

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MARLYN LOPEZ

Preamble

1. My name is Marlyn Lopez. I am a British citizen and I reside with my two children. I am a Core Participant to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and as such, I wish to make a statement in relation to Modules 3 and 4 of Phase 2 of the Inquiry.
2. I make this statement from my own personal knowledge and from matters that I have been told about by others; where the information does not come from my own personal knowledge, I make this clear below.
3. I was a resident at Flat 102 Grenfell Walk , London, W11 1WA ("my Flat"), until 14th June 2017, the night of the Grenfell Fire. I lived there with my two children, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], and my mother, Esperanza. My ex-partner, Diego Ortiz, also used to live with us there, on and off. In the year before the fire, he lived there all the time.
4. I have not made a Phase 1 witness statement for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.
5. I have not made a statement for the Metropolitan Police Service in relation to the events surrounding the fire at Grenfell Tower.

MODULE 3

Background information

6. I am of Colombian descent, although I have lived in Britain my whole life. At the time of the fire, I was doing a degree in Health and Social Care at Arden University in Tower Hill and working part-time in health and social care. Since the fire, I have been unable to attend university or work.
7. I moved to my Flat in 2008 with my child and my mother. My partner at the time (Diego Ortiz) lived with us full-time in the year before the fire. RBKC didn't pressure me or influence me to choose the property. When I moved in, there were cockroaches and mice. I complained at the time, but as I later explain, nothing was done.

Community

8. My family and I lived in the area for a long time. I remember my mum telling everyone about a dream she had when I was about 2, maybe in 1989. The dream was about the tower falling over. We lived in Barandon then, but we've always lived in the area.
9. I knew people in the area, and I felt like I saw all the people I knew that passed away in that tower in the week before the fire. I remember seeing an Egyptian lady sitting outside the flats. She knew my mum and lived in the flat in the tower directly opposite ours.
10. I remember speaking to Diego on the phone explaining how I'd seen another slender lady we knew from the Tower. I also saw a child that passed away too. I had known her since she was born, she lived her in Grenfell Tower. I saw her walking near the Virgin gym in that area.

Education history

11. As I have stated in paragraph 6, I attended Arden University in Tower Hill and was doing a degree in Health and Social Care. However, I did not finish my university course because of the fire.

Complaints about property

12. I constantly complained about the cockroaches, but the TMO never did anything. They just didn't care and they never cared. I found it was useless to try because it led to hours of waiting time and at the end of it all, no-one did anything.

Gas/Electricity supply

13. Our electricity and gas supply in our Grenfell Walk flat was supplied via a top-up meter.

Fire safety systems

Flat doors

14. The flat's front door was very strong; but there was no self-closing mechanism on our door. It had the intumescent strips. I don't remember it falling apart at all.

Communal doors

15. I don't remember anything about the communal doors, it was just open-entry to access our flat.

Escape routes

16. My flat faced the tower on the ground floor. We lived in little flats that were different to the tower. If you were to go to the flat the back way, you would go up four steps. If you were to go up through the ramp, it was an open entrance.
17. I do not recall seeing any fire safety signage outside the walkway but there was a small sign going up the stairs.

Emergency lighting

18. I did not recall any emergency lighting in the communal walkways. The normal lights were there, but they did not always work.

Smoke alarms

19. We had smoke alarms, but I don't remember them ever going off, even when I cooked. I don't remember them going off on the night of the fire because Diego woke me up, not the smoke alarms. I don't think that they worked.
20. I didn't complain about the smoke alarms, I just expected them to work.

Fire safety inspections

21. I am not aware of, nor do I recall any fire safety inspection. I never saw them do anything in the building.
22. They didn't do anything about the cockroaches, so I don't think they did fire safety inspections.

Fire safety advice

23. When I moved to my Flat, I do not recall receiving any advice as to what to do in case of a fire, nor did I receive any advice thereafter.
24. There were no signs telling us what to do in case of an emergency in the communal areas. I never saw any leaflets being given out, and we didn't know what to do in the event of a fire.
25. On the night, we didn't know what to do, and that's why we were so scared when it happened. We were literally running for our lives, especially from that kind of fire and all the flaming debris that was falling all around us.
26. We had no sort of communication about fire safety. I don't know anything about the fire safety in the buildings, if we had sprinklers, no water came out.

