

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF AMINA MOHAMED

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).

I, **AMINA MOHAMED**, will say as follows:

1. I make this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. This statement is an account of my personal experience of fire safety in Grenfell Tower ('the Tower') and of dealing with the Kensington and Chelsea Tennant Management Organisation ('TMO') and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council ('RBKC') (**Module 3**).
2. This statement will also provide a brief account of my experience in the aftermath of the fire ('the fire') at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017 (**Module 4**).
3. I provided a Witness Statement to the Inquiry dated 27 June 2018 (**IWS00000857**) for the purpose of Phase 1. I also provided three statements to the Metropolitan Police service dated: 13th July 2017, 10 November 2017 and 10 April 2018 respectively.

Background

4. I am originally from Somalia and first came to the United Kingdom on 23rd September 1994. I moved to Grenfell Tower on 27th January 2014 I lived in flat 51 Grenfell Tower with my nephew Khalid Ahmed. Khalid has lived with me [REDACTED]
5. Flat 51 was on the eighth floor of Grenfell Tower. It was a one bedroom flat, although the bedroom was a little small it had a large sitting room, a good-sized kitchen and a bathroom. All of the windows in my flat faced out onto the Kensington Leisure Centre, I believe that this is east facing side of the Tower. As it was a 1-bedroom flat, we put a sofa-bed in the living room which effectively became Khalid's bedroom
6. I was happy to move to the Tower because I liked the area. It had great transport links, which meant that my commute to work was much quicker, but it was also still easy to visit my family in Southall.
7. When I first moved into the flat, it was in a reasonably good condition and didn't require any significant repairs. As an assured tenant, the flat was going to be my permanent home, so I spent a lot of my own money redecorating my flat. For example, I painted the walls, bought new furniture and replaced the carpets with expensive wooden flooring because I wanted them to last. I spent approximately £2,500 in total.

Communication with the TMO and RBKC

8. The TMO and RBKC were not proactive in engaging with resident, they did the bare minimum. The Tower residents and wider area was multi-cultural, and many people had difficulty communicating in English, but the TMO and RBKC provided no additional assistance or support to individuals whose understanding of the English was limited. Any interaction with the TMO/RBKC felt like a "tick-box" exercise, with little or no desire on their part to ensure that residents understood what they were told. Occasionally, we

would receive letters where you could request the information in a different language, but this was inconsistent, and useless to someone who couldn't read English.

9. I was not aware that the TMO had a magazine for residents of the Lancaster West Estate called 'LINK'. I would have assumed that if it was important for me to read this, then my Housing Officer would have let me know when I first moved in. I assumed that any important information, such as fire safety advice, would be sent to each resident in a formal letter and not buried in any leaflets that can easily be confused for junk mail or online.
10. I was also not aware that the TMO sent texts to residents with updates during the refurbishment, as I never received these. My Housing Officer had my number on file so I should have received these if they were sent out.
11. The TMO would often do things without letting the residents know. For example, on several occasions the water would be turned off for hours, without notice. When I called the TMO, they told me that they were carrying out work, cleaning or something along those lines. On the rare occasions, that they sent out leaflets to let you know works were being carried out they did not explain the purpose of the works.
12. A few months before the fire, I came home from work and noticed dust on the ground around my front door. I wasn't sure where it had come from, so I looked around and when I looked up I saw that a big pipe had been put on top of my door which lead to the stairwell. I asked my neighbour in Flat 52, Willy, if he knew anything about it, he told me it was a gas pipe. I did not understand why the TMO were installing new gas pipe and no one had spoken to me about it before it was put-up.

The Refurbishment of Grenfell Tower

13. I first found out about the plan to refurbish the Tower when I received a letter from Rydon, letting us know that they were going to be replacing the boilers, central heating and windows. The letter also mentioned that there would be changes to the outside of the building, to make it look nicer and make the

building warmer. I don't remember the word 'cladding' being used at that point. I thought that the change to the outside of the building would have been the equivalent to changing the colour of a wall. I didn't realise that they were basically covering the building in petrol.

