross. I cannot remember the name of the third but it was between White City and Royal Park. We did not find Mohammad at any of the hospitals. Each hospital just told us that they had no information about Mohammad and to check the other hospitals.
45. I was in contact with Omar and Hashem, Mohammed's brothers, throughout the day. I understood that they had been in contact with the Coroner and had no news about Mohammed.
46. I went back to Aasem's house at about 8pm, and slept for an hour. When I woke up Aasem and his friend Aboud were talking. They told me that Mohammad had passed away. He showed me pictures of Mohammad lying on the floor, that he had seen uploaded onto Facebook by a man from the local area. The man had uploaded some

- pictures and a video onto Facebook. They showed Mohammed lying on the floor in the corridor of one of the Walkway blocks. Some of the pictures showed Mohammed's body and face covered with a white sheet, and others with it removed. In the video, the man removed the cover so you could see Mohammed's face. There was no one else in the videos or photos. It looked like the block was empty.
47. This was how I learned of Mohammed's death. It was shocking for me to see photos of his body like that. I heard later that the man who uploaded the photos and video of Mohammed's body was arrested and prosecuted for uploading pictures of Mohammed's body onto Facebook.
48. Aasem drove me and a few friends called Abood, Emad and Ammar back to the Tower to see if we could find Mohammed's body. I had recognised the block that Mohammed's body was lying in from the photos and video. A friend of ours had previously lived in that block several months before the fire, and I recognised the orange coloured flooring from the video.
49. When we arrived, there was still a lot of smoke coming from the Tower. There were a lot of people from the area around the base of the Tower and surrounding streets. It was really overcrowded and chaotic. Lots of people were crying and weeping. No one was aware of who had died and who had escaped. The section around the tower was cordoned off by the police, but that was the only official presence that I could see in the area.
50. I approached the Walkway block that Mohammed's body had been in when the pictures were taken. There was a police officer standing at the door. I told him I had been a resident of Grenfell Tower and was looking for my friend who I had lived with. I told him I had seen a picture showing my friend's body lying in the corridor of that block. I asked if Mohammed's body was there and if we could go inside to see him. The officer was very dismissive. He told me that he had not seen anyone, that there was no one inside and we were not allowed inside the building. Some of my friends also tried to speak with the officer after me, but he still refused to let us in or help us.

51. We stayed in the area for another two or three hours not knowing what to do. I was in a very bad state. I was keen on finding out what had happened to Mohammed but it felt helpless, and I did not know where to go next. I had barely slept for the last two days, and in that time everything had suddenly changed. It was as though someone had hit me over the head. I had never experienced anything like that before.
52. You could smell the fumes from the fire in the air. It was a noxious smell, not just of smoke but a weird kind of smell. It smelled like a mix of plastic and chemicals burning. At the time, I was not thinking about how unhealthy this would be to breathe as I was so anxious about finding Mohammad.
53. I had no communication from RBKC, the TMO or any other official body to inform me whether Mohammed had died or to help me find his body.
54. The next day, which was 15 June 2017, I went to see Omar. He had told me he had been taken to Kings College Hospital. I think Aasem drove me there. Omar was ready to be discharged when we arrived. There were two police officers with him at the hospital, one male and one female. I am not sure why they were there. They did not explain why to me. I think they just told us they were going to drive us to a community centre where we could get help.
55. Omar and I were driven from the hospital to the Westway Sports Centre by the police. At that time I had nothing other than what I was wearing; all my possessions, clothes and papers were destroyed in the fire.
56. The Westway was really busy. It was quite uncomfortable being there. In the centre of the main hall there was a lot of second hand items, mostly clothes but also other things like tinned food. Lots of people were there taking things. The two tennis courts were full of mattresses and bedclothes laid down next to one another, so there was almost no space between them.
57. It was not clear to me where to go for what support, as there was no signs anywhere. There was a big table outside that only had two people sitting at it. It was not clear what their role was.

