

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

PHASE 2 WITNESS STATEMENT OF FATIMA JONES

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

Background

1. I was born in Larache, Morocco and moved to London with my family when I was 6 years old. I was brought up in West London, very close to Grenfell Tower. My mum still lives in the same flat in W11 that I and my siblings grew up in. We take turns to look after her, and I go on a Friday and stay there until Saturday or sometimes Sunday if my siblings can't make it. I moved to South East London when I got married but the majority of my family live in West London as well as some friends.
2. My brother Abdulaziz El-Wahabi, sister-in-law 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 14th June 2017. The last memory I have of my brother is him giving me a big hug. I hold on to that memory.
3. I saw my brother and his family every weekend. My brother would come to my mum's flat on Saturdays when I was there and take us to his flat for lunch. My sister-in-law Faouzia and I ran classes on Islamic teachings and prayers for all the grandchildren every Saturday, and that would be in the same flat as well. So I spent a lot of time in my brother and sister-in-law's flat and was familiar with some of the issues they had there.
4. I saw the fire on television in the very early hours of 14th June 2017. I spoke to my sister Hanan Wahabi who also lived in Grenfell Tower, and she told me that our brother and his family were still in the building. She told me that she had escaped the fire, together with her husband Salah Eddine Chebiouni, their son Zakariya Chebiouni and their daughter. My husband Hamza Jones, my son Omar Jones, and I drove to Grenfell Tower and we got there around 3am.

5. This is my first statement to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. I have not given a statement to the Metropolitan Police.

Fire safety systems

6. I went to my brother's flat every weekend, so I saw what was happening with the refurbishment. Every weekend my brother would say "Look what they are doing" and show me the problems they were having. He was unhappy about the new windows – the quality wasn't good. He was also unhappy about the gas works because the workers wanted to change the pipes and put the boiler in the hallway – he refused this, so the boiler was put in the kitchen instead.
7. Almost every time I was at my brother's flat, there was no running water.
8. The bathroom needed repair, and that seemed to take forever. There was a lot of damp, the taps weren't coming on properly and the water pressure was weak.

Emergency Shelter and Accommodation

9. When I arrived outside Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire, my family were all standing outside and there was nowhere we could go. We stood outside the building and were hoping that my brother and his family would come down.
10. Later on, the Rugby Portobello Club was opened up. The people who ran the club knew my family, because Faouzia used to go there with Mehdi for homework club. I went there when it was light. My family and I made our way to the club via instruction given to us from a family member. There were residents and family members inside. I was there all day. I remember people from the Moroccan embassy came to the club in the early hours of the day. There was someone from BBC1 who came inside the club as well, and I thought that was really inappropriate so I asked her to go. I returned to the Rugby Portobello Club several times in the next few days with Hanan to find out any information and to pick up some clothes and I broke fast there in the evenings.
11. I didn't go to any other relief centres.
12. I stayed with Hanan on the day of the fire and the days afterwards. I didn't want to leave her. When we were told that Hanan and her family had a hotel room, we were sitting in the Rugby Portobello Club. I don't know who it was that told us about the hotel.
13. I went with Hanan and her family to their room in the Premier Inn. It was late, in the evening time, when we eventually got there. It must have been late because we broke fast at the Rugby Portobello Club before going there. Someone from the community gave us a

lift to the hotel. The room had a shower and clean sheets and it was safe, and that was all I cared about at the time. The hotel staff were lovely and kind to us.

Food and Drink

14. There was loads of food and water at the Rugby Portobello Club, brought by people in the community, the Moroccan embassy, the East London Mosque and other mosques. The food was available all the time for everyone, and for Muslims to break the fast in the evening. I was fasting because of Ramadan.
15. People in the community and the Moroccan embassy brought food to my mum's flat. It was very helpful to have that support, so that we could deal with our loss as a family and not have to think about preparing meals.

Basic Provisions and Financial Assistance

16. There were donations of cash, food and clothes from family, people in the community and charities. I changed Hanan's daughter into some of the donated clothes. There were blankets from the East London Mosque. There were some basic things like toothpaste and toothbrush in the donations as well, so we took that with us when we went to the hotel.
17. The next day, on 15th June 2017, two people came to Hanan's hotel room to give a mobile phone and some cash for food because there wasn't any facility for cooking in the hotel. They left a phone number and said that we could contact that number. I'm not sure whether they were from RBKC but they may have been.

