

**Witness Statement of: Ines Tavares Alves**  
**No. of statement: 2**  
**Exhibits: 4**  
**Date of statement: 25.02.2020**

## **GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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### **SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF INES TAVARES ALVES**

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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).

I, **INES TAVARES ALVES**, will say as follows:

1. I make this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. This statement is an account of my personal experience of fire safety in Grenfell Tower ('the Tower') (**Module 3**) and my experience in the aftermath of the fire at the Tower on 14 June 2017 ('the fire') (**Module 4**).
2. I provided a Witness Statement to the Inquiry dated 18 May 2018 (**IWS00000436**) for the purpose of Phase 1. I also provided three statements to the Metropolitan Police Service; all three statements are dated 25 August 2017.

#### **Background**

3. I lived at Flat 105 on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor in Grenfell Tower for most of my life. I lived in the flat with my mum, Maria de Fatima, my dad, Manuel Miguel Ferreira and my brother Tiago. My parents were leaseholders, having bought the lease in May 2001.

4. I believe that following the fire, some people have felt sorry for us because we lived in the Tower, they see it as having been a slum or a jungle, but I am very proud to have lived there because it was my home and because of the strong sense of community.
5. Having grown up in the Tower, and attended the local schools, most of my friends were from the local community. Our whole family was very active in the community. We socialised quite a lot with residents in and around the Tower and my dad was a member of the Grenfell Tower Leaseholders Association. The residents of the Tower worked together to try and address issues and make positive changes. The support from the community was invaluable in the days following the fire.

### **Fire Safety**

6. I never had a fire safety briefing or fire safety advice from any professionals whilst living in the Tower.
7. I remember that a week before the fire, I noticed an A5-sized poster instructing residents what to do in a fire. It was placed in between the two lifts on our floor. The poster said that in case of a fire, close your doors and warn your neighbours if the fire was in your flat. If there was a fire elsewhere in the building it said to stay in your flat. The poster also said not to use the lifts in a fire. I assume the poster was put on every floor. They must have only been put up a few weeks before the fire because I had never seen them before then. It was not there long.
8. I do not remember seeing any fire extinguishers in the communal parts of the building. If they were there, I didn't see them. We had a fire extinguisher in our flat and we had fire alarms in our flat, I think we had one smoke alarm and a carbon monoxide detector.
9. I remember that next to Flat 103, there was a hose in a red box. The box had a large glass panel. I think there was a hose on every floor.
10. The doors in the communal parts of the building, to the stairwell and the rubbish chute, were heavy and would shut automatically behind you. We visited our neighbours in flats 103 and 104 regularly; the front doors to their flats were light and would not shut

behind you if you didn't pull them. If there was a light wind because a window was open, the door would shut but it would not lock automatically, as you had to lift the handle in order to lock the door. I remember feeling that they were not safe, not in relation to fire safety but because they might be easily broken into because they were not solid doors.

11. I remember seeing fire exit signs pointing to the stairwell and a picture of a man running on emergency exit signs above the doors in the communal parts of the building. There was only one stairwell in the Tower, which was so narrow that you would only be able to fit two people side-by-side.

12. I have no idea whether there was emergency lighting in the Tower.

13. I do not remember seeing or hearing any smoke or fire alarms in the communal parts of the Tower.

14. I do not remember seeing any fire fighters or professionals carrying out any checks in the building.

### Lifts

15. We had two lifts in the Tower. They were often out of service and there were other more general issues with them. For example, the lifts would usually miss my floor even though I pressed the button to call it.

16. I had to learn to work around the issues with the lift so that I was not late for school. Each day I would have to try and guess whether it was worth taking the stairs or waiting for the lift and risk it either missing my floor or it being too full for me to use. It was frustrating.