58. Omar and I approached this desk and made enquiries. We asked where we should go now and where we would live. We were told to contact RBKC and were given a number. We dialled that number, and the people we spoke to said they would make us a reservation at a hotel. They asked me how many people I needed a room for, and I asked for a room for myself and Omar. I was not asked if it was important to me where the hotel was. We were told to wait for them to call back.
59. I also spoke to someone from the Red Cross while I was waiting at the Westway Centre. I asked them about bringing over my family, who were living in Holland at the time, and Omar's family from Syria for support. They told me they were not able to help me bring my family over as I was not bereaved. I didn't know what help they could give me.
60. I think we waited for about two hours in the Westway until we received a call back. We were told that a room had been booked for us at the Holiday Inn Express in Earls Court. They did not explain to me how long the room had been booked for or how long we could stay there. We were not given any money for travelling to the hotel or informed we would be entitled to this. A Syrian woman from the local community who was at the Westway Centre offered to drive us there in her car, which she did. I ended up staying there on my own. By then Omar's aunt had arrived to visit him from Scotland and so he went to stay at Aasem's house with her.

#### Emergency Accommodation

61. The room that had been allocated to Omar and me at the Holiday Inn was very small. It had two single beds which filled most of the room, with only a small space between the two beds. There was no room to move around in it. As Omar went to stay with his family, I was staying there alone from 15 June 2017 onwards.
62. The Holiday Inn was situated in Earls Court. It was not close to Grenfell Tower or any of the relief centres that had been set up. I did not know the area and I was far away from everything I knew. I felt isolated from my friends and community. Before the fire



my main support in the UK came from Omar and Mohammed. I had other friends in the UK from the Syrian community, but these were not friends that I knew well. Now Mohammed had died and I was not staying close to Omar. It was hard to spend time by myself. Although other people from the Tower were staying at the Holiday Inn, I did not know anyone else from the Tower very well.

63. I was not aware of any arrangements to pay my travel or other expenses. This meant I was spending my own money whenever I needed to travel to visit the Westway and other relief centres, or Omar.

64. The reception area of the hotel was not that big. It was always crowded, with no place to sit and no privacy. The guests were a mixture of Tower residents and tourists. It was also on a busy main road.

65. I do not remember anyone at the hotel introducing themselves to me as being in charge or responsible for me during my time there. This would have been helpful, as I felt I did not have all the information I needed while I was there. No one told me whether I could get help with my laundry or that I could eat at the hotel free of charge. I only eat Halal food and did not know of any Halal restaurants local area, so it was difficult to find food to eat.

66. I used my own money to buy food for the first two weeks at the hotel. I then went to visit Omar who had moved into the Hilton Hotel with his family, and while there I overheard a family of survivors talking about having a daily allowance for meals. It was only after this that I asked my key worker about the food allowance and was told that I was entitled to £30 a day food at the hotel. I felt frustrated that I had been spending my own money on this until that point, as I did not have any money at the time.

67. From then on, I did eat at the hotel sometimes, but only on three or four occasions. I was not able to eat when I wanted to. I remember one night I called to try to order food but was told that I was not able to. I also did not like the food there. I had no cooking facilities in my room and so I could not prepare my own meals. After the fire, I did not want to eat much and food was not a priority. I was in a really bad place, and just kept thinking about what happened at Grenfell.

68. One day I asked someone at the hotel about laundry as I had seen someone helping Omar with this at the Hilton. They said they would do my laundry for me, but this was only after I asked. Before this I had been asking my friends to let me do it at their houses.
69. I remember someone from the Red Cross came to the hotel two or three days after the fire. They conducted a short interview with me, lasting about 30 minutes. I do not remember them offering me any help. They asked me some questions and that was it.
70. I was also visited at my hotel by a man from Westminster Council to discuss housing, which I cover at paragraphs 117 and 118.
71. RBKC did not contact me while I was living in the hotel to update me on how long I would be staying there or where I would be moving to. As I was not happy in the hotel, I contacted my key worker and asked her if I could change my hotel to the Hilton where Omar was staying. I was going to Omar's hotel all the time anyway, and I hated to stay in that area on my own. My key worker told me she could not move me. I told her I was not comfortable staying at the hotel as the room was so small and there was nowhere to go to relax, to sit and chat with people. After three weeks, I was moved to temporary accommodation in Paddington, as outlined further at paragraph 118 to 120.

