

Witness Statement of: **Nashwa Abdel-kader**  
No. of statement: **1**  
Exhibits: **0**  
Date of statement: **27.02.20**

## **GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF NASHWA ABDEL-KADER**

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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, **Nashwa Abdel-kader**, will say as follows:

1. This is my first witness statement to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and relates to Phase 2. This statement will focus on Phase 2 issues, but to ensure that my other evidence can be understood in context, I will briefly outline my experience on the night of the fire.
2. I have addressed issues which are relevant to Module 3 (fire safety within the Tower and communication with residents) and Module 4 (aftermath) of the Inquiry's list of issues only.

#### Background

3. I am making this statement about Flat 204 Grenfell Tower where my cousin Hesham Rahman lived on the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor. My mother, Shafika Ragab, is the sister of Hesham's mother who died in childbirth. Hesham was born in Egypt and when he was 17, he came to live with my mother. We moved to England in the mid-1980s and Hesham joined us in around 1987 and lived with us. Hesham was five years older than me and he was like a brother to me. We were really close.

4. When I was 13 years old I moved into Flat 171 Grenfell Tower to live with my uncle Mohamed Ragab. I spent much of my childhood living there and I had a lot of friends in the Tower, including my best friend Eslah Elgwahry who lived on the 19th floor.
5. Hesham and I used to work together, he was a hairdresser and I was a beauty therapist. We had a shop together in St John's Wood and worked together at weddings. He would do hair and I did makeup. He did my hair for my wedding.
6. Hesham had diabetes and later on in life he would complain to me that his feet always hurt and he felt like they were burning. When he found standing up for long periods of time too difficult he had to stop working. Later on he found it difficult to walk and wore special shoes for his feet.
7. Hesham lived in Ladbroke Grove before he was made to move out and into temporary accommodation. Hesham told RBKC that he wanted to live close to my mum and my uncle Mohamed. He was offered Flat 204 in Grenfell Tower, which is on the top floor. I think he felt like he had to move into Grenfell Tower because this was what he was being offered by the council to take and he wanted to live close to my mum. I think that if he could have chosen a flat to live in then it would never have been on the top floor because of his mobility problems.
8. I remember he told RBKC that there were problems with his flat that needed changing before he moved in but I believe that RBKC told him take the offer of the flat or leave it and as I have said, I think he felt like he didn't have much choice.
9. I think it would have been obvious when Hesham moved into Grenfell Tower that he had mobility problems. I think that RBKC would have known this and yet they still put him on the top floor of the Tower. His mobility problems got worse the older he got and he would use a walking stick and he even used this to balance. I don't think that RBKC should have housed him on the top floor. I don't think there was a plan for Hesham in the event of an emergency which meant everyone needed to get out, because he couldn't walk down from the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor.
10. When Hesham moved into his flat, I remember there was a lot of work that had to be done inside to make the flat look nicer for him to live in. He had to organise for work

to be done to the flat and he paid for the work himself. As someone with disabilities, the flat needed to be customised for him, for example, he had handles installed in the bathroom. He had this work done himself. I don't think that the flat was suitable for him when he moved in and RBKC and the TMO did not help him to make it more suitable by doing these works for him.

11. Hesham had a car with a mobility badge on and he had a disabled parking space, so again I think that RBKC would have known about his mobility problems.
12. Mohamed helped Hesham a lot with reporting any problems to RBKC like repairs which needed making. Hesham's English was not very good and so Mohamed helped him by speaking with RBKC on his behalf.
13. After Hesham had finished organising the works inside his flat, including repainting it and having a new floor put down, it looked really beautiful. He would use every bit of money he had to look after his flat. He made it his own. He kept it tidy and clean but made it look cosy to live in. He loved antiques and would spend time adding antiques to his flat.
14. I remember Hesham had problems with the hot water and heating in his flat. The hot water would often not come on and when this happened, he would come to my mum's place to have a shower. Hesham told me he had complained to RBKC when things stopped working, particularly if the lifts were out of service. He told me other residents made lots of complaints too. He sometimes stayed at my mum's flat when both the lifts were not working as he couldn't walk up the stairs to the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor. He would have to check when the lifts were working again so he could get back into his flat. Walking down the stairs would be too difficult for Hesham as well.

#### The refurbishment

15. I do not recall Hesham talking about the refurbishment to me. I do remember Hesham complaining to me about his windows after the works were done to his flat as part of the refurbishment. Before the refurbishment, he could open his windows, and afterwards he had problems opening them.