17. The lifts were also very small; they would usually be full by the time it got to our floor, the 13<sup>th</sup> floor. I feel that the TMO or RBKC could have organised it better. I was lucky, I was healthy enough to use the stairs when I needed to, but some of our neighbours could not. There was a lady who lived in one of the new flats on the lower floors who was in a wheelchair and had four small children. There was another man in the building

who used crutches. There were also parents with young children in buggies. I don't know what they would do on the occasions that both lifts were out of service.

18. For at least 2 weeks during the refurbishment, probably longer, we only had one functioning lift.

### **Dealings with the TMO and RBKC**

19. As I mentioned above, my dad was very active in reporting issues to the TMO, whether in relation to problems in our flat or the communal parts of the Tower. This included issues relating to safety. He was a member of the Grenfell Tower Leaseholders Association and also wrote to the TMO independently. My brother Tiago helped him write letters, and I used to send him pictures of issues I noticed around the building. I believe he then forwarded these to the TMO. I never had any direct contact with the TMO or RBKC.

20. I now exhibit to this statement as **Exhibit ITA/7** two photographs that I took on my mobile phone of a door in the lobby to the Tower. The door had come completely off its hinges and was lying in the middle of the floor. I know from the time stamp on my phone that I took the photo at 4.48pm on 1 November 2016. I cannot be sure, but believe that it took some time for the door to be moved out of the way and fixed.

21. I also exhibit as **Exhibit ITA/8** a picture which I took at 12.21pm on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2016 of one of the lifts with its doors stuck open. There was no sign letting you know that it was out of service and again it was not fixed immediately.

22. Exhibits ITA/7 and ITA/8 are examples of pictures I sent to my dad which he would then forward to the TMO **Exhibit ITA/9**.

23. It took the TMO at least a couple of working days after something was reported for them to come and fix it.



24. The hot water in the Tower was also turned off at least three times a year. I'm not sure why this happened. I also remember one occasion when we had no water for almost a whole day, and I do not remember being given any notice that it was going to happen.

#### Refurbishment

25. I cannot remember when I first heard that the Tower was going to be refurbished but I remember them carrying out the work. I was the one at home when the builders came to carry out the work because my dad used to book them to come in during school holidays.
26. I think they started work in our flat during either the Easter holiday or May half-term 2016. They didn't complete the work all at once, and they returned a few weeks or months later to finish the job. On one occasion, they installed the new heating system and on another they put in the new windows. I can't remember which job was done first.
27. I remember being annoyed that they had to do the work. They used to come at 7am, start drilling and they were generally loud. The builders also made a lot of mess in the communal parts, which we had mop and Hoover ourselves. It was just disruptive. Residents in the Tower were also annoyed that the workmen used the lifts to carry their material and equipment up and down. They held the lifts for too long, so it made the usual issues with the lifts even worse.
28. It also took them longer to carry out the work than was expected. They did not always show up when they were supposed to. I distinctly remember one instance, when my parents had to call up and chase them because they hadn't shown up when they said they would. I was annoyed because it was a school holiday and I had to wait around for them when I could have been doing other things.
29. I remember they installed copper pipes. I think they were hot water pipes, but they left them exposed, it looked ugly. I think because my parents complained, Rydon eventually agreed to either paint them white or boxed them up.

30. Before the refurbishment, the windows in our flat were ugly and a lot of cold would get in. We put pillows above the sofa to block out the draught from the living room window. After the refurbishment, the windows were a lot prettier, but I'm not sure how safe they were. They also installed an extractor fan in our kitchen window, which was really noisy on most days but especially on a windy day.
31. My parent's friend does building work; he converted the additional bedroom in our flat before the refurbishment, so I could tell that the work done during the refurbishment wasn't of good quality. The workmen during the refurbishment didn't seem to pay attention to details in the same way that my parent's friends did and they didn't seem to take as much pride in their work. I remember my dad complaining about it as did others.

