

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF ALAN ANWAR ALI

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).

I, **ALAN ANWAR ALI**, will say as follows:

1. This is my first Witness Statement to the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry and is given for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Inquiry. I have previously provided a statement to the Metropolitan Police service dated: 5th July 2017.
2. This statement addresses the issues within module 3 (fire safety within Grenfell Tower and communication with residents) and module 4 (aftermath) from the Inquiry's Phase 2 schedule. I deal with issues relating to module 3 in paragraphs 8-17, and module 4 in 18-32.

Background

3. I moved into Flat 23 Grenfell Tower ('the Tower') in May 1997 with my late ex-wife and our baby son, who was two and a half months old at the time; it was offered to us

as permanent accommodation. I was previously self-employed as a chauffeur but I am no longer able to work because of my health condition.

4. Flat 23 was a two bedroom flat on the South Face of the Tower. When we first moved in the flat was on the 2nd floor, but after the refurbishment, this became the 5th floor.
5. My ex-wife and son moved out of the flat in November 1999 when my ex-wife and I divorced.
6. In 2003 it was much easier to get a 100% mortgage from lenders, so I made an application through the Right to Buy Scheme to buy the lease to my flat. I paid a £450 fee for the mortgage broker to arrange for a surveyor to do a mortgage valuation of the flat, as part of the mortgage application. When the survey had been completed, the lender told me that they would not be able to give me a mortgage because they did not trust that it would be a good investment. Their decision was based on the fact that it was a high-rise building and did not appear to them to be well-maintained by the Council. Although at the time I was disappointed, I am now glad that my application was rejected given the events of 14 June 2017.
7. Having lived in the Tower for 20 years, I knew many of my neighbours well, and considered some people good friends. These people included Hassan Hassan, Elsa Afeworki and Lukic Branislav. My son was very close friends with Yasin El-Wahabi, who lost his life in the fire, and my best friend in the Tower was Steven Power, who also died. I have found it almost unbearable to come to terms with the loss of these people. When I came to know the extent of the fire, I feared for them but I did not learn of their deaths for certain until I found photos of them displayed with those of the other deceased residents. These photos were either in the Westway or in Latimer Road. I remember being in complete shock when I saw their pictures, and I cried uncontrollably over their deaths for weeks after the fire. I desperately needed support at this time and so my mother and sister travelled over to Kurdistan to be with me.

Fire Safety

8. During the 20 years that I lived in Grenfell Tower I was never given any advice or information about what I should do if there was a fire in my flat or in the building. I never took part in any fire drills or training and was never informed about the escape routes out of the building. Before 14 June 2017 I never seriously considered what I would do in a fire, but I believe I would have relied on instinct, for example, I would have known not to use the lifts in a fire.
9. I do not recall seeing any emergency signs or fire safety notices in the Tower, and I do not remember ever receiving any written information about fire safety or the fire strategy for the Tower.
10. Before the refurbishments to the Tower, there was a fire alarm system located in the lobby by the reception desk, it was a large box with lots of little white lights and when it was activated, it would make a loud high-pitched noise. I believe that the system was directly linked to the London Fire Brigade because whenever it would go off; fire fighters would arrive at the building.
11. I remember the fire alarm going off around 5 to 6 times between 1997 and 2015. On most of those occasions I was at home and I was not asked to evacuate, but on one occasion, I had been out and just returned home, a fire-fighter told me that I needed to wait outside and could not enter the building until they had resolved the issue.
12. The alarm system was removed during the refurbishments to the Tower in about 2016, but was never replaced.
13. I do not recall ever seeing any fire alarms or smoke detectors in the communal areas of the building, however, there was a fire extinguisher in a glass box in the communal area on my floor, which was located just to the left of my front door. I believe that there was only one fire extinguisher on each floor.
14. Although I did not spend much time thinking about fire safety before 14 June 2017, I distinctly remember noting that there were no sprinklers in the building and how that would be dangerous if there was a fire.

