

Witness Statement of: Fatima Boujettif

No. of statement: 2

Exhibits: 0

Date of statement: 25 February 2020

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF FATIMA BOUJETIF

I, Fatima Boujettif, will say as follows:-

1. I am a resident of Hurstway Walk. I am making this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.
2. This is my second witness statement to the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. My first witness statement is dated 15 May 2018 (Unique reference number: **IWS00000469**) and addressed my experiences on 13/14 June 2017.
3. This statement addresses the issues within module 3 (Communication with residents and fire safety within the Tower) and module 4 (aftermath) from the Inquiry's stated Phase 2 schedule. I deal with issues relating to module 3 in paragraphs 7-18, and module 4 in paragraphs 19-45.

Background

Life in Hurstway Walk

4. I have lived in Hurstway Walk for my entire life. When I was born, my parents were living at ■■■ Hurstway Walk and then, when I was 2, the three of us moved into ■■■ Hurstway Walk, which has three bedrooms, is generally bigger, and is where I remain living with my mum. The flat is located approximately 80 metres from Grenfell Tower ('the Tower'). The tenancy is in my mum's name and the landlord is RBKC.
5. I work as a pastoral support manager at Kensington Aldridge Academy. Growing up and working here means that the Lancaster Estate Community has always formed a big part of my life.
6. Of course there would be things that I would change about the Estate, but it is my home and it is all that I have ever known.

Issues in the flat

7. We have had numerous problems in the flat in the time that we have lived here. The most persistent have been with the plumbing, electricity and water pressure. We have also had toilet blockages, issues with hot water, and power cuts after the Council fitted a lighting fixture.
8. In early 2017, we had a lot of issues with our balcony door in the living room. The balcony door is a very old French window, and it had started to come away from its hinges, so it wasn't sliding properly and we couldn't fully make use of it. This caused a number of problems such as cold air and leaves blowing in, and it was of course dangerous in terms of security. We had to report this on a few occasions and it wasn't fixed until around a month later. The TMO explained that the delay was due to them having to contract the work out.
9. The problems with hot water, in particular, have been ongoing for as long as I can remember. The water in Hurstway Walk is fed to each flat from a communal boiler; the water pressure has always been very limited. We did report this on a number of occasions, but we were informed by the TMO that the communal boiler system restricted the amount of water, and that they were not therefore able to resolve this.

10. There were other problems reoccurring in the flat, for example the bath panel would chip as a result of getting wet when water came out of the bath tub. The wooden insets would then come away from the panel. The kitchen cabinets were also falling off. Again, as I remember, these issues took some time to be resolved, despite us having reported them promptly and following up.

Complaints and Communication with the TMO

11. Mum and I would both take responsibility for contacting the Estate Office to report a repair, just depending on who would have the time available. The process was time consuming and frustrating. You would telephone to report the problem and it would then take weeks for someone to come out and resolve it.
12. I remember on at least one occasion being told that someone would attend to fix the balcony on a certain date, and taking some time off work to make sure that I was at home to let them in and answer any questions. When the agreed date came, nobody attended and they never contacted us about this. Also, there were occasions when someone would come out and assess the problem, but wouldn't be equipped, or have the expertise to fix it, and so you would have to wait longer for someone else to attend. I think that would happen in particular when an electrical repair was needed, because the TMO would contract out to other specialists.
13. As an organisation, the TMO's communication was really terrible. You would be made to feel as though you were a burden, or asking too much, or just not being taken seriously. I wasn't aware of any procedure for making or escalating complaints, or any methods to communicate feedback or suggest improvements to the service.

Fire Safety before the fire

In the flat

14. In the flat, prior to the fire, there were 3 smoke alarms in total, one in the kitchen, one in the hallway, and a third one by the main front door. I remember that they did work as the alarm sounded on a few occasions when cooking.

15. The front door that we had before the fire was very heavy and self-closing. I don't recall any problems with it. The doors in the communal areas were also self-closing.

In the Communal Areas

16. There has always been a dry riser by the rubbish chute, on the ground floor, but no other equipment as far as I can remember for putting out a fire. I didn't see any emergency lighting at any point, though it may have been fitted, and I also don't recall seeing any signs or evacuation plans to indicate which route would be best to take in the event of an emergency.

Checks and Inspections

17. The fire alarms in the flat were never serviced. With the gas, RBKC outsourced engineers from a company who would come to check the gas on a yearly basis. After the visit, we would get a certificate to demonstrate that everything was in working order. There didn't seem to be any equivalent procedure for checking the fire alarms, either in the flat, or in the communal areas.
18. There were certainly never any drills carried out and I wasn't aware of where people might be expected to assemble in the event of a fire. This is worrying on reflection because our flat is positioned on the third floor of the block, right at the end, and so it wouldn't necessarily be clear what route should be taken in the event of an emergency. I would certainly not have been clear on what to do at all. My mum's mobility is restricted as she suffers with arthritis and so I know she would not be able to run for example, or climb over anything. I believe that we only had the opportunity to make this information about her immobility problems known when the fire wardens patrolled after the fire.

Aftermath

19. I set out my experience of the night of the fire in paragraphs 8 – 27 of my first statement. I will not go into that in detail again in this statement.

