

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MERIAM ABDULKADIR YOUSUF

I, Meriam Abdulkadir Yousuf, formerly Nadia Yousuf (DOB: [REDACTED] of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] make this statement in relation to Phase Two of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. I make this statement in addition to my Phase One witness statement for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry [IWS00000338]. In this statement, I aim to address Modules 3 and 4 in respect of Phase 2 of the Inquiry. I understand that this statement will form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and will be published on the Inquiry's website.

Introduction

1. I previously lived in Flat 121 on the 15th floor of Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Road, London W11 1TQ. I signed my tenancy agreement on 22/06/09 and moved in soon after. I lived there alone until approximately March 2014, when I met my now husband, Sied Bayan. He stayed with me on average three days per week.
2. Before I moved into the tower, I was in temporary accommodation in RBKC. When the council offered me this property they told me it was my last offer of permanent accommodation and if I did not accept this flat they would discharge their duty to me. However, if I had the choice I would not have accepted this flat as it was in a high-rise building and I am afraid of heights.

Fire Safety

Fire Safety Systems

3. During the refurbishment works at Grenfell Tower the crews working on the lifts regularly used it to move their materials so more often than not they were not available for residents to use. The lifts would also break down at least once or twice a month. When this happened I had to walk up and down the stairs, which was not easy as I lived on the 15th floor.
4. I had a new front door installed that I think was a fire door, however it was not self-closing. I cannot remember if there was a draught excluder at the bottom of the door but I do not remember feeling a draught.
5. The kitchen extractor fan stopped working after approximately two weeks. I did not mind that it no longer worked because it was so noisy in the first place. When it broke down, I just aired the kitchen by opening a window.

6. We had two smoke alarms in our flat, one in the kitchen and the other in the hallway. I remember a couple of days before the fire, a fire officer knocked on our flat door and told us that he was there to carry out a test on the smoke alarms. He started in the kitchen before moving onto the hallway. I do not remember what he did but he was only in our flat for a short time before leaving. I remember that the alarm did not go off on the on the night of the fire. I do not remember any one from the council or the fire service carrying out any other fire safety checks or inspections.
7. I remember that there was a fire safety sign between the lifts but I do not remember if these signs were on every floor. There was a green sign, near the door that led to the stairs but I cannot remember if there was emergency lighting on the 15th floor.
8. I do not have any recollection of Cadent Gas or tRIIO attending to do any safety checks after the refurbishment.

Fire safety advice

9. I did not have any knowledge, nor was any information provided to me, of the 'stay put' policy before 14 June 2017. I had never heard of these words beforehand and I only became aware of this policy after the fire.

Fire safety complaints

10. I only made complaints about the windows to the TMO and Rydon. I was concerned about the newly installed windows, as they did not close properly. I complained to a woman who worked for the TMO and called Rydon several times. A manager from Rydon came to check the windows several times before he realised that the mechanism that closed the windows was missing. He told me that he would provide a replacement but he never returned. I remember he took notes each time he attended. After I complained they eventually fixed the mechanism but this took a really long time.
11. I did not make any complaints to Rydon, TMO or RBKC about fire safety.

Aftermath

Emergency Shelter and Accommodation

12. After I got out of the tower, I stood nearby the Kensington Academy Leisure Centre from approximately 1.30am to 7.30am. I was very tired and overwhelmed so my husband and I made our way to the Rugby Portobello Club. The volunteers there offered us drinks and a blanket. I do not remember anyone from RBKC/TMO approaching us to offer any kind of assistance.