### **Aftermath**

32. As this statement is made for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry, and will be made public, I do not feel comfortable going into detail about how I have been affected by the tragedy of the Grenfell Tower Fire. I will say that witnessing the fire was traumatising, I was devastated and I'm still struggling to rebuild my life.
33. On 14 June 2017, I ran out of the Tower wearing jeans, a T-shirt and a white jumper. I had no time to put on a bra or to take anything other than my phone and GCSE Chemistry revision notes for my exam later that day. It sounds silly now because I know they saved my life, but I remember being annoyed that my dad and brother woke me up, because I wanted to rest before my exam.
34. We stood outside the Tower for hours watching the fire. There was a lot of ash in the air, it looked like black dust. I remember hyperventilating whilst watching the fire as it got bigger and bigger and finally reached the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor. I could not get tears out because I was in shock. I remember asking my brother if it was going to reach our flat and he said no, I really wanted to believe him.
35. After a couple of hours of standing outside watching the Tower, my parents said it was better for me to go to our friend's Filipe's home, he lived in Bramley House. They

asked Tiago to take me. When we arrived at our friend's flat, my brother told me to try and sleep, but I couldn't. The flat was close enough to the Tower that you could see it from their balcony and you could hear everything that was going on.

36. I could not fully process what was happening. I think my way of coping with it was to focus on my Chemistry GCSE exam. I wanted to carry on as usual, so I tried to hold it together. I went to school in the same clothes I'd left the Tower in and sat my exam. As soon as they collected the papers, I burst into tears.

37. The whole first week after the fire was super weird, reality hadn't sunk in. After sitting that chemistry exam, I missed four other exams. I had no material and notes so I did not feel that I would have been properly prepared.

38. My school, Sacred Heart High School in Hammersmith, was supportive. On the day of the fire, the teachers gave me cash, an Oyster card, toothbrush, and toothpaste.

39. Whilst we were outside the Tower watching the fire, I described how the fire was spreading up the Tower to my friends over a group chat. I asked them to bring me some clothes, and a bra as I left the Tower without one. The clothes I had been wearing smelt of smoke, and my white jumper had almost turned grey because of all the black ash that had collected on it.

40. After the exam, I stayed at School for a while with my school friends. We went to Shepherds Bush Green but I only stayed a while before heading back to the flat of the family friends we were staying with. By that time, everyone had heard about the fire on the news so there were lots of people visiting.

#### *Relief Centres*

41. I found out through social media and friends who were volunteering {**Exhibit ITA/10** }, that donations were being directed to the Noting Hill Methodist Church. Around 12pm or 1pm on 14 June, I went with my dad and his best friend Filipe to the Methodist Church. It was early enough in the day that some people were still finding out about the fire for the first time. It was weird because we had lived through it and



we had seen it spread, but some people only heard about it when they woke up and watched the news.

42. A lot of people had come to the local area to try and help: it was packed. As well as the volunteers we saw reporters not knowing who to speak to. There were also police and fire services.
43. When we arrived at the Methodist Church I only remember seeing volunteers, there was no one from the Council or government. It wasn't very busy, I saw a lot of volunteers and donations, but I think we were the only survivors collecting donations. I remember that I wasn't really sure what I needed, I had the clothes I was wearing and that was enough, nothing else seemed important. I wasn't thinking about a phone charger, lip balm or anything else. I remember that we got clothes and we all needed to have a shower and change. I remember getting a yellow hoodie that I still have today. Some of the clothes I picked out, I probably wouldn't have bought for myself previously, but at that point, anything that fit me would do. I was definitely not in a position to be picky.
44. After dropping off the donations we had collected, at Filipe's home I went to meet my friends from primary school; they all lived in the local area. My friends told me about the Rugby Portobello Club and they went with me to the door, only survivors and bereaved were allowed in. At Rugby Portobello they took you at your word that you lived in the Tower or Walkways because a lot of people didn't have ID. Inside the hall, long tables had been set up with donations. I remember seeing clothes and food, things like crisps and fruit. I remember there were lots of clothes. I picked out a pair of trainers that were like the ones that I had before the fire, it was reassuring. I felt like I was getting something back.
45. One of my friends knew someone who lived in the Tower and she wanted to know that they made it out alive. Someone had put up a long sheet of paper with all the flat numbers written on it and information about whether the residents of that flat had made it out. It was unattended so I am not sure who put it up. I assumed it was someone from the Rugby Portobello; it did not look like an official register. At that point, everything



was still up in the air. No one knew what had happened, people were making up rumours, no one knew anything for certain.

