

Witness Statement of: Abu Baker Mohamed Ibrahim

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Exhibits:

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GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF ABU BAKER MOHAMED IBRAHIM

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).

Signed 

I, **ABU BAKER MOHAMED IBRAHIM**, will say as follows:

1. I make this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Fire Public Inquiry. This statement is an account of my personal experience in the aftermath of the fire on 14 June 2017 ('the fire') at Grenfell Tower ('the Tower') that took the lives of my mother, Faphia Ahmed El-Sanousi, my brother, Abufras Ibrahim ('Fras'), and sister, Isra Ibrahim.
2. I provided a Witness Statement to the Inquiry dated 10 May 2019 (Unique ID: **IWS00001238**) for the purpose of confirming the identity of my brother from video footage for Phase 1 of the Inquiry.

Background

3. I was born in Khartoum, in Sudan, one of 5 siblings. My father was an army officer and well respected. He died when I was young, and when that happened, life became more difficult, slowly at first, and then it squeezed us tighter and tighter, and my mother had to make the difficult decision that Sudan was not the right place for our family anymore, so she moved us to the UK. My older brother Gasim and sister Eiman were not able to join us due to issues with their visas, so they had to settle elsewhere.
4. We moved to London on 9 February 1992. I remember the day vividly and even remember the time that our plane landed in England as it was one of the happiest days of my life. I still feel that way, despite everything. My mother and siblings also shared that sentiment, and did until the day that they had to leave.
5. We lived first in a house in Croydon and we loved it. I remember one day, soon after we moved to England, Fras and I left the house early in the morning, and stood at the end of the road that our house was on. There were a group of boys walking past us to the football pitches, carrying footballs and on the way to practise. I remember feeling a sense of freedom and thinking that this was the way life should be; it felt great.
6. At that time, Fras and I went to the same school and were in the same class. In 2001, when we were in our early twenties, we moved to live together in Earls Court. Fras later got his own flat in Queensgate. Isra lived with my mother in the Tower and my older sister Eiman eventually moved to the UK and settled in Leicester.
7. Fras and I set up a business together, a fishmongers shop next to Arsenal Station in Islington. The shop opened in May 2017. We put so much of our time and money into that shop and were excited about what we could do with it. It was such a nice place after we refurbished it with our own money. We had big ideas of what we wanted to do, we worked long hours, starting at 8.30am and finishing at the same time in the evening, or sometimes later at 9pm or 10pm. We wanted our fish to be used for sushi, so it was all fast paced as everything had to be very fresh. We were proud of it, we kept it clean and tidy and presentable. As well as fish, we sold fresh fruit and vegetables,

oils and balsamic vinegars. We were in conversation with a lady down the road at the pub about doing something in collaboration together, and were also planning on making a lot of business when the football season began. I remember that my mum was really happy and proud of us; I have a memory of bringing her to the shop to show her what we had accomplished, and I remember her sitting there and smiling.

8. I slept at the shop for a period in order to put all my financial resources into the shop until Fras insisted that I go and stay with him in his flat in Queensgate, which I did in late May 2017. We lived there for three to four weeks together before the fire.

My mum's experience of living in the Tower

9. My mum moved into Grenfell Tower in 2008. She lived on the top floor. She enjoyed the area. I can rarely remember a time when I would visit her in her flat that she wouldn't have someone round there for a cup of tea chatting to her. My mum was incredibly welcoming, and she had so much experience in life that she really knew how to talk to people and people enjoyed being around her. The flat had wonderful views and that is what I like to remember about it now.
10. I do know that my mum had a few problems during the time that she was living there, in particular with the windows before the refurbishment, and after the refurbishment, with the heating and the water supply. For some time, there was no water at all coming through to her bathroom, and at other times I remember her talking about not having any hot water for quite some time. She and my sister would telephone the TMO quite often to report these things, but I am not sure what happened. Mum also mentioned a few times after the refurbishment that she was concerned about the gas pipes because they were exposed.

13 June 2017

11. On the night of 13 June 2017, Fras and I left the shop at 9pm and we got on bus number 19 from Islington to Hyde Park Corner where we got on the number 52 bus. On that journey we were discussing expanding the business into Kensington and Barnes. We thought that would be good because the areas and people are similar to Islington and so we were discussing how that would work well. It was Ramadan at the time and so we

agreed that we would wait until after Ramadan and then could put in more hours, when we had more energy, and split shifts, so that we could cover more of the day between us.