15. Following the refurbishments to the Tower, I was also very concerned about the exposed gas and hot water pipes which had been installed in my flat for the new heating system, I was worried that if there was a fire it would cause an explosion. I remember asking one of the building contract workers on site whether they planned to cover up the pipes, and he told me that they had no plans to do so and not to worry as they were instructed to leave them as they were, as it was part of the design. As the heating unit was installed in my hallway by my front door, the pipes only ran across the top of my hallway ceiling. I was friendly with a lot of my neighbours in the Tower and I'm aware that many of them shared my concerns about the potential danger of the exposed pipes in the event of a fire.
16. I had two smoke detectors in my hallway, which were checked annually along with the gas.
17. The front door to my flat was replaced in 2008/2009 with a fire resistant door, it was a heavy self-closing door, but none of the doors within the flat were changed and I am sure that they were not fire resistant.
18. I am not aware of any fire safety checks or inspections having been carried out in communal areas.
19. At no point during my 20 years of living in the Tower did anyone from or acting on behalf of the TMO or RBKC check on whether I or any member of my family had any disabilities or special needs.
20. When I first moved into the Tower it had two small lifts, these were replaced in or around 2005/2006, I do not know if they were fire-fighting lifts. The new lifts were terrible, at least one of the lifts would be out of service at least once a month and on many occasions they would both be out of service at the same time. I was lucky, I was living alone and a healthy man then, and I only lived on the 5th floor so I could use the stairs when the lifts were out of service, however, many of my neighbours who lived on the top floors of the Tower had young children or other difficulties using the stairs. There were even occasions that I remember when the lifts would break down on a Friday and would not be repaired until the following week. Whenever the lifts were out

of service, it would cause a lot of traffic in the lobby area; on several occasions I walked past neighbours who would cry out in anger and exasperation about the lifts.

Dealings with the TMO/RBKC

Repairs

21. When I first moved into Grenfell Tower, the TMO had not yet fully taken over management of the building and everything was great. You would get quick responses to your calls and someone would be sent out straight away to carry out any repairs that were needed. I remember an occasion when our toilet was blocked and someone was sent out on the same day to fix it.
22. Everything changed after the TMO took over management of the Tower; we were given a number to call whenever we needed a repair so I very rarely had to go to the Estate Office in person. On occasion, when I did need help, I would call requesting a repair and I would usually be told that I would need to wait and that someone would call me back the next day, but they never did. If you needed something to be done, you would have to chase them, and when I'd call to follow-up I'd always be put through to someone new and they would not have a record of my call, so I would need to explain everything to them again.
23. The only occasion when the TMO would send someone out promptly, was when an issue could affect the whole Tower, such as pests. I had a serious problem with bed bugs in 2012 which I reported to the TMO, and they arranged for the flat to be fumigated a few days later while I evacuated. I replaced the carpets throughout the flat a few weeks after it was fumigated but unfortunately, I had a re-infestation of bed-bugs a few years later in 2014.

Refurbishments

24. Throughout the refurbishment of the Tower in 2015/2016, I mostly had contact with the Rydon Liaison Officer rather than anyone from the TMO. I do not remember them asking me whether I had any special needs or disabilities, for which they needed to make adjustments. The only thing that they wanted to know was when I'd be available to let them into my flat so that they could carry out the works. I was working as a self-employed Chauffeur at the time so I wanted them to finish the work quickly so that I

didn't have to take too much time off work. I was pleased that they respected this and finished the works during the times that I specified.

25. I was pleased with the refurbishment, they changed my window frames and installed double-glazed windows and also replaced the heating system.
26. Before the refurbishment, we had a communal heating system which meant that you paid for utilities based on an estimate rather than an exact meter reading. This meant that even when I wasn't using the heating, or when I was on abroad on holiday, I was paying for heating and hot water, so I was very pleased with the new individual systems which meant that I had more control.
27. Another benefit of the new heating system was that it improved the hot water pressure in the flat. The hot water pressure had been so weak that I wasn't able to take showers before the refurbishment; you had to fill up the bath tub in order to wash, and there was only ever enough hot water for maybe two people to have a shower, you would then have to wait at least 3 hours for it to reheat. When there was hot water, it tended to be too hot, and it was difficult to regulate this. I cannot imagine how families with more than two people, especially with children, coped.
28. I was aware that some of my neighbours had disapproved of the new heating units being placed in the hallways because they took up too much room, they asked for the units to be installed in the kitchens. I don't remember being given much of an option, but agreed for the unit to be installed in the hallway of my flat, only because I wanted the works to be finished quickly and could not afford to take off the extra time which would have been needed for it to be installed in my kitchen.
29. After the works were completed, someone came and checked my flat and asked me if I was happy with the changes; I believe he was from the council. I had no issues at the time of the inspection, but a few weeks later, the handle on the kitchen window broke and kept sticking, I called the Resident Liaison Officer from Rydon and someone was sent out to fix it.