20. On the morning of 14 June 2017, I went to a friend's house in Stanford Brook, near Chiswick, to try to get a few hours of sleep. I arrived about 8:30am. However, I was not able to sleep much and so at around 1pm I returned to the Estate. I felt quite disorientated. I bumped into a friend who told me that people appeared to be congregating at the Westway Sports centre.
21. Word had spread that the police had advised that we could not return to our flats but no alternative was presented to us. Initially I had heard, either from the police or from people on the street, that we could go to the Latimer Road Christian Centre but I did not want to go there, and so that is why I decided to go to my friend's house in Stamford Brook.

Relief Centres

22. Early in the afternoon on 14th June, perhaps about 1:30pm, I spoke to an RBKC representative at the Westway; I asked when we would be let back into our flats, how we would be notified that we could return and where we should go in the interim. I cannot remember their exact words, but the feeling I got from their response stuck with me: they were very rude and there was no reassurance. They suggested that I watch the news. I remember being upset by their manner and that we started to have a bit of a disagreement and were saying disagreeable things back and forth. I was with a friend, Adin, who said that I should probably leave it. I felt then as though my problems were not really a priority and I did not want to keep asking for information; that feeling stuck with me.
23. The atmosphere at the Westway was quite overwhelming. It did not seem well organised; there were lots of people there, and so much noise and movement. As I remember, there was donated food and drink available but I did not pay too much attention to this as I had no appetite, I was not interested in eating anything.
24. As I had not been advised of any alternative accommodation I had to make my own arrangements, and my mum and I went to stay with my sister in Hammersmith. No words can explain how I was feeling at that time. Questions and messages had started

coming in from friends. One of my friends told me that her brother was going to be away for a few days and that I would be able to stay in his house in Holland Park for the next 5 nights whilst he was away. I met with her to collect the keys and then stayed at his house. My mum continued to stay with my sister.

Practical and financial assistance

25. After a few days, I really needed to know what was happening. On 19th or 20th June, the Monday or Tuesday following the fire, I returned to the Estate and to the Westway. I came across some people that I recognised from the Estate. They said to me that I could return to my flat to collect belongings that I needed; I would be accompanied by a police officer. I needed to do this as at this time all I had was a friend's dress that I had borrowed and some pyjamas. I didn't even have my wallet as when we were evacuated, although I took my handbag, my wallet was left in a coat pocket at the flat.
26. I called my mum and she gave me a list of belongings that she wanted from the flat. I then approached the police officers who were stationed by the first entrance on Latimer Road, by the cordoned off area. I asked if one of them could accompany me to the flat, which they did. I asked the police officer when we would be able to return to the flat and for any other information they had, but they were not able to tell me anything. Afterwards, I went back to the Westway and asked for information from a representative of RBKC, but they too were unable to answer my questions. I was told that I could stay at the Westway but I did not want to stay there, I did not want to take up space meant for those who had lost their homes, and so I went to stay at my sister's home.
27. For the next few days I borrowed cash from friends and was given money here and there by my family. I was not aware of any alternative. In fact, I did not need much money as I wasn't hungry or able to eat much, which I believe was due to the stress and upheaval of everything that I had experienced. At one point, our neighbour told us that RBKC were handing out clothing and emergency funds at the Westway. My mother was initially against accepting anything, however, after a conversation with her friend, she agreed to go and ask for the £500 emergency payment.

Emergency accommodation

28. Around a week after the fire, my sister received a text from the TMO to say that the residents of the walkways were allowed back into their homes. I returned to the Estate but when I arrived the police were still not letting people in. I showed the police officer the text that my sister had received; the police officer radioed over to his Chief. The Chief said that anyone "over the '500s" was able to return home and that they had not been evacuated, but that we were not.
29. This was frustrating. I called RBKC. I was waiting on the phone for about 30 minutes before somebody answered. The first person I spoke to said that they were under the assumption that I could go back in, but that I needed to call the emergency accommodation line. I spoke to someone there who asked if I could stay at the Westway or with family or friends. I explained we were staying with family but that we could not stay for a long time. The police officer with me could tell that I was feeling overwhelmed and exasperated; he then spoke to the person from RBKC and they then agreed that I could stay at the Holiday Inn in West Kensington for one night. I was to call back the next day. I went to the hotel and stayed there for the night.
30. The next day I went to St Clement James Centre in Latimer Road; I used to work there and so they recognised me. Someone called North Kensington Law Centre for me. The lawyer there was so helpful. They phoned RBKC on my behalf. Following that phone call, RBKC arranged for me and my mum to stay at the Novotel in Hammersmith. I do not know how I would have got through this time without the support of St Clement James Centre and the North Kensington Law Centre. Kensington Law Centre advised us of our rights and most importantly provided support; St Clement James made us feel welcome, not a burden or a charity case.
31. It was such an enormous relief just to have some certainty, to know that we would be able to stay in one place for longer than one night. Mum and I shared a room; it had one double bed that we shared. Even so, we were happy to be able to settle down somewhere for an extended period of time, we just wanted to make it work. There were a number of other people from the Tower and from the Walkways who were also staying at the hotel.