Fire safety complaints

27. I didn't make any fire safety complaints.

MODULE 4

28. On the night of the fire, I was in my Flat. Diego was awake and tried to wake me up, but I wasn't responding because I was in a very deep sleep when it happened. When I woke up, I was in shock. I remember Diego saying that we needed to get out. I was just walking from side to side in the little corridor downstairs. When I saw the fire, I felt like I couldn't move for ten minutes. Diego kept saying we needed to get out, and I couldn't move.
29. We got tagged by the police, and they gave us wristbands. My body was shaking and I was crying, my girls were crying. We were really scared. We were standing on the grass near the leisure centre, and my godmothers' daughters were looking for me. They were crying, arguing with the police, they were really upset.
30. My memory of the whole period of time after the fire is very poor, because I really didn't want to take into account what was happening to me, so I pretty much blocked out most of it.
31. I was not allowed back to my flat, which made me desperately upset. I had an argument with the police because of this.

Emergency shelter and accommodation

Initial relief centre – St. Clements Church

32. After 6am, we went to St. Clements Church with our neighbours. Everyone was going crazy. We had neighbours from the properties around us comforting us. No-one from the RBKC or TMO were there.
33. The food and drink came after. It was Ramadan, so Muslims were in the Mosque, and some of the food and the water that they had was brought to us. I don't know which Mosque.
34. The people in the houses nearby started bringing stuff too. This was still in the morning as it was light outside. They started piling up stuff, and then the community

came together. No-one knew that we were so close. It put No. 10 to shame and it shocked everyone. The TMO weren't showing their face. The community were the ones helping us.

35. We didn't receive any help from the TMO or the RBKC on the day of 14th June. We received help from the people in the houses in the surrounding area. They offered beds and they offered for us to put our kids to rest in their house. They're the ones that offered to help.
36. The people from the Mosques also brought more food and by midday, there were massive piles of stuff. I didn't touch anything. All I drank was water and smoked the cigarettes that I had got for free from the owner of a corner shop nearby. My kids had some of the food that had been donated, but I can't recall exactly what.
37. I felt useless, it's like you're not valid. I was in my pyjamas, and I didn't want anything. It was horrible.
38. After a couple of weeks, there was a person working in the second hotel I was put in, the Victoria, and they said they could help me. They wanted our sizes but I didn't want the clothing. However, my mum said I would be silly not to take it.
39. We received shoes and clothes. Every time we got the boxes, I would feel useless. I would start crying, and it was more traumatising for me because I felt useless.
40. A couple of weeks down the line, my neighbours told me that in Westway, the Red Cross were apparently giving £500 to each household that were affected by the fire. The NHS were there as well.
41. I didn't use the psychological help at Westway. I didn't want to speak to anyone and I didn't want to see anyone. I wasn't in a good state. I just wanted to be with my kids, go to the park, and go on walks. I wanted nothing to do with the fire and the people involved.
42. At that time, the RBKC were hidden, they came later. The Church, Westway, and the community played a crucial role. They were the ones that were there.

Placement in hotels

43. I stayed at my dad's place on the night of the 14th of June and we were then placed in the Battersea Travelodge on the 15th of June, but it was awful. It smelled of weed, urine and cigarettes. I was there for two weeks, and then I was moved in a hotel in Victoria - the Amba Hotel, Grosvenor. We were there for approximately two months.
44. In the hotel, they would treat us like garbage. We were tagged like animals. We had a set menu and we could only eat from that. It was basic and it was not the sort of stuff that I would have usually ordered for myself. I remember the food being like school dinners, and we were only allowed one drink per meal, either Coke, orange juice or water.
45. I didn't eat there for long. I asked my dad to lend me money so that I could buy my own food.
46. Whilst at the Amba Hotel, I had money taken from my room. There was a big argument with the manager. The money was never repaid. The money that was taken was a few hundred pounds.
47. After the hotel in Victoria, we were put in the Millennium Hotel. We were there for about a year.

Temporary and Permanent Accommodation

48. When I was told about my permanent accommodation in Ladbroke Grove by my keyworker, I was emailed the wrong pictures of the flat. We were then moved out of the Millennium Hotel on 29th August 2018. The RBKC took all our stuff out of the hotel without my knowledge and put it in the property, they effectively chucked me out. I was out of the country at this time. Diego was my representative, and they were not supposed to move me in until there were appropriate changes made.
49. I was told that there were no other properties to move into, and that I wouldn't be put back into the hotel.

