

Witness Statement of: Tiago Alves  
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## GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

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### PHASE 2 WITNESS STATEMENT OF TIAGO ALVES

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I, **TIAGO ALVES**, will say as follows:-

1. This is my second statement and relates to Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. My first statement is dated 16 May 2018 (IWS00000123) and dealt with the night of the fire. 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 fully set out my experiences on the night of the fire or fully explain the impact that these events and the aftermath have had on me (and my family).

#### Background

2. I grew up living in flat 105 Grenfell Tower, I was just nine months old when we first moved in and apart from a five year period when my family moved to North London I lived my whole life in the Tower. I really enjoyed living in the area and knew lots of people from the Tower. I went to nursery with Yasin El Wahabi and I played football with several others who lived in the Tower. When I was at school I would attend the homework club at Clement James centre with neighbours. My mum organised community events. I grew up part of the community, it was my community.

#### The TMO

3. From an early age I was closely involved in dealing with issues relating to the TMO and our flat as my dad regularly asked me for help writing the emails and letters that he sent to them raising the many issues that they failed to resolve. My father's first language is Portuguese and he would ask me to help with English spelling and grammar. It is probably true to say that nearly all of the emails that

my dad sent were written with my help. Anything longer than a sentence or two he had me help him out. I generally didn't mind helping. I am very glad I did help now though – I feel like I learned a lot that has helped me in the work that I am now doing with Grenfell United.

4. My father was always of the view that contact with the TMO had to be in writing. He had learnt through experience not to trust the them to deal with telephone calls. They would say something on the telephone to get the call finished and claim that they would follow up, but then deny the contact later on. We knew that if we reported problems by telephone, and then called back later for an update they would say that the issue had never been reported.
5. The longest email I remember writing was when I was 13 years old which was in about 2010. It was about a huge stack of service charge invoices that my father had been told that he needed to pay, despite the fact that many did not actually have anything to do with him. We had to go through all of the invoices, identifying the ones that they were wrongly trying to charge us for. In the end they cut down the bill substantially. This took at least 3 or 4 days though. That sort of difficulty, requiring us to invest significant time and effort because of their failings was typical of our dealings with the TMO, throughout the time we lived in the Tower.
6. There were many problems that we had to contact the TMO about and many issues in the communal areas. The lifts were often not working, we frequently had problems with our water, there were times when we had to email about garages. One time the TMO locked my dad's garage for no good reason. I also remember emailing once to say that the fire doors to the stairway were not closing properly which meant that smells in the stairway would come onto the landing on our floor.

## **The Refurbishment**

### **Background**

7. From the beginning we knew that the only reason the Tower was getting the upgrade was because of the building of the Kensington Aldridge Academy. At the very beginning of the planning there was talk about demolishing parts of the estate

entirely to make space for the school but there was a massive uproar and they realised that they couldn't get away with it. The inside was still the same rotten core. They subsequently changed their mind about the demolition, but we knew that they saw the tower as an eyesore. RBKC were determined that the Academy would be built and wanted to do whatever they could to override local objections.

8. As I was at school at the time I could see things from a slightly different perspective also. We knew that the Academy project was about removing North Kensington kids from Holland Park school. It was well known in the area that the academy project was about protecting the reputation of the school, providing a syphon of people away from Holland Park School
9. It was clear that they were more concerned with appearance than substance. The refurbishment of the Tower was primarily about the outside of the building and the entrance to the Tower. There was very little improvement inside the tower itself. The work was badly done, the materials poor and the inside was essentially the same after the refurbishment.
10. The way the refurbishment was carried out seemed to represent their approach to the project in general. The refurbishment was not clean, and there was a lot of rubble and dirt so access was very difficult. The access routes were cramped, the boiler they installed in our flat did not function properly. All in all the contractors dealt with things terribly.
11. One particular recollection of mine is of the fire hazard that they created during the refurbishment project beside the temporary entrance. To enable access at the same time as the works were being carried out they created a temporary entrance on the third floor that you accessed via the ramp from beside Latimer road station. This was the only way in and out of the tower throughout the refurbishment works. While this was happening a lot of the builders beside the route a dump site. There were black bin liners, old cans of paint all, and all sorts of things on the side. If there had been a fire at that time, this was the only route in and out. It was dangerous. The way they set things up during the refurbishment work was terrible. If the fire had happened then, there would have been no exit.