14. I was not given any detailed information about the purpose of the refurbishments. I never saw or heard from anyone from the TMO during the refurbishment. It was Rydon staff who we saw going in and out of the building. I don't recall Rydon asking whether Khalid and I had any special needs or needed any special assistance. However, I do remember receiving leaflets letting us know that we could go to the Notting Hill Methodist Church during the day to escape the noise from the construction work.
15. Before the refurbishment of the Tower, we had a security guard downstairs with an office in the lobby. The security guards would notice when the lifts broke down and would call someone to come and repair them. I found this useful because I worked full-time and did not have the opportunity to call them myself. The security guard was removed around the time of the refurbishment. After they were removed, it took longer for someone to come and fix the lifts. People were also less afraid to force open the main entrance to the Tower, to get in when they did not have a fob. This meant that anyone could just walk into the Tower. It made the Tower feel less safe.
16. Sometime after I received the letter from Rydon, a woman from Rydon came and knocked on my door. She said that they need to put a board in my hallway because they were going to be putting in the new boiler. I was off work that day so I happened to be home when she knocked, she hadn't arranged this with me so I had no notice. She made it seem like I had no choice in the matter, and didn't explain that I could refuse entry. A few minutes later, she returned with a workman and he nailed a large wooden board to the wall in my hallway.
17. The refurbishment work started on the top floor of the Tower and they worked their way down. By the time they got to my floor, the other residents had already started discussing the consequences of having a boiler in our

hallways. Our hallways were very tight already, and the boilers are not small. Residents were not only concerned about the appearance of the large units in the hallway, but also the practical effects. People were worried that when they had large deliveries, deliverymen wouldn't be able to enter the flat, and that people with wheelchairs or children's buggy's would also find it difficult. I don't think that the TMO or Rydon had considered the practical effect of the boilers being in the hallway, and suspect that they just wanted to get the job done quickly.

18. A few residents had organised and arranged meetings to discuss the changes. I went to about five meetings. Everyone who came agreed that the boilers in the hallway were not appropriate. Some people decided that they would refuse to open their doors for the contractors. As I worked during the day anyway, I wouldn't have been at home if the contractors knocked on my door and Khalid was usually at College.
19. Eventually, Rydon agreed to put the boilers in the kitchen for the people who refused to have them in the hallway. This never would have happened had we not all come together and pushed for it. Some of the residents on the top floors of the Tower, such as my friend Fadumo Ahmed, had let the contractors into their flats before we came to this agreement, so they were then stuck with boilers in their hallways.
20. The refurbishment works caused a lot of disruption. The work would start at around 9am every morning Monday to Friday and it was extremely loud. This meant that even on my days off, I couldn't sleep in. They had put scaffolding on the outside of the building so you could hear the builders walking around you could also hear the constant drilling.
21. Work in my flat started in the summer of 2016. It took two weeks and I had to use my annual leave so that I could be in the flat to let the workers in. The work could have been completed quicker if the contractors had worked 9am to 5pm. Instead, they would come in for a few hours do one two things and then leave. They knew that I was taking time off work to be there but they did not respect this. When they finished their work they removed the board that they

had initially put up in my hallway for the boiler, but they didn't fix the holes which were left when the nails were removed and those were still there in 2017.

22. After the work was complete, no one from the TMO came to inspect my flat or check the quality of the work or to check whether we were happy. Throughout the refurbishment process, it was clear that the concerns of residents were the last thing that RBKC or Rydon really cared about. It was hugely disrespectful and we felt like we were simply in the way, in our own homes.

