

# IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

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## PHASE 2 WITNESS STATEMENT OF HAMZA JONES

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I, Hamza Christopher Anthony Jones, born [REDACTED], c/o Birnberg Peirce Ltd, 14 Inverness Street, London, NW1 7HJ, WILL SAY as follows:

### Background

1. I was born and raised in South London. I was a soldier, first class infantry, having served in Northern Ireland. I saw fires in flats in Northern Ireland but not like that. No experience could have prepared me for the fire at Grenfell Tower.
2. My wife, Fatima Jones, was brought up in West London, very close to Grenfell Tower and her mother and other family members still live close by in W11. She moved to South London when we got married but many of her friends and family are in West London. The fall-out from the fire has placed an unbearable stress upon our family.
3. My brother-in-law Abdulaziz El-Wahabi, his wife, Faouzia El-Wahabi, nephew Yasin El-Wahabi, niece Nur Huda El-Wahabi, and nephew Mehdi El-Wahabi lived in Flat 182 of Grenfell Tower. They passed away in the fire on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.
4. We would see my brother-in-law and his family almost every weekend. The whole family would gather and visit my mother-in-law's flat on Saturdays. We would often go back to his flat in the tower for lunch. So I was familiar with the flat and a lot of the issues they had there.
5. In the early hours of 14<sup>th</sup> June, my wife spoke to her sister, Hanan Wahabi, who also lived in the building but had escaped, and we learnt that her brother and his family were still inside the tower. We turned on the television but there was not enough information at that stage. I also looked at twitter and saw a photo of firemen at the

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bottom of the building. My wife, my son Omar Jones, and I drove to Grenfell Tower. We got to the area around 2.30/2.45am.

6. This is my first statement to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. I have not given a statement to the Metropolitan Police.
7. I understand that this statement will form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and will be published on the Inquiry's website in due course.

### **Fire safety systems**

8. I could see my house from the 21<sup>st</sup> floor of the tower. It was like being in a penthouse in the tower but it didn't feel safe to me because it was so far down. I never liked the views, I always felt nervous.
9. Abdulaziz did mention concerns with living there. I always wondered how the family were going to get out of the tower if there was a problem.
10. Abdulaziz was always talking about his concerns, because a lot of it was a problem for him. He worried because the hydrant - I have since been told this was the dry riser main in the lift lobby - was some way from the stairs. It was a joke, in an emergency you can imagine what would happen, the fire door opened outside in, and it was a concern the water would not pump very well at that height.
11. Not long before the fire, the family were told to get a gas pipe fitted in to their flat. I was a bit shocked because Abdulaziz mentioned to me something about issues at Trellick Tower. It was a safety issue he said. I know he did not like the pipes going into the flat.
12. There were concerns about the safety within the flats, but I would have thought they were brought up with the tenants' and residents' association, I am not aware that the family were that proactive or involved as they were renting. I think Abdulaziz always thought complaining was a waste of time because nothing ever seemed to get done. He seemed to be of the view that the council or TMO just did not listen to residents.
13. We always had problems with the front entrance to the tower because we used to drive close to it and get the car practically outside but Abdulaziz would often have to come down to meet his sister, my wife, to get inside. There were always problems with the door opening. The buzzer working was intermittent, so that meant when we visited we sometimes had to be let in, in person.

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14. There were vulnerable people who could not get out of their flats without assistance living in the tower. At one stage during the refurbishment they got rid of the porter's (concierge) desk and someone who could keep an eye on the cameras, so there was no one who knew the people in the flats at the time of the fire. This was to save money, as I understand it, approximately £24,000 pounds per year.

### **Emergency Shelter and Accommodation**

15. On the night we got to the area around the tower but we could not park. Someone on the street suggested we should go around Portobello way. I found a parking space near Latimer Road tube. I could see what was going on, the scale of the fire, but I could not really understand it.
16. We moved around towards the leisure centre and joined the rest of the family who were looking up at tower. Emotions were very raw. We were all there seeing it, smelling it.
17. I thought, bloody hell, they were on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor so I was very worried they were not getting out of there. I could see the flat because it was right at the top, but the fire was raging, ferocious. I knew if I didn't do something physical I felt I was going to explode. I felt helpless. We had no more information. I was trying to work out what was going on and it didn't look good.
18. I spoke with the eldest brother in the family, Amin, and who is very sensible. We were looking at the building and trying to plan a way to get closer to the flats, we thought logically we can get closer than this. But it was not the right thing to do at the time. We just wanted to help in some way.
19. When we arrived, there was already a police cordon so that people could not get too close. It was already set up to keep people on the ground safe and that meant we could not get close anyway. My impression was the police had less information than we did.
20. Me and my family tried to keep calling Abdulaziz and his family but there was no answer. After that we started to phone the London hospitals.
21. After it had got light, which we thought may have helped, but you could just see more, someone let us inside the Portobello Rugby Club. It gave everyone access to

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toilets and drinking water. It was all so shocking and we tried to calm those that had become hysterical.