*Windows*



12. Before the refurbishment we had single glazed windows. They were poor quality, draughty and didn't retain heat. There was very little maintenance and so they had fallen into a serious state of disrepair. Whenever it was windy outside there was a whistling noise. When it was cold it was essential to have the heating on, otherwise the heat would all just dissipate out of the windows. We were happy that they were going to be changed.
13. During the refurbishment we were the first flat in the whole tower to have the new windows installed. Before the work was carried out my dad said that he didn't like the plastic window frames and tried to get them changed. He told Rydon that he wanted a different type of window sill, but they couldn't provide this. When they actually carried the work out I was inside the house. The way they did it was to take the windows out one day and install them the next day so we spent the whole night without windows.
14. Initially when the windows were installed they seemed a lot better, but after a while we realised there was a draft. They simply left the old window sill and put the new acrylic one on top. This left a cavity behind that you could feel the draft coming from. Sound would travel up and so you could tell that there was a gap beneath. The draft was such a problem that my dad had to put a layer of cushions on top to cover it up.
15. The windows had a hinge that opened from one point only. There were three modes on the window: open, turn and tilt. The window was only secure at one point, at the bottom. On one occasion there was a piece of plastic that had got stuck in the mechanism so that the window wouldn't close properly on the tilt. We had to press the window hard to make sure it stayed in the frame and the whole window pane was in danger of simply falling out, on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of the tower block. This was a couple of months after the beginning of the refurbishment.

### *Boiler*

16. Before the refurbishment we had a boiler behind a pannel between the bathroom and kitchen. My dad was one of the first people to accept the new boiler but he asked whether they could change the place it was installed. It seemed a very strange decision to put it in the hall as it blocked access and was unsightly, and it meant that



they had to put all the pipes up and across the corridor, and had to drill brand new holes in walls. They left some of the copper pipes on show and they simply painted them over but didn't use the proper paint when doing so. You could tell that they thought very little about what they were going to do and that it was being done very poorly. At the time there were talks about leaseholders paying for things and the thought of paying a massive bill was not attractive so we let them do it. Now I look back on it and it is obviously something that they shouldn't have done in the way that they did.

17. The water from the new boiler was a bit lukewarm. I would have to shower with only water from the hot water tap, there was no need to mix it with cold. Before the refurb the water was so much warmer, but you wouldn't get as much

### *Lifts*

18. By the time of the fire the lifts were appallingly bad. They were originally installed in 2005 and frequently broke down. I had been trapped in them before. The lift would stop and then you pressed the alarm button and hoped that it would start working again. The majority of the time it would stop working when no one was actually in. The repairs team would need to come but they wouldn't turn up for about a week.
19. During the refurbishment they were out of action very frequently. The builders would use one of the lifts leaving only one for residents to use.

### Fire safety systems

20. The communal doors weren't changed during the refurbishment. I don't know if they were compliant with fire safety standards. I think they painted them but nothing else.
21. The kitchen extractor fans were a lot more noisy when they installed new ones during the refurbishment. They didn't seem to do much to clear the air of smoke or smells. They were very poorly made and were noisy and probably too small.
22. There used to be lights in the lobbies in the ceiling. I don't know if the old lights were emergency lights or not. They did change the position of the lighting.

### Smoke Alarms

23. I remember that we used to have old plastic smoke alarms. They had a big button in the middle. At some time we had fire fighters come and replace them. The new alarms were quite heavy, so much so that one of them pulled the paint off the ceiling and fell to the floor. It still worked but we moved it to a different location.