13. Sied and I then made our way to his mother's house so she knew that we were safe. We did not stay there long before making our way back towards the tower. We went to the Latymer Community Church and there were staff from RBKC checking off names of those people who lived in the tower; both of our names were on the list. However, they did not ask us any further questions or assist us further. Therefore, we both left and went back to the Rugby Portobello Club so that we could try to find out what had happened to our friends and neighbours.
14. RBKC did not immediately offer us hotel accommodation so we stayed with Sied's mother for approximately 3 days. However, we decided to go back to the Rugby Portobello Club to seek help and they offered accommodation at a bed and breakfast in Earls Court. However, as soon as we saw the accommodation RBKC had arranged for us, we left immediately. It was very dirty and not fit for human habitation. We could not believe that the council expected us to stay there. We had just lost our home and experienced the worst day in our lives. It was insulting and awful.
15. We went to The Westway Centre to complain about the accommodation and they arranged a room for us at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Gloucester Road but we were told that it would not be ready until the next day. We felt we had no choice but to stay with Sied's mother again. In total, we stayed with his mother for 7 days. We only stayed at the Holiday Inn in Gloucester Road for 7 days because we received a note that was pushed under our room door, which stated that we had to leave that day by noon, which meant we only had 2 hours to vacate the room. We were not given an explanation as to why we were being asked to leave.
16. We could not believe what was happening but I remember thinking that we were homeless again. We contacted RBKC and they arranged a room for us at the Thistle Gardens Hotel in Kensington. This accommodation was unsuitable as the room was very small with limited floor space. It did not have a table or chairs so if we ate in our room we had to do this on the bed. We stayed at this hotel for 3 months but we were so desperate to move that we agreed to accept anything from RBKC. They placed us in temporary accommodation, a one bed flat in Blenheim Crescent, and we stayed there for 12 months before we were offered permanent accommodation.

Food and Drink

17. We were still celebrating Ramadan whilst at the first hotel so we would break our fast with family. However, I remember several local restaurants donated food to some of the charities and they delivered food to us at the hotel. We had access to food and drink whilst we were staying at the Thistle Hotel and did not experience any problems.

Basic Provisions and Financial Assistance

18. We went nearly everyday to Rugby Portobello to find clothes and to look through the items donated by the community/charities.
19. I remember we received some money after 2 or 3 weeks from RBKC, I can't remember but it was between £1,000 and £2,000, which we collected from the post office. We did not receive any other financial assistance from them, or any charitable donations.

Psychological Support

20. I accessed counselling sessions through my GP and St Charles Hospital and initially saw a counsellor weekly, then fortnightly. I only went for approximately 3 or 4 months as I found talking about the tragedy very difficult and I did not want to be constantly reminded of that night. My husband also attended counselling once or twice a month at the mosque but like me he stopped after 6 months as he did not feel talking about it was helping.
21. We were allocated a keyworker when we were at the Holiday Inn but the council kept changing them. In total we have had 4 keyworkers. We did not have any problem with them but we never knew why they kept on changing them, which was very frustrating.

Information and Assistance

22. It was not easy to access information about any services regarding those who were missing or deceased. We attended several relief centres in the hope of finding out what had happened to our friends or neighbours but none of the volunteers could give any information. We found it easier to get information from the survivors.
23. I do not know who put it up but there was a board on the wall at Rugby Portobello where everyone wrote down their names and flat numbers and we used this to check who had survived.

Public Communication

24. I remember our keyworker provided one leaflet but I cannot recall if it provided any information about the services that were available. I soon realised that the best way to find out any information was by word of mouth.

Voluntary and Community Groups

25. I think the voluntary and community groups were excellent and I was overwhelmed by their generosity and kindness. It has made us want to be more charitable and help those in need.

Coordination and Leadership

26. I did not see anyone from RBKC or TMO in the immediate aftermath. It was very embarrassing that no one seemed to know who was in charge. To be honest, I prefer not to have any interaction with RBKC/TMO because I don't think they wanted to help then and I don't think they want to help now.

Adequacy of Response and Lessons Learned

27. If I were ever in a similar situation I would not listen to or take advice from the emergency services, particularly the fire brigade. If we had listened to them on the night of the fire, when they told us to return to our flat and stay put, I don't think we would be here to tell you our experiences.

I believe the contents of this witness statement to be true.

Signed.....

Date: 24/02/20

MERIAM ABDULKADIR YOUSUF