50. I'm still living in boxes. I was put in the same house as Diego initially as we were rehoused together, but we've been split up since the fire. It's been so hectic and very difficult because they've forced me to live with Diego at each hotel, even in permanent accommodation.
51. They finally gave Diego his own place in late November 2019, but it has rats, and it has no central heating. I don't let my kids go there, it's bad.
52. We're not playing and we're not acting up so that we get two houses. Our stuff is real. I have a new partner now and I'm married to my new partner. The RBKC didn't treat us like they respected that.

Basic provisions and Financial Assistance

53. The organisation for the donations was terrible. There were people committing fraud, people just helping themselves. The RBKC got scared and they just started splashing money, but that wasn't the point. We needed help; we were not okay. They were just signing off stuff and had people taking money.
54. I didn't know about the emergency payments until months later. I only found out about them from my neighbours.
55. I was always the person to the side. I didn't fight on the TV and I only went public once. I was hurt. Some people did go public, but I didn't want to. I always felt like, personally, I only ever wanted to take what was mine and what was for the kids. I didn't want to make a fuss.
56. In order to get the payments, I had to get a passport and a letter from the post-office that was delivered to my address.
57. When I applied for payments, I was told that there was another person had been registered to my Flat. That person didn't even live there, and I didn't know anything about them. I said that the council could check it up as I didn't know them.

58. I ended up getting the food allowance which was a regular transfer into my account. Because Diego and I had an on-off relationship, we never collected much money before. We never tried to abuse the system even though he was there that night and we were told he could get assistance. He never did that. I just shared my part with him.

Psychological support

59. I didn't want to speak to anyone at the time of the fire. I didn't get counselling until I got my keyworker. I had counselling at St. Charles. I had quite a few sessions, but I ended up arguing with all of my psychologists.
60. The support has been offered twice, but I fight with all of my counsellors – they tell me that they're just there to put stuff on paper for me to get what I want. If I tell them how I feel, they just ask me if I want it in the report.
61. I just want to talk about what I'm going through, and I don't feel like the counsellors have been useful. I need to get a person that is just there to hear me out, and if they don't want to put it in the report, then fine, they don't have to.
62. It's upsetting sometimes to see my children cry; the fire has traumatised them too.

Information and assistance

63. I didn't search for people after the fire, I was too distraught.
64. I didn't want a keyworker at the start. I didn't want anything to do with the fire. I only got a key worker last year. I had arguments with people because they seemed to think that everyone is the same and greedy for money.
65. All I wanted was my life back on track and I feel that I don't have my life back on track. Even giving interviews with my solicitors for this statement. It has been hard.
66. The RBKC and the TMO never contacted me to give me any information themselves, or information on progress. I know there were helplines, but I never wanted to be involved.

67. I've not had my lungs checked since the fire.

Needs of specific groups

68. I don't think the RBKC cared about specific needs. They never cared. They don't look at us as people and they don't think about who we are, and whether we have lives, families. They just don't care.
69. No-one took into account the fact that my mother was a Spanish speaker, and there were no special mechanisms put in place to help her.

Community and Leadership

70. The RBKC's leadership was terrible and the government were worse. We were just garbage people to them. They thought the tower caught fire because someone had lit it up, and that they had to give us money because we had suddenly become important.
71. They wanted to redo the area and tear the properties down. I think that's why they changed the tower but that backfired.
72. The community were the ones that provided the support when we needed it – not the RBKC, TMO, and nor the government.

Adequacy of response and lessons learned

73. It's so upsetting because this is the UK and no-one was prepared. When the RBKC started to organise themselves, there was no co-ordination.
74. I don't want to give advice to the government. They don't care about us, and they never will. They go in to do their nine-to-five shift, and no-one cares.
75. The RBKC should have given help and come in to talk with the ones that were affected. You need to do these things with love and with sympathy. But there was no love, no sympathy, there was nothing. There were higher-ups on holiday at the time, and no-one cared.

76. If these people worked with their heart, then that would have made a difference. The RBKC don't work like that. The only reason I had a property is because of my children, but if that policy changes, then that's it. I'd be out on the street. I don't want to live in this country any more, and the way the RBKC have tried to cover what they've done with money is disgusting.
77. I could have graduated by now but because of what happened, I've not graduated. I'm back to square one.

Other matters

78. I am willing to assist the Inquiry with any further information that it may need.

Statement of Truth

79. I confirm that the contents of this witness statement are true.
80. I confirm that 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: Marlyn Lopez Dated: 28/2/2020