### Fire safety checks/inspections

24. I remember a time before the refurbishment when they tested the communal fire alarm system. I remember being inside the flat and hearing a big fire alarm going off. I looked outside my front door through the peep hole. The lights were off outside the flat so I called my dad. I think he told me that they were testing the fire alarms.

### Fire safety advice

25. I have a vague recollection of a sign saying that we shouldn't use the lifts. I understood that unless the fire was in your flat then you should stay in your flat. I think there was a sign somewhere saying that but I don't remember where exactly. My understanding was that if the fire was in your flat then you should leave, but otherwise stay in the flat. I don't remember any other advice about fire safety.
26. There was a time when my grandmother was staying with us. She had mobility issues and it was around the time of the refurbishment. We didn't know what the plan was if we had to leave, or how she could be helped.

## **Module 4 - Aftermath**

### After the Fire

*2am – 5am 14 June*

27. I describe some of the terrible impact of the fire in my first statement. I have grouped events here into time periods but I am not always absolutely certain of the specific times that things took place. Everything was so overwhelming that it has affected my recall.

28. After leaving the Tower on the night of the fire my sister and I stood watching the fire for some time. My sister became overwhelmed by what was happening and so I suggested we leave. I told my parents we would go to our family friend's home in Bramley House, a building opposite the Tower. From that flat we could still see the tower burning. Both balconies and the sitting rooms windows faced the Tower My sister and I arrived there at around 2 am. We had a clear view of our flat and could see people on the upper floors at the windows.
29. I remember being particularly worried about my mum. She was distraught, and I remember she was in such a state of shock that at one time she fell to her knees crying. I brought her inside where our friends have a statue of the Virgin Mary and she prayed. She was so overwhelmed that she doesn't remember that time at all.
30. My family are close friends with Marcio Gomes and his family. My dad was very worried about him and believed that he had almost certainly died in the fire. My mum was more optimistic. She said that God would save him.
31. There were so many things that we needed to think about, and so many decisions to make. At the time we weren't really thinking how big a disaster this was. There was a clash of the extraordinary and the normal stuff. It was impossible to understand the reality of what was going on. I think the first time that we really noticed this was at about 5am when we turned on the news and there was a helicopter circling around and the footage of the fire was being broadcast live. It is very difficult to describe the chaos and horror that we were experiencing.

*5am – 10am 14 June*

32. Soon after the fire I was supposed to be travelling to Switzerland with my friend Chris to meet our friend Claudio who was studying there on a year abroad. Everything I needed had been packed and ready in our flat. On the morning of the 14th I called Chris and left him a message saying that I wouldn't be able to come and that I was really sorry. I told him that there had been a fire but said that I was okay. Ten minutes later he called back. He had seen the news and told me not to apologise. We cancelled the flight and the trip to the airport but got all our money back.
33. My phone was out of battery and no one had the phone charger that I needed.



Getting a working phone was vital as so many people were trying to get in contact with us. Our friends had a computer though and my first instinct was to go on Facebook. One thing that sticks in my mind was the 'mark if you are safe' function. I decided to click it to alert my friends or anyone else who was checking. I remember Natasha Elcock's daughter [REDACTED] messaging me and asking if I was okay. She messaged me publicly on Facebook.

34. I remember that while on the computer I typed 'Grenfell Tower' into Google because I was looking for information and I stumbled onto the website 'reddit,' and onto a subreddit called r/toosoon. Lots of people had posted things about Grenfell, they were joking about the fire. It seemed too strange to be real. At the time no one knew how many people had died but there was a lot of disgusting stuff there. It made me realise that people often don't think of the consequences of the things that they post online, they never think that the people who were directly affected will see things.
35. Around this time I started laughing/crying, hysterically. Tears were rolling down my face. It felt like I was going down into some form of hysteria, I didn't know what to do. I remember pinching myself to try and understand whether it was real. I pinched myself so hard that I started bleeding. I now realise that this was shock but at the time I had no idea what was happening to me. It was weird and terrifying. It felt like a dream, like a non-reality.
36. For a time I went into such a state of shock that it was as though the emotion fell away. I became super alert. It was as though my emotions had been so overwhelmed that they temporarily shut down and all there was rationality. It was only later when I rested that the emotion came crashing back.
37. At this point I was trying to get into contact with my girlfriend. It was difficult because my phone battery was dead but I knew that I needed her to know that I was okay. Somehow I got in touch with her and we arranged to meet. I don't remember making the journey to go to see her. As soon as I saw her though I was on my knees and I just cried. She hugged me. There were people all around. I said that I just didn't know what to do – I didn't know what was happening. I walked all the way back to the flat where my parents were and I remember that we had lunch and the