46. I remember that my parents got cash from charities at the Rugby Portobello in the days after the fire, but I do not remember which one.
47. After the Rugby Portobello Club, I went to St Francis Community Church. I was a pupil at Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School, which is attached to the Church, so I knew the majority of the people there. I went to the Church for emotional support, but there were also donations there: a lot of food, snacks, and clothes. I saw people collecting donations; I assume they lived in the Tower or Walkways.
48. I did not see anyone from the Council or the government on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2017. There was no one directing us to relief centres, all the information came from the local community.
49. Throughout the day, we saw water, fruit, crisps and other snacks being handed out by volunteers and laid out, in the streets and the relief centres. It was all local people, people who wanted to volunteer and help in some way rather than an organized group.
50. I also saw a lot of debris lying on the ground in the area in the days and weeks after the fire. There was a lot of black ash. There was also a mixture of large and small debris, some pieces as large as footballs. I remember picking up a piece of debris that looked to be solid, but as soon as I gripped it, it crumbled into ash. There was debris all over Filipe's balcony which he and his family had to clean up themselves. For the first few days after the fire, the whole of the local area was covered in a layer of black ash. I remember that it was around all of the relief centres I visited and even as far away as Ladbroke Grove. There seemed to have been more debris around in the two or three days after the fire than on the 14 June. I believe that it had been spread around by the wind.
51. A week after the fire, I started going to the Westway with my parents in order to get documents reissued, a National Insurance card and a passport. I went to the Westway

regularly throughout the first couple of weeks after the fire because it was nice to see people we knew.

### *Accommodation*

52. We stayed with our family friends for about four days after the fire. It was crowded with all of us there, as well as the many visitors we had. There was not enough room in the flat for us to keep the clothes we had collected from the Methodist Church and Rugby Portobello Club. The daughter of another family friend had an apartment opposite Latimer Road station; she offered to stay with her parents so that we could use her place.

53. I remember my parents feeling scared that if we were not placed in a hotel we would be forgotten about by the Council. My parents also knew that we couldn't stay with friends forever. The weekend after the fire, we were offered a room at the Hilton Hotel in Paddington, but there was not enough room for us all. RBKC had only booked one room and it was only for a few days, so we carried on staying with friends because we wanted to stay together.

54. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, my parents were told by someone at RBKC that we had rooms booked at the Holiday Inn, Earl's Court. I went with my mother to check-in. When we arrived at the hotel, we gave them our names but were told that they had no rooms left. My mum got angry; she didn't understand how we could be sent there by the Council if there were no rooms. My dad also got angry about the situation because it was another mistake. I think he called the Council and was told that the room had in fact been booked for the next day. We had to spend another night with friends.

55. If we had not had our friends support during the week after the fire, we would have been forced to sleep in the Westway like many of our neighbours. The Council kept making mistakes when arranging emergency accommodation.

56. When we checked into the Holiday Inn on 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2017, we were given two double rooms. I had to share a double bed with my brother for 2 nights before they swapped the double bed for two singles. It was inappropriate for us to share a double bed. We had to share a room for about 3 months; although I get on well with my brother it was

difficult because I had no privacy. I was given my own room in September, once I started school.

57. A couple of our neighbours were also staying at the same hotel, including Marlon Mangoba and his family; Marlon and I went to school together.