Repairs following Refurbishment

- Windows

23. After the new windows were installed I had difficulty opening and closing them, as did my nephew. I had never seen similar windows before, you had to pull, twist and push to open them and they were very stiff. I called the TMO to complain about the windows. My Solicitors have recently received a copy of the repairs data for my flat (**Exhibit AM/1**) based on this I believe that I made the complaints about the windows in October 2016.

24. Eventually a man came around to check the windows. At the time, I wasn't sure whether he was from the TMO or Rydon, he didn't make it clear. I now know from the Work Progress Notes section of a file that my Solicitors obtained as part of a Subject Access Request from Rydon, that he was Ben Bailey of Rydon (**Exhibit AM/2**). He came to the flat, looked at the window and said there was nothing wrong with it. He told us that we just didn't know how to use them, but did not properly explain what he thought we were doing wrong. Up until the 14 June 2017, both Khalid and I still had difficulty opening and closing the window.

- Flooding

25. On two or three separate occasion we had leaks in my flat. Although we had experienced leaks before the refurbishments, the most serious incident was during the refurbishment in late 2016. This happened because the TMO had turned off the water mains without notice. I think our neighbours on the 10th

floor had forgotten to turn off their taps and were out of their flat when the water came back on.

26. There was a lot of water. It was coming down the walls in my kitchen and hallway. There was so much water that it ran through my flat and affected the flat directly below. I called the TMO's emergency repairs number and someone did come out to deal with it, but only because the leak was affecting several flats. When the repairman arrived they found that the people who lived in the flat above were out and he had to wait for a colleague to come before he could break into the flat and turn off the taps. They did nothing to help me directly and would not even step into my flat. Khalid and I spent all night trying to dry out walls and floors but there was a lot of water damage.
27. The next morning I called the TMO and asked them to send someone to come and fix the water damage. I was upset because my wooden floors were damaged. They didn't send anyone despite me chasing two or three times. Eventually I gave up. The water damage was still visible on 14 June 2017.

Fire safety

28. I do not remember seeing any fire safety notices in the Tower, not even standard signs marking out the fire exits. I never received advice about what to do if there was a fire in my flat or in the Tower, and no one ever advised me about the escape routes out of the building. There were no fire or smoke alarms in the communal areas of the Tower.
29. I do not recall there ever being a fire alarm test or any fire drills in the Tower. Before the 14 June 2017, I had no knowledge of the "stay put" strategy for the building or any other fire strategy.
30. I understand from my neighbours that the front door to my flat was replaced with a supposedly fire-resistant door shortly before I arrived in the Tower. To me, the door looked cheap and as if it was made out of plastic. Based on my experience on the 14 June 2017, the door clearly were not fire or smoke resistant. As I was leaving the Tower on that night, my neighbour in Flat 56

opened their front door to leave their flat; I could see smoke seeping out from their flats into the lobby area.

31. We had a smoke alarm in the hallway of our flat and in the kitchen, which were checked on a yearly basis. This was the only fire-safety system in place that I knew of.
32. The two lifts in the Tower were in so bad a condition that it often felt like we might as well have not had any lifts. I can recall only a handful of times when both lifts were actually in a working condition at the same time. Almost every other month, one of the lifts would break down and it would take a long time for someone to come in and fix it. It was also very common for them both to be out of service at the same time.
33. Khalid and I were lucky, neither of us had mobility difficulties and so we were able to use the stairs when the lifts were not working. I often worried about some of our neighbours though, especially the elderly, young children and those with mobility difficulties.
34. The stairs in the Tower were very narrow; you could just about have two people go up them side-by-side at the same time. This was difficult on days when the lifts were out as there was a lot of traffic. On the night of the fire, it was terrible: there were people trying to escape, going down the stairs and fire fighters with their equipment trying to go up. There were children and the elderly who needed to take their time to go down the stairs and those who simply wanted to rush out. There was only one stairwell for hundreds of residents. The TMO should have known that if there was an emergency, the stairwell was not a sufficient escape route for those who were in the Tower at the time.