building was still burning.

*10am - 2pm 14 June*

38. As the extent of the tragedy became clear more and more media agencies arrived in the area to report on what was happening. The view of the Tower from our friend's balcony was so clear that a CNN film crew asked if they use the balcony for filming. The journalists also asked if they could interview us. There was also French radio station, and Portuguese media.
39. The road by the Tower was closed because of gas works and so there were no buses running or cars coming. There was access but no cars and because of this the streets filled quickly with people, many of whom brought food and wanted to help. There were so many people and so much food and the whole place was full of people who wanted to help, but I saw no one from RBKC. As far as I could see they were just absent and there was no mention of anything to do with accommodation for people from the Tower.
40. I just needed to do something. My friend Chris had come to see me and we left Bramley House and started to walk around the area. The road was partly closed and so because of that it filled with people, cars couldn't really get through. People were bringing in large crates of water bottles and passing them down. I remember boxes of nappies. There was an overwhelming response from people which was fantastic, but little from the government or local authority.
41. As I passed the Latymer Christian Centre I saw that there were a lot of people there and that they were sorting through donations of food and supplies. I figured if I didn't know what to do then I may as well help, but at that stage they said they didn't need anyone. So many people had already offered to volunteer that they were turning people away. They suggested that I go to the Rugby Portobello Club as they may need assistance there. When I arrived though they said that they also already had enough volunteers and suggested that I go to the Harrow Club.
42. On my way there I passed some people there from the Tower who I recognised. They came up to me and asked if I was alright, and they hugged me. I hugged them back. I didn't know them well at the time but I found myself hugging them as if

they were long lost friends.

43. After lunch Chris and I went to the Latimer Alternative Provision Academy by the Harrow Club where we started helping out. We helped to organise donated clothes into boxes ready for them to be given to people who needed them. I think that the clothes were coming from donations given to Rugby Portobello. Chris and I met another friend, Eliza, on the way to the Harrow Club. She came with us to help.
44. I wasn't aware of any Council presence at that time, there was certainly no one with any level of authority. The only people who seemed to be organising things were people from the community. The police were around, but they were just guarding the cordon around the Tower. They did not seem to be taking any steps to identify and record people who had escaped.
45. In the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> I came back to our friend's home in Bramley House where my parents were. By this time I had heard confirmation that 12 people had died.
46. A school friend of mine had messaged me earlier in the day. Her mother worked for Channel 4 and she was very apologetic but asked if I would agree to be interviewed. I said it was okay and ended up speaking with Jon Snow from Channel 4 news on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>. He asked me whether I thought that the current death total figure was likely to be accurate. I said that, given the horrific extent of the fire then, if there were only 12 people dead then it would have been a miracle. I was certain that more people had died because I could remember seeing at least 30 people on the upper floors of the tower screaming for help. He talked about Lilly Allen having said that there were over a hundred people who had died.
47. I slept the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> at my Chris' house on All Souls Avenue. I did not want to separate from my family but there was not enough space in the Bramley House flat for us all and so I had no choice. No one told us that we could go to the Westway for accommodation.

*15 June 2017*

48. My mum was the first member of our family to go to the Westway but I am not sure when she went for the first time. We had lost everything in the fire except for what



we had with us when we left the building and so she picked up some new clothes. It was through her that I first heard about the Westway.