12. At some point on the journey my mum called Frasier to break Ramadan fast at her flat and he asked whether I was going to join them. I said that I wasn't as I was getting a haircut the following morning. He said that he would hang on to the keys for the shop to open up the next morning, because he said we needed some new fish knives, some better ones than those we had already, and that when I arrived at the shop the following morning, he would head to a place in Fulham to get them, which I said was fine.
13. I got off the bus by the Royal Albert Hall and he carried on. When I got off the bus, as it pulled away, I saw his head from the back facing forward. That was the last time I saw him.
14. I went home and got straight into bed.

14 June 2017

15. I had a phone call really early in the morning from my sister Eiman in Leicester. She said that she didn't want for me to be alarmed but that there looked as though there was a fire in mum's building; she asked if I could go and check it out. I got up straight away, got dressed and just ran out onto the road outside. I missed two buses but eventually a taxi stopped for me. I said to him that I needed to get to the Tower and that my mum lived there. The taxi driver told me that it was a really bad fire and he didn't charge me.
16. I remember wondering why Frasier hadn't called me. I tried to ring everyone's phones but they all seemed to be off. As we approached the area, from quite some distance, I began to see smoke. You go into this strange state, I can't describe it, like you could be in a dream and you can't work out whether things are real. When I got out of the taxi, I saw the ambulance and fire trucks and for the first time properly, the extent of the fire. I started to run towards the Tower; I thought that I was moving but my legs weren't working and I was immediately out of breath. I had nothing in the tank. I sat down on the floor, on someone's door step, and I just thought, this is not normal, something is

not right. It is hard to describe how I felt, there is no precedent, and I was in complete shock.

17. A voice in my head told me to get up and pull myself together, and to go and get my family. There were so many people around me, I just started asking people questions, where I could go to look for my family, and where injured people had been taken. I have no idea who these people were or where they were from, I was just asking anyone, I was not really taking things in. The people that I asked mentioned a few places where they thought the injured had been taken. I could not tell you exactly what these places were called but they were community halls as I remember; I went to three or four of them.
18. In the crowd of people, I then saw a familiar face, someone who I recognised who had lived in the Tower, who I had seen before, though I could not now tell you who this was. I went over to him and I asked whether he had seen my mum or my brother and sister; he asked me what floor they had lived on and I said that they were right at the top, on the 23rd floor. He turned to me and said, 'oh, mate, they are gone' and he said that he believed that nobody had come out from the 21st floor upwards.
19. I walked to Latimer Road station and stood there trying to process what was happening. I looked up at the Tower; I could see the fire right at the top of the building. I was in total shock I think. I couldn't understand why Frasier had not called me. He would always call me. Even if he was just on the way home from somewhere, he would call me. Even if he had lost a limb or been in the hospital hooked up to machines.
20. I called Elizabeth, my wife, then while I was standing outside Latimer Station. I didn't want to call her, but I did and she came. I saw some other people that I recognised from the Tower, who I did not want to be around. My cousin also came.
21. Though it is again a bit of a blur, at some point, somebody mentioned a number of hospitals which people might have been taken. I wasn't given a list or anything but I remember I asked someone who was in the vicinity of the Tower and was told about these. I walked to two hospitals by myself, which I think were St Charles Hospital and Charring Cross.

22. Two of my friends joined me at a later time and we went in one of their cars to some more hospitals in South London.
23. At some point that day on 14 June, my sister Eiman came from Leicester with her kids and her husband, to my flat. I could see that she was in shock; she knew what had happened but she could not really understand fully. I said to her that it would not help her to look around for them and that she should wait at my flat, which she did. I continued to search the hospitals. I went with my friends to St Mary's, a second hospital in Camberwell and then a third one, which I cannot remember the name of. Every hospital that we went to, I went in and gave the names of my family. The hospital staff would say the same thing that nobody of that name had been there. I was hoping for some sort of miracle.
24. On the morning of 15 June, I had to go with Elizabeth to Tooting to collect something. On the way back, we had a car accident, someone hit us from behind. Elizabeth fractured her arm and had to go to hospital. She was taken by ambulance to Chelsea and Westminster Hospital and I followed on. When I found her, she must have told someone what had happened and that we were involved with the fire. We were told to wait in the room that she was in as someone from the police was going to come to see us.