Aftermath

35. At paragraphs 23 to 25 of my first Witness Statement to the Inquiry dated 27 June 2018 (IWS00000857) I briefly addressed the impact, which the events of the 14 June 2017 had on me. I now wish to expand on that.

36. I still regularly think about the night of the fire. It haunts me that within five minutes of me exiting the Tower, the entire building was completely ablaze. Frequently I get flashbacks of seeing residents on the upper floors flashing their mobile phone lights and waving in a desperate attempt to be seen and to get help. I also think about those who lost their lives and their loved ones.
37. Noura Jamal and her family died on the 22nd floor. I used to talk to Noura whenever we saw each other in the Tower or in the playground with her children. She was the first person I met in the Tower and she made me feel part of the community. She was very friendly and had many friends in the community. I was also friendly with Fathia Ahmed Elsanousi and her daughter, Isra Ibrahim. They passed away on the 23rd floor of the Tower, as did Fathia's son, Abufras.
38. There were also many people who lost their lives in the Tower who I recognised although I might have not known by name before the 14 June 2017. Saber Neda was one of these people. We used to run into each other in the lifts almost every morning at 7am on the way to work.

Emergency Shelter/Accommodation

39. On the night of the fire, Khalid and I stood outdoors in our pyjamas until the early morning. By then Khalid's friends who lived in Southall, had heard about the fire and they came and collected him. He stayed with them for a few days. At around 6am I heard from my neighbours that the Rugby Portobello Club had opened their doors and were helping people from the Tower so I went there.
40. When I arrived at the Rugby Portobello, there were already a lot of people there. I saw children sleeping on the floor on blankets. There was water and food being donated and volunteers assisting, I could see people crying and looking for their family members. I did not see anyone from the Council. It was very confusing. For a while I was just wondering around in shock going back and forth from the Tower to the Rugby Portobello. I couldn't think straight after witnessing the fire. I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing and I had not eaten anything for hours. I felt disorientated.

41. The whole area around the Tower was very crowded. The Police, ambulances and fire fighters were still around. Everyone had heard about the fire and came down to either look for their loved ones or to help, but there were also a lot of journalists showing up.
42. Sometime after 9am, I realised that I had to find some clothes, as I was still in the pyjamas that I was wearing when I escaped. I went to my friend's house in Ladbroke Grove and she lent me an abaya. Unfortunately, it didn't fit properly but it had to do. I went to the bank and asked them to give me some money; I did not have my bank card or passport so I told them my address, my date of birth and account details. I was thankful that they didn't ask me too many questions and allowed me to withdraw £100 from my account.
43. I then called my cousin who is an Uber driver; I asked him to take me to Kensington High Street so I could buy some clothes. I bought some leggings and underwear, and my cousin dropped me off in Ladbroke Grove. I walked up to the area around the Tower; I could see that it was still burning, giving off smoke.
44. When I arrived back at the Rugby Portobello Club, I saw that they were writing down the names and addresses of survivors. I added my name and Khalid's to the list. I am not sure who started the list but there was no one official asking us to write our names down.
45. In the afternoon a woman, who was volunteering at the Rugby Portobello, asked me if I had anywhere to stay. I told her I didn't and explained that both Khalid and I would need temporary accommodation; and that we needed to stay together. The volunteer went to speak to someone and 20 minutes later she came back and gave me the address to the Premier Inn hotel in Earls Court. She told me that I would only be able to stay there for one night. I was too tired to think anything of this. I just wanted somewhere to sleep.
46. I was not offered any help getting to the hotel. It doesn't seem like those who arranged my stay at the hotel even thought about how I was going to get there. Fortunately, I was able to go to my cousin's house, as he lived close by and he

dropped me off at the hotel in the evening. He also gave me an Oyster card to use the next day.