### Relief Centres

#### *Westway Centre*

72. I went back to the Westway Centre a number of times after the fire, although I cannot remember what I did on a specific day. I remember speaking to people from the Home Office who helped me with replacing my driving license and my passport. I also spoke to them about obtaining visas for my family to visit me because I was by myself in London, without any family. At this time my family from Syria were living in the Netherlands and Kuwait. I was told by the people at the Home Office that it would not be possible to arrange for my family to visit me. They told me that this right to be visited

by family members was restricted to bereaved survivors only. I later learned this was not correct, but I accepted the answer I was given at the time.

73. At the Westway, I also received support to help me with getting paper work to prove my address. I also picked up toiletries and water which I collected over several visits. I did not take any food or clothes donations. I remember Royal Mail also being there and handing out leaflets.

74. I also went to the Westway for financial support, which I cover further at paragraphs 91 to 92.

75. I remember I spoke to the Red Cross on one occasion, as they said they had money from donations to give out. I asked them about this, and they said I was not entitled to any money as I was not bereaved. I became very stressed about this. I had no money at the time as I had stopped work since the fire because I was finding it hard to cope, and I was completely ignorant as to what to do about money. I had lost everything and couldn't work. This added to the stress I was under after seeing the fire, the death of my friend and now living on my own in an unfamiliar part of London. Then a lady came and introduced herself as being from an Islamic Care Organisation. She spoke Arabic. She asked me what was the problem and brought me over to her desk. She told me they had money from donations as well. I think she offered me a donation of £500.

76. Although I was reliant on the Westway in the weeks following the fire, I did not find the people there very helpful. No one at the Westway ever explained to me about what assistance, financial or otherwise, was available for survivors of the fire. I had to find out everything on my own. RBKC should have made this information easily available. As it was, I had to travel to the Westway whenever I needed something and check what was available. I would have to go there even for basic supplies such as bread and cereal, as I was not aware of the hotel food allowance. I found it difficult to have to travel there so often, as it was not near my hotel. It was always very chaotic and full of people.

77. After a while, I stopped going to the Westway, as what they were offering was no longer meeting my needs. For example, when I moved into Paddington, I needed things for the

flat but I did not know how or who to ask for them. I needed a new mattress because mine was bad and causing me back pain. I asked my key worker for help, but she said she was unable to assist with this. I eventually got a new mattress from a charity.

78. I spoke to the Red Cross when I was at the Westway as I was there with Omar who had to fill in Next of Kin information documentation to get donations. They said that I was not entitled to this financial support, that it was just available to the next of kin of those who had died in the fire

#### *The Curve*

79. I heard from other people that the Curve was offering help. After some point, I cannot recall when, all the assistance that had been at the Westway moved to the Curve. You would now have to go there for assistance from bodies such as Royal Mail and Home Office there.
80. I visited the Curve, but I cannot remember when exactly. I went there to get some clothes, but they did not have anything my size or suitable for my needs. For example, they had a lot of pyjamas but no daytime clothes.
81. I went again to the Curve about a month after the fire. I went there to pick up letters as my post was re-directed to the Curve. I also went to see the Home Office to ask again for help obtaining visas for my family, but again I was told I was not entitled to this.
82. I picked up a few items from the Curve. A charity based at the Curve also helped me get a mattress for my temporary flat in Paddington. I got bottled water from there, as the tap water in my temporary flat in Paddington had a nasty taste. I took some toiletries, such as shampoo, and also two or three items of clothing. They had a lot there but it was difficult to find items of clothing that were the right size.
83. I did not like to go to the Curve. Too many people there were not from the Tower. They seemed to be very happy and were laughing loudly. This made me feel uncomfortable,



as it was a very stressful time for me and other survivors. I found I did not want to be there.

#### *Other relief centres*

84. I also went to the Portobello Rugby Club. I first went on the morning of the 14 June to report that Mohammad was missing. I think I reported this to a volunteer, as I do not remember seeing anyone from RBKC there. There were no people in uniforms or signs from RBKC. I went back later when I heard that financial donations had started coming in to apply for financial support.

85. I attended the Al Manaar Mosque in the week after the fire, as Omar had told me that they were giving out support such as clothes and toiletries. I went but I could not find anything that was suitable for my needs so I did not take anything. The same thing happened when I visited the Harrow Club. There was nothing suitable and so I did not take anything.