58. The only meal that the hotel served was breakfast and it was only at set times. It was the summer holiday so I liked to sleep in, but if I did, I'd miss breakfast so I often had to rush to make it in time. We had to have lunch out and for dinner we had food delivered to the hotel. We were given vouchers for Deliveroo by the Council for dinner. For 4 months after the fire, we often went to friends' homes for dinner so we had home cooked meals; there were three families in particular whose homes we would go to regularly.

59. We lived in the hotel for 4 months. We then moved into temporary accommodation for 8 months, and then to a place in Ladbroke Grove for another 8 months. We moved into our permanent home almost a year ago.

### *Psychological Support*

60. For a year after the fire, I felt very weird. It's hard to describe, it was like a dream. I could physically feel myself pinching my skin, but I kept telling myself that I was going to wake up. I was in limbo and just going with the flow of things, doing what I thought I was supposed to be doing.

61. I continued to feel like this even after we moved from the hotel to an apartment. We still had no idea how long we were going to stay there. It was not our home and so I did not feel settled; everything was so uncertain.

62. In the weeks following the fire, we regularly went back to the area around the Tower to go to the Westway in order to sort out our documentation and to see friends. I saw pictures of missing people posted up across the local area; no one knew for sure what had happened to them. It was only two weeks after the fire that deaths started to be confirmed. I knew everyone that died; I knew their face if not their names. I knew if



they lived in the floors above me or below me, I probably spoke to most of them in the lifts or in the communal parts.

63. In the weeks after the fire, my mum kept asking me to start counselling. She picked up leaflets at the Westway and other relief centres about counselling and she encouraged me to go. Everything was still in limbo; deaths had not been confirmed; we did not know what state our flat was in. I had not started processing what had happened so I didn't think counselling would be beneficial at that time.
64. My family did a couple of interviews after the fire. People became interested in my story after it was reported that I did well in the Chemistry GCSE I sat on the day of the fire. I was very upset by some of the comments, which were posted on the online articles: they called me selfish for saving my chemistry revision notes instead of other people. They didn't realise that my dad had knocked on the doors of all our neighbours on our floor. They also called me a "nerd" and made remarks about the fact that I was not English. I tried to ignore all these comments and to tell myself that they were cowards hiding behind a screen, but it was very difficult to see those comments.
65. There are still a lot of negative comments on social media about survivors and the bereaved; they got at us for criticising the fire brigade. They do not understand that we are not blaming the fire fighters, we just think that the fire brigade could have done better.
66. At the one-year anniversary of the fire, I started having panic attacks. I felt very unmotivated and low. I did not want to do the things I enjoyed like going to the gym. I found that I could not finish a task. If anyone said something to me that I didn't like I burst into tears.
67. There were lots of reporters wanting to interview me for documentaries because my story was one of the more positive stories from the Tower. People wanted to know how I was doing at school. It put a lot of pressure on me; I did not do as well in my year 12 exams which was very unlike me. I knew something was wrong.

68. I started therapy at the Curve in late-August/early-September 2018. I had one-to one weekly sessions with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, trauma specialist. I remember that during my first therapy session I could not get my words out because I couldn't stop crying. After I turned 18, I continued with the same therapist as we had developed a relationship, she diagnosed me with Paediatric Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.
69. I understand now that I was triggered by having to sit an exam. After discussing it with my therapist and family, I decided to re-take year 12. It wasn't what I wanted to do, I had to watch my friends and classmates go off to University whilst I stayed behind, I felt like I had lost a year because of the fire, but I now believe that it was the right decision.
70. I have not done any national exams since my GCSE Chemistry exam so I'm concerned about my A-Levels which I will be taking in summer 2020.
71. Seeing pictures of those who passed away and social media and articles relating to the Tower continue to trigger my panic attacks.
72. I do not think that RBKC were prepared to respond to what happened, but the community was also not prepared and yet somehow they managed to provide the support faster than RBKC was able to. RBKC should have been quicker. If the community were able to act, why couldn't they?

### **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: ...Ines Alves.....

**Ines Tavares Alves**

Dated: ...25.02.2020..