#### The 14 June 2017 and week after the fire



16. On the 13 June 2017, I was with my mum and Hesham in her flat. Hesham left her house in the evening and I left at around 00:45. I then drove home (which is near South Kensington) and went to bed. At around 06:00 I was woken up by my son Karim, who called me on my phone and said I needed to come to Grenfell Tower now. I told him I was at home and he told me to look at the fire on the news. I got up and turned on the television and I saw the Tower on fire. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I felt really scared for Hesham's life, knowing he was at the top.
17. I got changed and went to my car and drove towards the Tower. The surrounding roads were blocked so I could not get close to the Tower and I had to leave my car parked near Notting Hill Gate. I told police officers on the road that my brother was in the Tower and my family were outside there and I needed to get there. They told me they would park my car for me so I gave them my car keys and then I ran from Notting Hill Gate towards the Tower.
18. When I got outside the Tower, I saw my mum was on the street crying. At around 07:00 my mum fainted whilst looking up at the Tower. Paramedics came over to her and helped her. I told my mum "We are in the UK, don't worry. They wouldn't leave a building burning like this and someone inside" because I wanted to try and comfort her because she was in such distress. I was told by the paramedics to wait one hour before visiting the hospitals so that the staff had enough time to register the patients. The paramedics recommended visiting St Mary's Hospital or Chelsea and Westminster Hospital to see if Hesham had been taken there. I stayed with my mum in the area to look after her whilst my uncle Mohamed went to all the local hospitals to look for Hesham. I was really upset but my mum was beside herself and needed my support. I really hoped that my family would find Hesham in the hospital.
19. My family spent the day searching the hospitals and the area and I stayed with my mum at her house to support her. Later that evening uncle Mohamed came back to the house and said he hadn't found Hesham in the hospitals he had visited and the hospitals said they did not have a record of him having been taken there. I stayed the night at my mum's house with other family members. I did not want to leave her house until we had Hesham back with us. I said I wanted to wait until he was home.

20. We were not contacted by the police or by RBKC or the TMO on 14 June. We as a family didn't understand what was happening or what we should do to try and find out what had happened to Hesham.
21. I met one of Hesham's friends, Anna, outside the Tower in the first few days after the fire. She told me that on the night of the fire she had spoken with Hesham on the phone who was trapped inside his flat and she thought he had died whilst she was talking to him. She cried as she told me this and I found it too difficult to hear. I said "don't say it" when she explained what had happened because I didn't want to hear that Hesham had died. I knew that my mum had spoken to him on the phone that night as well but she lost contact with him and stopped answering his phone in the early hours of the morning. This was the first time I really believed that Hesham had died. I could not believe it. It was upsetting to imagine how he must have suffered. What must he have gone through, being trapped on his own in his flat, not able to get out? I was really upset thinking of this.
22. It was a chaotic time in the days after the fire. My family were out looking for Hesham but I stayed with my mum at home who needed my support. For this reason I didn't go to the relief centres in the area in the first seven days.
23. The police eventually came to the house (within the first seven days of the fire). I can't remember when this was because I can't remember the exact dates in which things happened within this time. It was a very distressing time for me so it's hard to remember things. The police told us that they could not confirm whether Hesham had died because they had not found a body. We were all distraught on hearing this. My sons Karim and Mohamed could not take this in. Soon after this I packed up my things and I left for Egypt because I just could not face my life anymore and I wanted to run away. Hesham and I had grown up together and I was so hurt by how he had died. I had lost a lot of trust in this country and I am so disappointed. How could firefighters not have saved him? How were they able to use helicopters but not use water to put the fire out? Eslah Elgwahry who died in the fire was a friend of mine, who I had known for so many years. I went to her funeral and then soon after that I flew back to Egypt.

24. Whilst I was away, the police informed my family that they had found Hesham's remains in his flat and could confirm that he had died in the Tower. I regularly visit my mum who lives in the same house near the Tower and being there brings back very painful memories that I do not want to remember.

### Impact

25. I do not want to go into detail about the impact of losing Hesham has had on me in this public statement, other than to say I suffer nightmares of what happened in the Tower and I have nightmares about what I saw. Some days when I look back at the night I can't actually believe what happened and I find this really difficult and painful. It really upsets me to think how much Hesham would have suffered. I want to think that he is in a good place now and he is watching over us. I have found comfort through my religion instead. We are a very close-knit family and this has had a huge impact on all of us.

### Adequacy of response & lessons learned

26. As a response to the fire, RBKC should have contacted us and I think that the police should have met us on 14 June and confirmed to us that Hesham wasn't in the hospitals and was believed to have not made it out. That would have spared the family the pain of searching for him.
27. After the fire, I lost trust in RBKC and the government. My family chose to live in this country because they believed it would be safe for them. The events on 14 June 2017 have changed destroyed every bit of respect I had for RBKC and the Government. I am now scared for my children my daughter lives on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor in a cladded tower block in Wembley. She is scared and the council is not helping her to move.
28. What happened was a huge injustice and the government needs to learn from the mistakes that were made.

### Statement of truth

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

I am willing for the statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and be published on the Inquiry's website

SIGNED:



DATE:

27/2/2020