86. Although there was clothes in the relief centres, it was not easy to find clothes that were my size. I therefore had to go to Westfield in the days after the fire to buy myself some new clothes.

87. I was also told by word of mouth that a relief centre was giving out replacement laptops. When I got there, they had run out of most of the laptops. The laptop I was given was not as good as the laptop I had that was destroyed by the fire but it was all that was available and I needed one.

88. I also attended a number of other relief centres that were distributing financial support to residents from donations they had received. I cover this further at paragraph 94.

#### Financial Assistance

89. After the fire I could not work. I was in need of financial assistance but I did not know where to go for this. Initially it was very difficult for me, as I did not have enough

money to live on. No one from RBKC of Central Government ever contacted me in the immediate aftermath of the fire to let me know that financial support was available. No outreach workers came to the hotel to offer me financial help or information about financial help. All the help I received in the weeks after the fire was through attending the relief centres, which I heard about through word of mouth.

90. The difficulties I had in accessing financial support really added to the stress that I was under at this time because of the fire. I needed money to live on, but it was not easy to get help. I had to push to get support with things.

91. The first bit of financial support I received after the fire was from RBKC at the Westway Centre. This was something like one week to 10 days after the fire. I attended the Westway and asked for this, as I had heard from other Grenfell residents that there was financial support available for survivors. Omar and I attended and were given £500 each from the RBKC staff there. While there, I asked if we would be entitled to another payment when we ran out of money, or if they had any other information about my entitlement to money or support. They did not have any further information to give.

92. When I ran out of money sometime in the following weeks I went back to the Westway centre and asked RBKC what to do. I was given another payment of £500. These were the only two emergency support payments I received from RBKC.

93. About two weeks after the fire I was given a leaflet/brochure at the Westway from the Department of Work and Pensions that told me I could collect a payment of £5,000 that would be split between me and Omar. I was directed to go to a Post Office to complete and submit an application, following which money was transferred to our bank accounts.

94. I also received cash payments from several relief centres, which had received donations for residents of Grenfell Tower. I learned that the Al Manaar Mosque was distributing financial support for residents when I went there in the week after the fire. I applied

and I think they gave me around £500 in cash. I also received a donation from St Clements Church, which I think was within 10 days of the fire.

95. No one from RBKC, at the West way or other relief centres, ever told me that there was money available to help with travel. It was only after about 4 months, in October 2017, when I was visiting Omar in the Hilton Hotel, that I found out from other residents that they had been receiving financial help for their travel costs. Until that point I had been paying for all of my travel myself. I spoke to my keyworker after this and put pressure on her to help me get this financial support. Eventually, on 25 October 2017, I was transferred £1,500 to cover the cost of an oyster card for one year. This was only after I pushed for it. The RBKC did not reimburse the travel costs that I had already spent for the last four months. They told me I could if I had kept all the receipts, but I did not have these and so they refused to make a retrospective payment.

96. I also heard from other residents around this time that they were getting a weekly food allowance of £300 from RBKC. I had not been aware of this either. I spoke to my key worker Suzanna about this and learned that I had been entitled to this allowance from when I was in the hotel until moving to permanent accommodation. Had I known about this at the time I would have claimed the money and it would have alleviated some of the stress I was going through. I told her that I was never told about this allowance, and that I should be compensated for the money I had not claimed. She kept saying she would help me sort this out, but nothing seemed to happen. I had to keep chasing her and putting pressure on her about this before it was resolved. I received a lump sum payment on 22 November 2017 of £5,200 for the weekly food allowance payments that I had missed.

97. When I moved into my permanent flat, RBKC provided £2,000 a month to cover monthly living costs for the first six months. This consisted of four weekly food allowance payments of £300 and an additional monthly payment of £200 for laundry services. I then received half of this for the next six months.