30. The TMO were useless when it came to communicating with residents, they did not make sure that information was provided in a way which could be understood by the individual resident. Despite the fact that most of the residents did not speak English as their first language, only after the fire did they start providing letters in different languages, and even then I remember them only being available as an alternative in Arabic. From what I recall, they did not provide letters or newsletter in alternative formats for residents with disabilities.

Aftermath

31. On the night of 14 June 2017, I was in Kurdistan visiting my family. I received a message on either WhatsApp or Viber from my son; it was about 5am locally and for some reason I was still awake. The message was to tell me that Grenfell Tower was on fire and with it he sent a picture of the Tower burning. I was supposed to be returning to the UK on 16 June 2017, but I knew that I had to get back quicker, so at 9am I went to the travel agent and changed my ticket for the first flight back to London.
32. I kept an eye on the news through my trip back and as I knew I would not be able to go in to the Tower, I arranged for my cousin to pick me up when I got back. I arrived at around 10:30pm and went straight to his home in Wembley, where I spent the night. The next day (16 June 2017), I received a call from someone from RBKC letting me know that I should go to the Holiday Inn Hotel in South Kensington. I cannot remember the person's name and assume they had my phone number from my file.
33. On the second or third day of my stay at the Holiday Inn, I went to the Westway Sports Centre, where I had been told that I could claim financial assistance. I took some of the other Tower residents who were staying at the hotel with me, including Elsa, who did not seem to have a lot of information at that time, and hadn't been aware of the financial support. When we arrived at the Westway, we had to provide our name, previous address and ID to people from the Council. We were then given £600. I was able to provide ID as I had my passport and driving licence with me as I had taken them travelling. There was also food at the Westway, such as crisps, grapes and baked

beans that helped to get us by. I had some shorts and trainers in my suitcase from my holiday, but no other clothes at all, so I went both the Westway and Rugby Portobello for clothes.

34. Two or three days after going to the Westway, I received a call from my Key Worker, Alison Blunt, informing me that I should go to the Rugby Portobello to fill out a form for financial assistance from the Government. We had to take the forms to the Post Office on Portobello Road where we were given £500 cash and £5,000 was transferred into my account a few days later.
35. I spent 10 days at the Holiday Inn, and a lot of my neighbours from the Tower were also staying there including Elsa, Luca and Alan. I was pleased that we had each other for support; we would spend most nights sitting together in the hotel lobby, trying to piece together what had happened, and talking about other things. We had to have our meals in the hotel; I do not remember them checking to see whether we had any special dietary needs. After 10 days, we were moved to the Radisson Blu, Marylebone. I believe that the owner of the Holiday Inn had accommodated all those people affected by the fire for free, but it was the middle of summer and the height of the tourist season, so the rooms were already booked and could not accommodate us any longer.
36. When we were moved to the Radison Blu, I was pleased that they kept all the residents who had been staying at the Holiday Inn together, as we had grown very close and it was good to at least have that sense of community. After a few weeks at the hotel, the Council began to provide us with £300 a week for food, which meant that we wno longer had to have our meals at the hotel. Although I was pleased, I grew weary of living in a hotel; I especially missed being able to cook for myself in my own kitchen.
37. I stayed at the Radison Blu for 3 months until 2 October 2017, then accepted permanent accommodation in Earls Court. During my last few weeks at the hotel, I had begun to notice that I was developing a growth on my stomach and knew that this could be a serious medical issue, so I wanted to settle into permanent accommodation as soon as possible. I was diagnosed with [REDACTED] in November 2017.
38. For weeks after the fire I was in a terrible state, and didn't feel my usual resilient self. I told my Key Worker Alison that I was struggling emotionally and she informed me

that I could receive counselling. I attended counselling every 2 weeks at St Charles Hospital, but after 4 sessions, had to stop to begin my [REDACTED] treatment.

39. I am now very vigilant about fire safety, at my new home the first thing I considered was the escape route for if there was a fire, I made sure that the building had sprinklers and working fire alarms, and I also have two fire extinguishers within my flat.

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.

Signed:



Dated:

26/02/2020