32. By this time, we had been told that the delay in being able to return home was due to the difficulties in trying to reinstall the gas and hot water which had come from the Tower, We were told that the situation would be kept under review. As I understand it, RBKC would update the hotel reception, and the staff from the hotel in turn would update all affected guests staying at the same time.

Clothes and personal belongings

33. Once I knew that we were going to be based at the Novotel for a while, I went back to the flat (with a police officer) and packed a suitcase of clothes and belongings for mum and me. Access to the flat was inconsistent; sometimes police allowed us to enter without any questions and sometimes we were refused entry. I filled a large suitcase but I still needed to be able to return to pick up more items as there were no laundry facilities at the hotel where we could wash our clothes. I didn't feel right collecting anything from the Westway.

Debris

34. We needed to clean up the debris that had entered the flat, but we didn't feel able to stay there for long periods of time. The side of the flat that faces Grenfell. Had a lot of the debris from the tower but also leaves from where the window, was left open over a long of time. The balcony had a considerable amount of debris from the tower. I cleaned up the flat however, council cleaned up the balcony.

Food

35. Once we were settled into the hotel, we were drip fed information about how we could get our meals and financial support. We were told that RBKC would cover the cost of breakfast and dinner at the hotel, this included one soft drink. On top of this we were given an allowance of £15 for lunch, which we could spend at the hotel or elsewhere. Much later on we found out from other residents that there was an option of a £30 per day food allowance; this would have been so much easier as we would have liked to

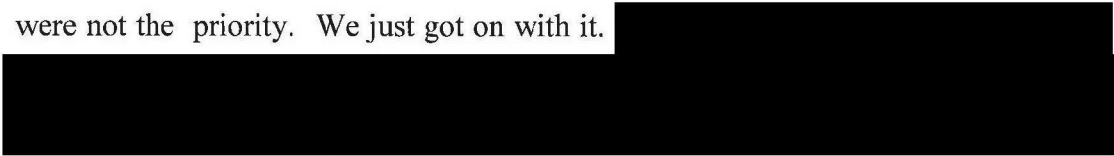
have the flexibility to eat at places other than at the hotel and at times we had spent our own money going out to other places to eat.

Psychological and emotional support

36. Three weeks after the fire, I was allocated a key worker, who I understand had been brought in from Hammersmith. I heard from her once to set up a meeting, but did not have any further contact. It would have been good to have help. I did not feel able to initiate contact myself.

Around three weeks after the fire a representative from RBKC – who I understand was a Hammersmith and Fulham housing officer - came to the hotel and told us that counselling was available. She explained that this was through St Charlies Hospital. By then I had already been to see my GP and asked for a referral.

Information sharing

37. I did not go out of my way to find out all of the information that it would have helped for us to know, because I felt that as so many had died and had lost their homes, we were not the priority. We just got on with it.
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38. However, there was very little information available and as a result we were all so misinformed. For example, we were under the impression that a lot of the help was solely for those that had been in Grenfell Tower. That misunderstanding, in the absence of anyone actively providing information about the support available meant that we believed that we were not eligible for certain help, for example for emergency hotel accommodation for some time and later, for emergency financial assistance and funding for food costs. As neither my mum nor I had any disabilities or young children perhaps we were not afforded such a sense of priority.

39. Information was generally shared amongst people who had lived on the Estate, between neighbours and friends. That is how we came to be aware of what was available.

Needs of specific groups

40. I mentioned that my mum has bad arthritis which really impacts on her ability to mobilise around. At no point did this seem to be a factor when we were being accommodated, and I know she has felt as though it wasn't considered important, despite her struggling.

Life in Hurstway now – how things have changed

41. I returned to work after the school summer holiday in September 2017 and we returned to the flat in November 2017.
42. We have had a new door installed since the fire which is supposed to be fire resistant. It is flimsy compared to our old one which was very sturdy and which you felt secure behind. We were told it was compliant with fire safety but recently have been told that it isn't and that it has been earmarked to be changed again. Fire curtains have been put in to some flats with windows that overlook the communal area. There is a new exit fire button on the communal doors and a new middle walkway door system.
43. Settling back into the flat, it went from one extreme to the other. Initially, when we needed it, we had no information, and then we seemed to be inundated with leaflets about various things, telling us about all sorts, for example about The Curve opening, about the support being offered, works being done, and new safety plans. It was too much at that time and, really, too late.
44. In the early days when we returned there was also a lot of demand on our time when we were trying to settle back into our lives. We had to be in for example when the gas man came, or the plumber came, or when they came to fix in a new door in; it was quite disruptive.

Impact

45. It is hard to find words to describe the effects of the night of 14 June 2017. As I said in

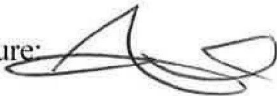
my first statement, it has been tremendously difficult to escape the memories and the tragedy; it is everywhere. The community have lost so much and will never be the same. This statement is a factual statement prepared for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry dealing with modules 3 and 4 in Phase 2 only. It does 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).

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.

Name: *Fatima Boujetif*

Signature: 

Date: *25.02.2020*