Police Liaison Officers

25. That is when Emma Harris came, and a fellow police officer called, Claire. They were the Family Liaison Officers with the police. As I understand it, they had been informed that there was a bereaved person in the hospital and so they came rushing straight over to me. They didn't therefore have any information for me at that point. They were both lovely and very supportive. It was basically an introduction and they asked me for the details of what had happened. I explained that my mum, brother and sister had been in the Tower the night before and that I hadn't heard from them since, and so I thought that they must be gone, but wanted to know what had happened. They took my contact details and said that they would try and find everything out and would then be in touch.

26. From that point on the Family Liaison Officers, Emma Harris in particular, were an amazing source of support. This included David Pearl who joined later and acted as a co Family Liaison Officer alongside the other two. In addition, Ann Castle worked as my victim support worker and has again been a very important source of support for me throughout. Emma would visit me around three times a week sometimes, or would otherwise update me on the phone or by text. It therefore wasn't necessary for me to go to any of the Centres that were set up for relatives to obtain information. I was wary of going online at this point as well, because of the images and opinions that were being shared around. Emma and the others would also make direct contact with my sister, and I know also travelled to Leicester quite a few times to see her as well, so it wasn't as though I was expected to update her.

27. I was told about 5 days after the fire about Fras, where he had been found and how he had died. It was Emma who came to my home to tell me. In my mind then, I was clear on what had gone on. From knowing Fras as well as I did, I could imagine what must have gone through his mind. He would have seen my mum and sister dying in the room, and he would have hung on to the very end, but it would have been too much for him, and he would have made the decision to jump. I think he was incredibly brave.

28. It took a while, perhaps a number of weeks, for me to find out about my sister and mum and for their bodies to be retrieved. Emma contacted me a couple of weeks after the fire in relation to needing to take a DNA sample. She explained to me why it was necessary and she took me to the place where I had it done. I cannot remember a lot of this as I was feeling so numb at the time. I just felt that way throughout the whole process; you feel strange and lost, I can't properly put it into words.

Keyworker

29. I would say about 7 weeks after the fire, I met my keyworker, Amelia Booth, who became very helpful along the journey as well. Before this point, I did not have a key worker. After a year, a key worker called Sharon took over from Amelia, and then a few months later again, Jackie Kaiser, who remains my key worker. I did find them all very helpful, Amelia in particular, for example with arranging art therapy classes and issues with accommodation. They also made it clear that therapy was accessible to me

throughout, but it didn't feel right for me at the time as I felt numb. I have since sought treatment as the pain has really settled in. At first, I just wanted to know where my family were, and what had happened to them, and after that time, I became quite numb. I found all of the keyworkers that I was allocated to be very helpful and supportive, I know a lot of people that I spoke to struggled with theirs in terms of their attitude and not finding them very sympathetic. I was lucky not to have that experience as those that worked with me were very comforting and caring in their ways.

Coroner

30. I met with the Coroner, Fiona Wilcox some weeks after the fire. She seemed to me to be very passionate and compassionate. I met her for the first time in the mortuary when she explained to me the procedure for identifying the bodies and the state of them, and supported me with that, and also at a conference at a later stage. She was very approachable, it felt as though you could turn up there and ask to see her. She would release information directly to me or sometimes information and updates would come through Emma. I saw her again at the mortuary when I went to collect the bodies. I did feel that I was able to be involved as much as I wanted to be.

Funeral arrangements

31. The first funeral, which was Frás', was arranged by the Mosque at Regents Park. The funerals for my mum and sister were arranged by Hassan, as we had a joint funeral for them and for his wife and two children, because they died and were found together. The costs of the funeral were met for us by the police. I was satisfied with the process.

My family

Abufras

32. My family are all very giving, and this especially applied to Frás. It would sometimes get to the point of being annoying with him. Sometimes he would give you money that he didn't even have himself. I remember him buying some new shirts and I commented that they were nice, and he gave them to me; he would be quite happy in a Primark t-

shirt, he wasn't caught up with material things. He was very solid and very brave always, and always there to help others. I almost think, on some level, deep down, it was as if he knew he was leaving this world soon, and so wouldn't have need for them, and he wanted others to have them. I am a grown man but he was the kind of person that would come by my bedroom, and if I was sleeping, he would come in and pull the covers over me so that I wouldn't be cold. Fras also had a way with people, for example the customers in the shop really got along with him. He was very direct and frank about things.