49. On the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> June Chris' dad gave the two of us a lift to the large Sainsburys in Ladbroke Grove where we met Eliza. We wanted to buy things for people who had lost their homes. We bought all of the shampoo and other toiletries we could find and walked to the Westway with five or six shopping bags.
50. On the way to the Westway we passed along Cambridge Gardens and met a woman on the street who noticed that we were carrying bags and asked whether we were taking them to donate. She thanked us for wanting to help out although she was unaware that I was a survivor myself. We began talking and she asked us where we were from. I told her that I was from the tower and she suggested that I should start taking down names and emails of other survivors. No one in authority was doing this at that time. She even offered her laptop because I didn't have one. This was an important conversation because it sowed the seed in mind of the need to establish contact with other survivors and bereaved.
51. When we arrived the Red Cross were on the door of the Westway controlling who came in. They accepted the bags of donations, but told me that only survivors from the Tower were allowed in. I tried to explain that I was from the Tower myself, but it was difficult to get this message across so I just dropped off the bags and left.
52. I didn't go back to the Westway for several days, I didn't feel like there was any point. When I did eventually go back a few days later the Red Cross asked me why I had not already visited. Given that initial contact it just didn't seem like somewhere that I could get assistance.
53. I think it was also on the 15th June that someone got in touch with my dad from the Portuguese embassy to see if we were okay. At that time we had still had no direct contact from the Council. The Portuguese embassy was more active in approaching people and offering support than RBKC.
54. Suddenly my sister became the focus of a lot of media attention because the day after the fire she sat a GCSE exam. She had spoken to Portuguese media on 14 June and the English newspapers picked up the story a day later. When her story went

viral a few days later, the comments on the Daily Mail website in particular were horrific. There were posts about immigrants getting secondary school places, comments about her being a nerd and even people suggesting that she decided to save her chemistry notes rather than other people. I told her not to read the comments, but she was transfixed and just ended up scrolling and reading. As I found out myself it is like that. The material is so hurtful but you cannot stop yourself from reading it. People don't realise how hurtful and damaging what they are doing and saying is.

55. I didn't contact the Westway about a hotel, my parents dealt with that side of things. My mum had tried to find someone to speak with about emergency accommodation when she first visited the Westway but they had said that they didn't have any room on the night of the 15th. On the 16th she tried again and this time managed to get one room for the whole family for 2 nights at the Hilton Metropol on Edgware Road. RBKC made no direct approach to me.

*16th – 20th June*

56. On 16<sup>th</sup> of June there was a big demonstration outside Kensington Town Hall. I wasn't there but I heard about it and was very worried that there would be riots and that the people who were actually directly affected would be forgotten. My fear was that it would become like the Tottenham riots. I had seen that most people don't remember what happens to cause a riot, they just think about the violence and disruption of the protest, and that enables the authorities to ignore the causes. I was worried that the actual fire would feel like just a catalyst for the disorder that followed.
57. On the 18th June our booking at the Metropol Hotel came to an end and my parents tried to contact the person at the Westway who had first organised our stay. They told us that there would be a booking at the Holiday Inn in Earls Court. When my mum arrived at the Holiday Inn that evening she discovered that the booking had not actually been made and we were left once again without a place to stay. As it was out of hours our contact at the Council had gone home and so we were not able to do anything other than again ask our friends for help. We stayed another night at our friends house. The following day RBKC did make us a hotel booking at the Holiday

Inn Express Earls Court, where we stayed until we moved into longer term accommodation several months later.

58. The first time I really visited the Westway was on Monday 19th June. By this time RBKC had opened up the back section where there were lots of stalls from various agencies. For example the DVLA was there to help you get a new drivers licence. The Department for Work and Pensions were also there and so I was able to get my National Insurance number and P45. That was the first time that anyone official took my details as a Tower resident.