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

98. I do not think RBKC were helpful in the aftermath of the fire. I was already traumatised after what I had seen on the night of the fire. I was upset, spending a lot of time by myself, and was always crying. I could not believe what had happened, and could not believe I had lost such a close friend. The way I was treated by officials from RBKC often made things worse for me. When I asked them for help, I often felt ignored or was told something disappointing that I later found out to be wrong. This increased my stress and the tension I was living under.
99. I did not receive any texts, calls or emails from RBKC or other government organisation until I was put in touch with my key worker around 10 days after the fire. In the early days after the fire I had no contact from RBKC about the relief effort or support available. For example, they did not call or contact me to explain that hotels were available, I had to go to them access this support.
100. Aside from accommodation, I was mostly stressed out about key workers. I had several key workers, maybe four or five. They kept leaving, especially at the beginning, which meant I had to explain myself each time I met a new one. It was frustrating to have to keep repeating myself when I wanted help with something. I also had to keep putting pressure on my key workers before they would help with things, which was stressful.
101. I was given my first key worker around one week to 10 days after the fire. I think her name was Elizabeth. A few days after the fire she got in contact with me and came to the hotel. She did help me to obtain replacement travel documents, but she would not try to help me bring my family to the UK. When I moved to the flat in Paddington I asked her about getting a mop and a bucket for cleaning, but she said she could not help with these items. She then left shortly after this, around three weeks after the fire.
102. My second key worker was named Suzanna. She was my key worker from July to December 2017, although she did not make contact with me for the first few weeks. At the beginning I did not find Suzanna to be helpful. Whenever I asked her for help with



something I was left waiting, and would have to chase her to follow up on things. She did later become more helpful, but that was only after I chased her.

103. For example, Suzanna did help me to obtain funds for my oyster card transport and for the backdated food allowance payment, as set out in paragraph 98. She was helpful in the end, but I had to chase her repeatedly and it was only after I threatened to complain about her three weeks later that she made progress on my request.

104. I also asked her for help with arranging visas for my family to come and visit me. I had to ask her several times before anything was done. I had been told by several officials, including my previous key worker, that I could not get help for this. However other residents who were not bereaved had told me there was help for this. When I asked Suzanna she said she was not sure if she could help. I felt that she did not really want to help. I then asked for help from Nick Hurd MP during a meeting with him about accommodation. He gave me a telephone number to call and told me to just make an application myself. I think he contacted Suzanna, as she helped me with the visa application after this. This was in September 2017.

105. When my parents, sister and her two children did visit me in November 2017, I was given misleading information that affected the duration of their stay. I asked Suzanna whether their visas could be extended for up to six months. She told me this was not possible. I also asked whether they could be supported to stay longer. She said RBKC was prepared to offer support for a limited period of time but not a long time. I later found out that the families of other residents were provided with the support to visit them for six months. In addition to this, my parents asked Suzanna whether they would be allowed to leave the UK and come back under their visa during their stay. They had to return to Holland for medical appointments. We showed her their visas and she told me if they left the UK they could not come back without making another application. As a result, my parents left the UK after 18 days and went back to Holland. Two days after they had left, Suzanna called me to apologise and say that they could have left and come back, by which point it was too late.

106. After Suzanna left in November 2017, I have had three further key workers. I cannot remember their names. I was less reliant on key workers by this time, and had very little contact with them.

107. I think RBKC could have done things differently in the aftermath of the fire. They should have contacted residents to see what they needed, to offer them help with accommodation and financial support, rather than waiting for people to contact them. It was not easy for all residents to have to keep coming to the area around Grenfell Tower for help with things. For example, I was suffering from a bad back at the time, and had very limited money to pay for transport. I felt that RBKC were not taking account of different people's needs and requirements.

108. It seemed to me that RBKC did not want to pay money out. Their approach seemed to be that if residents did not know about financial assistance, they would not have to pay for them. Whenever I spoke to someone from RBKC, they would only give me what I had requested and nothing else. They would not suggest other things I may need or be entitled to. It made me nervous to find out things from other residents that I had not informed about directly by RBKC, and question what else I had not been told.

#### *Family Liaison Officer*

109. I was allocated a Family Liaison Officer called Roxanna Dawe. I do not remember meeting her until I gave my police statement in February 2018. I have since seen her around at different events. I did not really have much direct contact with my FLO.

#### *Public Communications*

110. The most effective way I obtained information was through other residents and the local community. No one from RBKC or any other official position gave me clear advice on what help was available. At first I had to find everything out myself. When I moved to permanent accommodation in October 2017, I started to receive things by post from RBKC, but it was all about the building I was in rather than the support available.