33. I sometimes drive past the house that we used to live in in Earls Court; I can see him in my mind upstairs in the flat, or coming out of the front door; he had a distinctive walk. It makes me smile. Nobody can take those memories away from me. Abufras and I had a very close relationship, and were friends as much as brothers. I could not re-open our fishmonger shop after his death.

Isra

34. My sister was the same as Fras. She worked with elderly people with real problems for not much money at all. She would tell me about the elderly people that she had met and made friends with and the stories that they would share. My mum had a chat with me one day as she was worried about how Isra was going to support herself financially and survive doing this job. I said that I would have talk with her about this. Both my brother and sister gave and gave, they were different from other people, they were not materialistic, it is just how they were. There are a lot of people who give and expect things in return, but they were not like that.

Mum

35. I think these qualities came from my mum. She had an amazing journey. She would never turn her back on things or people, even people who didn't deserve her time or help. She fought to keep us together as a family which was very brave, and she had so much strength and courage to look after all of us.

36. My mum would always be looking out for us and encouraging us to look out for each other. She would say, you know, I think your brother is stressed, or he has a bit of a temper, keep a check on him, you know. She liked that we had gone into business together; she wanted us to protect each other.
37. They were all strong and brave and giving and I believe that is reflected in the way that they died. I am immensely proud of how they died. My mum's and sister's bodies were found hugging each other, they were together. My brother hung on until the end, I know he did. I know him well enough to know what must have been going through his mind. It was late when he died, it must have been pure hell. I played it over and over in my mind. I had thought that they had died in my mum's flat, that is the only thing that I hadn't expected. I know that Frass must have seen my sister and mother dying there in the room, and that it will have been too much for him, and I think he made the decision to jump. He was so brave, they all were. There is love, loyalty and dignity in the way that they died. That is who my family are.

Other people

38. I met Rania and her two girls once around three weeks before the fire. I got in the lift with them when I was going to see my mum one time. It was a long way up from the bottom to the top and we got talking. The two girls were beautiful, especially the older one, she was talkative. She would say, 'where are you going?'; she was cheeky. That is the first and last time that I saw them. I have seen Hassan, we get on well, he has been through a lot. God doesn't give weak people these problems.

Impact

39. There has been a numbness all along which is now starting to wear off and the pain is starting to kick in. I wake up at all hours of the night, jump out of bed, and pace around in the living room with my hands on my head or just sit in the corner with my hands covering my face. It is just like constantly screaming, not out loud, but inside, as if you are just going to explode. It is agony, not just mentally, but physically. My physical body is giving up on me bit by bit. I am a young man but I don't have half of the strength that I used to. I have nightmare after nightmare. It was only after speaking to Eiman's

husband that he mentioned that she had been doing the exact same thing, we hadn't even spoken to each other about that.

40. People expect you to feel better after a set amount of time, as if the pain will just disappear. I think that is a mistake that the Council made as well, as though they put a time limit on when you were supposed to pull yourself together and feel alright to carry on with your life again. People seem to expect that you will heal after a certain amount of time, as though you have an on or off switch and can just pull yourself together. It isn't like that, the pain is unimaginable. Even the others who are bereaved; we all struggle to connect and we tend to isolate ourselves, as we are all different in the way we handle it and it is so hard.
41. We all know death, we know it comes to us all, we all fear it, but these were exceptional deaths. They weren't peaceful deaths. It's the level of pain and fear involved and what they must have gone through. I constantly think about what my brother, sister and mum must have been thinking, what must have been going through their minds. My sister's and mum's bodies were burnt to such an extent that all that was recoverable of them were tiny bone fragments and a piece of skull. I know that my brother could have got out if he had wanted to, and he could have helped my mum and sister down; he was a fit man, he wouldn't have wanted to leave them, and they stayed until it was too late because they were told to. It is pain you can never get over. I think it is disrespectful for people to think that you can fit into a box, and to expect that you will be fine after a certain amount of time. It doesn't give me, the others who are bereaved, my family, or what they went through the respect deserved.

Statement of truth

I confirm that this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I confirm that I am willing for the statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and published on the Inquiry's web site.

Signed: 

Dated: 28.02.2020