### *The Beginnings of Grenfell United*

59. At some point in the week following the fire I was told that there were laptops available for survivors who were also students. To collect the laptop I went to the Rugby Portobello where I provided proof that I was a student, and then went to another location where they were being distributed. The point was that I had a computer when a day or so after this there was a meeting of survivors from the Tower at the Rugby Portobello. My dad and I went to the meeting and when we arrived Ed Daffarn was there and he greeted my dad. During the meeting we discussed what steps we should take to ensure that survivors were being properly supported, given the failings of provision and communication that we had already experienced. We started talking about how little was being done for people. It was all so muddled up and everything was so confusing. There were rumours and confusion and uncertainty when what we needed was clarity. At the meeting I sent a piece of paper around to record who was present and to take their contact details. From this I compiled a list on my laptop.

60. There was already a large paper list of former Tower residents and bereaved people at the Rugby Portobello, that was started on the night of the fire. It recorded the people who had safely left the Tower. Someone suggested that we should build on this list and the list that I began to develop a group of survivors. This was the beginning of the formation of the Grenfell United WhatsApp group. I remember someone asking what the group should be called. Willie Thompson came up with the name Grenfell United and it stuck.

61. There were other organisations being set up at that time like Justice4Grenfell but



they we felt that their aims were more political than humanitarian, and they were not led by survivors. It felt like they were more interested in capitalising on the situation for their own political ends, and their desire to politicise everything only caused division. Their approach led to the Daily Mail and other newspapers running very critical reports which didn't help the situation at all. We wanted to leave party politics aside. There was a humanitarian need and that needed to be dealt with first. All of this was made more difficult by the vacuum of leadership from RBKC.

*Grenfell Victims and Survivors Trust.*

62. Sometime later we first heard that another group had been set up called the Grenfell Victims and Survivors Trust. The group already had printed letterheads and the formation seemed to have been supported by Gold Command, the multi-agency response that had been drafted in to direct RBKC's response to the fire. At this stage Grenfell United still had not been formally constituted but we were making progress towards becoming the organisation that represented bereaved and survivors. It seemed that the authorities wanted us to discontinue our efforts to create an independent organisation and join the Grenfell Victims and Survivors Trust.
63. At a meeting with Hilary Patel of Gold Command I first encountered Ibrahim El Noor, who had founded the Grenfell Victims and Survivors Trust and claimed to be bereaved by the fire. He presented himself as the only option to lead a group of bereaved and survivors. We were suspicious of him from the start. However, Gold Command kept saying that we needed to work with him. At the end of the meeting he asked me for the list I had compiled of names and contact details. I didn't give it to him and after discussing it with my dad later that day we agreed that I should not let him have the information.
64. Later that week the same man came to a Grenfell Tower Leaseholders Association Meeting (GTLA) that my dad and I attended. He said that he was going to talk to us about a proposal for the GTLA to join his organisation. He had never met with the leaseholders before but he claimed that he knew my dad and I, even though we had only ever seen him at that previous meeting. All of the leaseholders were very suspicious of his intentions.

65. After this, I received a letter inviting me to a meeting at the Westway on the Saturday 24th June. I couldn't go to that meeting but I heard all about it from those who did attend, and I saw a video that circulated on WhatsApp of Ibrahim El-Nour being escorted to his car by the police. It had become apparent at the meeting that he had no meaningful connection with the Tower, and had lied, or significantly exaggerated his relationship with anyone who had died in the fire. People were very angry with him. It was all very odd, particularly given that the authorities had been so insistent that we should work with him. It was difficult not to reach the conclusion that they were deliberately trying to establish an alternative to Grenfell United, in an attempt to hinder the process of survivors establishing their own independent organisation.

### *Constitution of Grenfell United*

66. The experience of dealing with Ibrahim El Noor made it all the more apparent to us that we needed to work to establish Grenfell United. Ed and Shahin Sadafi and others arranged a meeting on 28th June at the Royal Garden Hotel. I attended with my dad and sister. We arrived at the Hotel and no one was there taking people's names and so again I compiled a list as people were coming into the room. We let anybody in provided another person could confirm that they had lived in the Tower.