Psychological Support

18. There was nobody you could talk to. I didn't notice any counselling service.
19. It was really hard for my mum. She had been very close to my brother. She had relied on him as she relied on my dad before he passed away. My brother had tried to arrange everything for her as my dad used to do. On the 3rd day after the fire, I told her what had happened and we all as a family tried to comfort her. Due to her health issues, as a family we decided it was best not to tell her anything until we were clear of the situation. There wasn't any support from RBKC being offered to her, so I requested help.

Information and Assistance

20. There were a lot of rumours about people seeing Yasin. We were ringing around to try to find him and the rest of my brother's family. In the first couple of days there was nobody

from the authorities to help us find them, but then we met the Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) from the Metropolitan Police who were very helpful. My family had a meeting with the FLOs at my sister Amina Chaer-Yemlahi's house and they explained what was happening.

21. The FLOs were giving us some information, but we were also getting other information from everywhere and there was a lot of doubt. We were trying to comfort each other and our mother but we realised that we had lost them – my dear brother Abdulaziz, sister-in-law Faouzia, nephew Yasin, niece Nur Huda and nephew Mehdi.

Public Communication

22. I had information through my siblings and we shared information by meeting in my sister Asia Ghamhi's flat. I didn't get any information from websites, social media, or newsletters.

Needs of Specific Groups

23. As I mentioned above, my mum needed support, having lost her son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. She is elderly and isn't fluent in speaking English. She didn't get any support from any authorities, it took us as siblings to request support from the community hub but we had to keep contacting them and reaching out. Eventually someone from the Grenfell outreach team began visiting her every other Saturday whilst I was with her. This was months after the fire.
24. Thanks to the community, there was Halal food available for Muslims when we broke the fast during Ramadan. I didn't notice RBKC offering any specific support for Muslims.
25. Once we knew that my brother and his family had passed away, our aim became to give them a proper burial, and for the whole family to be able to grieve with respect and peace. It was a relief when we finally buried them in the proper way in October 2017. I thought we had buried all their remains, but I have since learned that some remains were retained by the police for the Coroner, and this has been very upsetting. It is very important in my family's Muslim faith that the body is prepared and washed collectively before being buried. I know that my brother would have fought for my body to be buried properly if I had passed away before him, and I want to do the same for him. My solicitors have repeatedly asked the police and the Coroner's office for all remains to be returned but haven't had a clear response. I feel sad that we have not been able to bury them according to our faith.

Coordination and Leadership

26. I didn't see any coordination or leadership by the central government, RBKC or the TMO in the immediate aftermath of the fire. RBKC may have arranged the hotel accommodation, phones and cash for food, but this seems like just the minimum they needed to do after such a disaster.

Adequacy of Response and Lessons Learned

27. The most important lesson for the emergency services is that everyone in the building should have been told to come down and escape the fire.
28. In the aftermath of the fire, there should have been RBKC people outside Grenfell Tower immediately, showing that they care and being with us at our level. Even if they were feeling overwhelmed, they could have come and shown themselves as fellow human beings. The community were incredible – the Rugby Portobello Club was full with donations in a very short space of time – but RBKC were not there.
29. I thought it was important that the headteacher from Thomas Jones Primary School came to Grenfell Tower on the day after the fire. Hanan's daughter was at that school and she met her headteacher when she still wasn't wearing any shoes, as she had escaped the fire carried out by her brother and without her shoes on. She smiled when she saw her headteacher.
30. The Prime Minister should have met the residents the first time she came to Grenfell, but she only met with the fire service. I'm not saying she shouldn't have been to see the fire service, but she should have met the residents as well.
31. I have seen positive things happening after the Grenfell fire. Fire safety is being taken more seriously in my building, and there have been checks on the fire alarms. But my mum lives in an RBKC council flat and she still doesn't have a kitchen door although we have asked for it. If there is a fire in her kitchen, it would spread to the rest of the flat. Sometimes I worry about how she would leave the building if there is a fire, as she is not very mobile and it would be difficult to carry her down the stairs.

32. 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.

I believe that the contents of this witness statement are true.

Signed: F. Jones.....

Dated: 26-02-2020.....

Fatima Jones