47. On 15 June 2017, I left the Premier Inn and went back to the Rugby Portobello. I was offered juice and something to eat, which I could not accept as I was fasting, and was given the address of a place to stay in Kilburn by a volunteer who had spoken to RBKC. This time RBKC arranged for a taxi to take me to the hotel. When I arrived, I found that the hotel was actually more like a hostel. It was completely unsuitable. It was dirty and very cramped. The other guests there were mostly single young people. I saw people with drugs, and it made me feel very uncomfortable.
48. I checked-in, quickly dropped off my stuff in the room and locked the door when I left. I had asked the cab driver who dropped me off at the hotel to wait so he could take me back to Ladbroke Grove. I again went to my cousin's and stayed until after Iftar. When I got back to the hotel, I just locked the door behind me and tried to go to sleep despite feeling uncomfortable about sleeping in a dirty bed. I had no choice. A little before sunrise, I woke up to eat something before beginning my fast and to pray (known as Sahoor). I wanted to heat up some milk to have with cornflakes. I went to the kitchen to use the microwave, but the kitchen was locked.
49. I had not recognised any of the other guests at the hostel when I first arrived. However, the following morning, 16 June 2017, I bumped into a man who told me that he also lived in the Tower and had survived the fire. He had just been discharged from hospital and had been sent to this hostel. He was coughing because he had inhaled smoke. He had been given a prescription to help his breathing and he told me that he did not have any clothes other than those he was wearing which he had been given at the hospital. The clothes he had been wearing when he left the Tower smelt of smoke so the hospital had given him something to change into. He was not given any advice about where to get assistance. He was confused and I wanted to help him so I took him with me to the Rugby Portobello Club.

50. We took the bus to the Rugby Portobello Club. I asked one of the volunteers there to help him because he had just been discharged from hospital. I saw volunteers give him clothes and food. He thanked me for my help.
51. I explained to the same volunteer who had assisted me the day before that I could not go back to the hostel in Kilburn, that I was not comfortable staying there because it was dirty and felt unsafe. At first I was told that I had to go back there as there was nowhere else available. I kept saying that I was not going to return there. Two volunteers tried to help by talking to Housing Officers on my behalf. They spent most of the day arguing with the Housing Officers. At one point, I overheard them saying that the RBKC Housing Team had been given £5 million to accommodate people affected by the fire and surely they could put me in a better hotel. By then, it was around 6pm and the comment seemed to persuade the Housing Officer to change their mind; I was given the option of staying in the Holiday Inn Hotel on Cromwell Road where other residents had been housed. The housing officers were unable to confirm how long I would be able to stay there.
52. Khalid had joined me at the Holiday Inn hotel a few days after I first checked in. We had been at the hotel for two weeks, when I received a call from Khalid telling me that a woman had knocked on his door and told him that he had to go to the Radisson Blu Hotel, Marble Arch. She told him that the rooms had been pre-booked so they were moving everyone and we had to check-out that afternoon. I spoke to the woman. I told her that we needed to stay together and she agreed that it was fine, we would be kept together.
53. When I arrived back at the Holiday Inn that day, Khalid had already checked-out. A Social Worker, who told me that she was a volunteer, helped me pack my things and gave me £40 for a black cab. When I arrived at the Radisson Blu I could not find Khalid so I called him. Khalid told me he was waiting outside in his friend's car because when he arrived to check-in, he was told that they did not have his name on the system so could not give him a room. I asked the receptionist to check the system again because Khalid and I had to stay together. They told me that nothing could be done and gave me the number which they had for RBKC and told me to call RBKC. This was the

first time I was given a way to contact RBKC directly myself. Until the receptionist gave me this number, I had had no way of contacting the Council because they had not given me a contact number.

54. We sat in the lobby calling the number I had been given for the Council. I spent hours arguing with the Housing Officer on the phone. They knew that the most important thing for us was that we stay together but despite this, at about 10pm, I received a call from someone in the Council telling me that they had found a room for Khalid at a hotel in Waterloo. I knew then that I had to put my foot down. I told them that I was not going to my room and that I was staying in the Radisson Blu reception with Khalid until they found a room for us together. I was fasting at the time and had very little energy but I knew I couldn't send Khalid to Waterloo alone and I had lost all faith in the ability of RBKC to sort things out.