67. The meeting was attended by around 50 people from the Tower. Shahin stood up at the beginning and explained that we needed to come together. He said that people were already out speaking on our behalf, and that we could not let this happen. Shahin said that the best way to achieve this would be to create a formal organisation which could advocate on behalf of bereaved and survivors, and which could explain our struggles to the many agencies involved in the aftermath. We voted on these suggestions and they were passed. This meeting was the foundation of Grenfell United.

68. We decided to hold general meeting in September, but to put in place an interim committee. In previous meetings we had established that an odd number of committee members was necessary to ensure that there would always be a deciding vote. We agreed on 11 people, but considered this again when later forming the actual constitution of Grenfell United. At this first meeting people were asked to

stand up if they wanted to put themselves forward as interim committee members. Ten people did so. As there was one unfilled place some individuals were asked by name to fill the gap, including myself. I rejected the request because of my lack of experience, and also because I was just about to start an internship at Hoegh Capital Partners and so felt that I would not be able to contribute the time that was required. In the end my dad put himself forward as the eleventh committee member. However it was always understood that I would assist him and when he went on holiday in July 2017 I took over his role on the committee and I have been involved ever since.

69. Following the first meeting, the committee organised a series of meetings for all bereaved and survivors over a number of weeks with very senior figures from Government and Administration. First we met with the ministers Alok Sharma, Sajid Javid and Nick Hurd to discuss Government engagement with survivors. Two weeks later we met with Sir Martin Moore-Bick to discuss the terms of reference of the Public Inquiry. Two weeks after that we met with the Charity Commission to discuss their oversight of money donated following the fire. All of these meetings took place at the Royal Garden Hotel.
70. The final meeting was with Teresa May who was then Prime Minister. Given her importance we were not allowed to announce her attendance prior to the meeting and the police did background checks on committee members. The meeting did feel productive as Teresa May stayed for a lot longer than originally planned, but I still did not feel that she really understood the full scope of the problems we were facing.
71. At first most of the people involved with GU were survivors of the fire and we we had limited contact with bereaved families who were not themselves resident in the Tower. It was not easy to establish contact with the bereaved, but we always believed it to be of the utmost importance to have bereaved representation as part of Grenfell United. The Committee met with Ahmed Elgwahry who lost his mother and sister in the Tower. Ahmed had lived in the tower as a child, but had moved out some time ago. Following the fire he had created a bereaved WhatsApp group and knew Shahin as they had been childhood friends. Initially Ahmed was not sure that the two groups could work together so he became involved in GU himself, independently without attempting to persuade any other bereaved. In time he became more engaged in our work and invited other bereaved people to get



involved.

72. In preparation for our first AGM we produced a draft constitution with the help of the Tennant Participatory Advisory Service. We also received a lot of support from Oliver McTernan and Jordan Morgan of the organisation Forward Thinking. The Constitution was formally adopted at the first AGM meeting and established four main objectives: to get justice for the families, to hold the government to account, to scrutinise the charity commission, and to push for a criminal prosecution of those responsible.
73. Grenfell United (GU) began because the survivors and residents realised that if we did not act, then little would be done. Support was hard to find and gradually GU was able to build the trust of the people who had gone through this disaster. It was not made up of outsiders or people doing things to us but was made up of the actual residents and victims of this tragedy. It meant that there was trust.
74. The impact of the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> June has been huge. At the time I had just finished my second year of a four year undergraduate Masters degree in physics. Before the fire I had high hopes for my studies but as I tried to go back to study in the autumn of 2017 I found I could not longer cope. My grades dropped significantly; I could not focus and I ended up splitting my third year into two parts. It was impossible for me to manage. I had been studying on a four year undergraduate Masters programme but could not continue with this and reduced to a 3 year degree. My education has been delayed; my health has also been affected; I gained a lot of weight and since the night of the fire I found everything very psychologically difficult.

### **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:

Tiago Alves

Date: 28/02/2020