### Medical /Mental Health Assistance

111. As outlined at paragraphs 6 and 7 of my Phase 1 statement, my health before the fire was very good. Without going into detail, I have struggled with both my physical and mental health since the fire. I will not cover the issues with my physical health in this statement. In respect of my mental health, I have suffered with flashbacks, difficulty sleeping and poor memory and have been diagnosed with PTSD and Depression. I also touch on this at paragraph 45 of my Phase 1 statement.
112. At the Westway shortly after the fire, I spoke to someone from the NHS about support to help us cope. Omar and I gave him our numbers and he said he would call us back. I do not think I ever received a call.
113. I have since had counselling from a number of different organisations. Initially I saw one counsellor for two sessions through Time to Talk. I cannot remember if this was arranged by the NHS or through the Westway or the Curve. I then saw a second counsellor at Holland Park GP practice for a further two sessions, and then another counsellor in July 2017. None of these counsellors spoke Arabic. This was unhelpful, as I feel most able to talk about my issues in Arabic rather than English. —
114. No one offered me psychological support in Arabic after the fire although I asked for it. When I asked my key worker to help with this, she arranged an appointment for me at The Curve. However, when I went to the appointment the counsellor could not understand the Arabic I spoke at all. She was from Morocco and this is a different type of Arabic to my native language.
115. Eventually my case manager and solicitor helped me to find a psychologist that could speak Arabic. I started seeing him in April 2018. I feel like he has been the first person who has been able to help me and give me the support I need. The delay in finding the right support was very stressful and it was hard managing alone.

### Longer-term housing

116. In general, I did not feel that the housing allocation process was ever properly explained to me. It seemed to be applied inconsistently. I kept being told that I was not entitled to what I felt I needed, and then I would learn that other people in the same position as me were being offered what had been refused to me. I did not understand the system in the UK, which made it even more difficult for me to understand what was going on. Although I spoke English, I was not fluent and I was not offered an interpreter to help explain the process at any point.
117. Around 10 days after the fire a man who introduced himself as being from Westminster Council came to see Omar and me at my hotel. I cannot remember his name or what his role was, as this was the only occasion that I met him. He either called up or knocked on the door. I had to call Omar and ask him to come to the hotel.
118. His manner was very official, and he left me feeling that we had to do what he said. He did not offer us an interpreter, or make any allowances for the fact that we were traumatised and bereaved. It felt as if he did not respect us at all. He told me that they were going to move me to a temporary flat and out of the hotel. He was putting me under a lot of pressure to leave the hotel immediately. He told me I would not be offered a good flat if I did not move now. He also said this was a great opportunity for us, that we should be grateful for.
119. He was gathering information about our accommodation requirements, but he did not clearly explain what he was doing or explain our rights and entitlements. He asked me how many bedrooms I wanted in the temporary flat. I said one bedroom because I thought he was only asking about temporary accommodation. However, it appeared to me that the same information was used by RBKC when offering me permanent accommodation, as I cover at paragraph 123. It was all very confusing and misleading.
120. When I started to look for temporary flats, many other residents told me not to move because I would be there for a long time. This caused me further anxiety. I was placed in temporary accommodation in a one bedroom flat in Paddington three weeks after the fire. It was very noisy in the flat, as it was situated close to the A40. It was not really an



improvement on staying in the hotel. It was also far away from everything I knew in London, and I continued to feel very isolated.

121. During the search for permanent accommodation, I informed my housing officer that I wanted to move back to the area around Grenfell Tower. I wanted to remain within RBKC, and not be moved around from Council to Council.

122. We moved into [REDACTED] block of flats in November 2018 but last year I learned that this block I was living in had the same cladding as they had had on Grenfell Tower. This made me angry that they could put us at risk again. The cladding on my block was replaced on 22 July 2019.

#### Impact

123. I have not gone into detail in this statement about the impact of the fire and aftermath has had on me except for where it is relevant for context. What I saw on the night of the fire and coping with the death of my friend Mohammad has really affected me. How I was treated or left to sort things out for myself after the fire made everything much worse.

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:**



**DATE:** 18/02/2020