55. I only had water to break my fast and nothing to eat, but I knew that I could not leave the hotel to get something to eat until our accommodation was sorted out. Eventually at about 11pm RBKC agreed that Khalid could stay in the same hotel as me. I still do not understand why they tried to split us up when they knew we lived in the same flat and they knew how important it was to us that we were together.

56. There were a lot of people from the Tower in the Radisson Blu with us, Elsa Afeworki, Alemishet Demissie, Hassan Hassan, Alan Anwar, Eamon Zada. We used to sit together and talk in the evenings, supporting each other and sharing information.

57. Although the Radisson Blu was much more suitable than the hostel in Kilburn, it also had its issues. Meal times at the hotel were set. Breakfast was early in the morning and dinner was early in the evening. RBKC had not made any separate provisions for our food; they did not check whether I had any specific dietary needs. I was just expected to eat what was offered by the hotel during the set meal times.

58. This was a problem because during those first few weeks after the fire, all of the survivors from the Tower were busy with meetings with different

organisations. This meant that we were out of the hotel for most of the day and would often come back late. We often missed dinner at the hotel and the hotel did not make any exceptions for us. As a result, we either had to spend our own money on eating out or buying something ready-made (and cold) to take back to our rooms to eat. We did not have a food allowance at that point.

59. Another issue was that for the first few weeks/months (I cannot recall exactly how long) they did not have halal food. Eventually, they had halal chicken, but that was the only halal food and meant that I had to eat chicken every night.

60. The survivors got together and insisted on RBKC providing us with substance payments because of all the issues with food provided by the hotel. Eventually I cannot remember exactly when, the Council provided us with £300 a week. It was so disappointing that the Council did not consider this issue at all, and that we had to fight for this.

Financial Assistance

61. I received a letter about financial assistance when I was at the Holiday Inn. I think the letter was from the Council but I cannot be sure. The letter said that you had to go to a specified Post Office to show ID and get around £5,000 in financial assistance. This was the only financial assistance that I received from the government in those first few months after the fire.

62. By that point, I already had a passport as a friend of mine went with me to the Passport Office in Victoria and helped me complete the application form for a new passport. She even explained to the clerk that I lost my original passport in the Tower, so they agreed to issue that passport in four hours. Because of the lack of centralised information at the time. I didn't know that I could have just gone to the Westway Sports Centre to get a replacement passport for free, which is what Khalid did just a few days later.

63. I went to the Westway a few times in the first couple of weeks after the fire. I saw all the different stands with people helping Tower residents in getting replacement documentation, and I got a new driving licence.


Psychological Support

64. The day after the fire was supposed to be my last day at work before going on ten days annual leave. On the 14 June 2017, I called my supervisor to let her know that I wasn't going to be able to go into work. I couldn't go in. I didn't even have any clothes, just the pyjamas I was wearing when I ran out of the Tower. I was still in shock so I was just doing what I thought I was supposed to do. I believe that my supervisor told the other staff at my workplace that I lived in the Tower because I started receiving messages and calls of support from my colleagues. I also received calls from family and friends, but I still could not fully comprehend what we has just gone through and what I had seen.
65. I was unable to return to work for six months following the fire. I eventually went back on 19 December 2017.
66. I continue to be affected by the events of 14 June 2017. I do not wish to go into detail about this in this statement, other than to say that to this day, every time I hear a police, ambulance or fire siren, I panic and I'm taken back to the night of the fire. I continue to have nightmares and often wake up in a sweat.
67. I was offered counselling session at the Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Centre at St Charles Hospital at the end of 2017. I was diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

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:  AMINA MOHAMED

Dated: 21.02.2020