22. I was at the rugby club there for around twenty hours or so. I was inside for a while then outside at times to try and understand what was going on. I tried to make sure my wife was okay. In all these circumstances the family came together. The family were mostly at the rugby club.
23. I tried to comfort others and I kept a boy company. The boy was around thirteen years old at the most, and I think he may have been autistic. It was clear he was traumatised. He appeared to be with an older lady, who may have been his grandmother. He was playing with things we found and I tried my best to keep his mind off things. There were some toys and I gave him some water. I went back outside again, but then it became more difficult to get inside the club as it was getting so full.
24. It was so chaotic; chaotic for too long and I tried to help but it had been a very long day. By late evening, shortly after eating, I took someone, but I cannot recall clearly, to a hotel in Earl's Court, which I think was the Holiday Inn. Fatima joined Hanan to look after her where they stayed at a hotel. I then drove home shocked and exhausted.

### **Food and Drink**

25. The club was giving out water, which seemed to come from a Southall charity, so this charity had to come to West London themselves. This was not from the council.
26. Lots of people ate together after the sun went down when they had finished fasting. The food came from the community.
27. To my mind things being given out on that first day were done in a really chaotic way, with items getting redistributed.

### **Basic Provisions and Financial Assistance**

28. At no point did I notice anyone from the council because as far as I could tell there was no-one there from the council. Basic provisions came only from the community. I saw people had their pyjamas on, men, women, children, and because they wanted to keep warm they were grateful for the donations. The community had good hearts, donated clothes and basics and helped so much in those first hours.

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### **Psychological Support**

29. There was no help for what seemed like some time. My wife's family kept close and were suffering so much with grief. It was a loss for me too. I did not feel I had the support so I just had to get on with it. I witnessed what everyone else witnessed. I felt the heartbreak of the family, their deaths.
30. I was referred via my work to London Borough of Lambeth, who organised a private counsellor, but this proved costly. I just kept on going until I was helped with a referral to Corpore in June 2019 and an initial assessment in September 2019.

### **Information and Assistance**

31. I recall a man with a yellow vest on and clipboard came to take names on the day of the fire at the rugby club. There were about 30 people waiting for information, giving names. They had to move people away from the door and they were struggling to do a half decent job with everyone coming forward.
32. We asked the person with yellow vest but they did not know anything. We phoned hospitals including St Mary's and Kings. I spoke to my sister because she's a nurse at Kings and she told me there was no information.
33. I would not phone the helplines. There was no one offering help that had anything positive, that would make you feel better, and I suppose I was fearful of the truth.
34. At first, there was nothing official but then Fatima had a meeting with police Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) a few days after the fire. That was the first time they had spoken to the family and had some information. It was not looking hopeful. For my family it was terrible and I was waiting for someone to tell me something but in the end it was not good news.

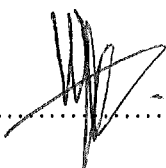
### **Public Communication**

35. I was not aware of any public communications or pamphlets. I was shocked but I kept it in, so I had no awareness.

### **Needs of Specific Groups**

36. I did not notice the council were interested in helping the vulnerable.

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### **Coordination and Leadership**

37. When something big like that happens, usually there's a procedure everyone follows. I looked at the structure at the time – usually you've got gold command – and it just did not seem to be there as far I could see.
38. The Red Cross with limited funding, did an excellent job. When they first came, there was no one telling anyone what to do. They started to organise things, where the people needed help, how they could get food and clothing, and in the background there was someone organising somewhere for people to go. They were like a light. I returned about three days later to the area, and things seemed more organised. People from lots of different charities were there, and they were trying to do something to help but I couldn't really do much myself. I just felt lost.
39. I did not see the council responding to people being traumatised by awful events. I just felt there was no leadership from them.

### **Adequacy of Response and Lessons Learned**

40. On the night itself the police seemed to do a good job with what little information they had. They kept people back and safe. They were broadcasting on their radios, but my impression was that the fire brigade did not appear to be communicating to police for whatever reason. It seemed like a gap in communications and that needs to be sorted out before another big disaster happens. I just hope nothing like this happens though.
41. There was so much noise on the night; there needs to be better communication all round in the future. The council simply needed to do more to help and quickly.

**I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.**

Signed: .....

Dated: .....

**Hamza Jones**

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