

**Witness Statement of: Christopher Roncolato**

**No. of statement:** 2

**Exhibits:** 0

**Date of statement:**

27/02/20

## **GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER RONCOLATO**

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This statement is a factual statement prepared for Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry dealing with modules 3 and 4 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 or my family.

Signed: .....



I, **CHRISTOPHER RONCOLATO**, will say as follows:

1. On the night of the fire, I was living at Flat 72 Grenfell Tower on the tenth floor with my father, Antonio Roncolato and my aunt and godmother, Gloria Wilson. I am making this statement for the purpose of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.
2. I made a statement in Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry signed on 28 June 2018 (reference **IWS/840**) with exhibits CR/1-3 (reference **IWS/836-838**). I also gave a statement to the Metropolitan Police Service dated *21 July 2017*.
3. This statement addresses the issues within module 3 (fire safety within the 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 4-53, and module 4 in paragraphs 54-100. My Phase 2 statement should be read in conjunction with my Phase 1 statement, which also touches on issues relating to module 3 and 4.

## Module 3 Issues

### Living in Grenfell Tower

4. I explain about my family and background in paragraphs 3-8 of my Phase 1 statement.  
I grew up in Grenfell Tower and always considered it to be home.
5. I used to play with my friends in and around the Tower. We played outside on the football pitches behind Grenfell Tower, where Kensington Aldridge Academy now is. Grenfell Tower was a big part of my life and I have many happy memories.
6. What I liked most about living in Grenfell Tower was the sense of community and how close everyone was to one another, especially the residents who had lived in the Tower for a long time. As people moved in and out, the sense of community still remained. I would say hello and chat to people in the communal areas or if I was waiting for the lifts. Following the fire, our community has been dispersed and fractured.
7. Our flat was so cosy, it was one of my favourite places to be. We also had family living in the Tower including my Aunt Alba Rodriguez. She lived three floors below us at Flat 45, but moved out about a year before the fire. My dad sent me on errands to my Aunt's place; I was always running up and down the stairs between the two flats.

### Relationship with Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (RBKC) and the Tenant Management Organisation (TMO)

8. My dad and I both had a secure tenancy agreement with RBKC. My dad would normally be the person from our flat to communicate with RBKC and later the TMO. If dad was not around or available, I would liaise with them and report back to my dad, but this was rare. Most communication was by letters that we would get through our letterbox.
9. If we had any complaints, my dad would usually call the TMO. I did not usually make complaints myself.

### Health before the Fire

10. Before the fire, I do not remember RBKC or TMO asking me about any health issues.
11. In any event as already stated at paragraph 4 of my Phase 1 statement, I was physically and mentally healthy at the time of the fire as was my dad and Aunt Gloria.
12. None of us had any health concerns that impacted upon us living on the tenth floor. When the lifts broke down, we were able to walk up, although I was aware of other residents that would not have been able to do this due to their age, a disability or ill health.

### The Refurbishment

13. Paragraphs 23-27 of my Phase 1 statement addresses the refurbishment at Grenfell Tower. However, I now wish to provide further details in my Phase 2 statement.
14. I found out about the proposed refurbishment of Grenfell Tower and the surrounding area by newsletters through our front door. Before this, my dad told me there was a proposal for Grenfell Tower to be demolished, but it appeared RBKC changed its mind and decided to refurbishment the Tower instead.
15. Kensington Aldridge Academy was built before the refurbishment. The Academy took up a lot of green space in the area. It was built on the football pitches and car park by the Tower that I used to play in. It made the area feel more urban. I have already outlined my concerns about the Academy at paragraph 12 of my Phase 1 statement. It changed the feel of the area.
16. As already stated at paragraph 25 of my Phase 1 statement, I did not play any part in the discussion about the refurbishment. There was a consultation, but I was not involved and did not attend any meetings about this. We frequently received newsletters from the TMO, but I do not remember receiving a residents information pack from Rydon nor completing any questionnaires, but my dad normally dealt with this stuff.



17. I initially felt good about the refurbishment. I cannot remember when I first found out that Grenfell Tower was going to be cladded, but I thought the cladding would make the Tower look futuristic. I did not know at the time that the cladding was dangerous.
18. The whole area was being updated, so I assumed that RBKC wanted the Tower to fit in with its new surrounding with the new school and the improvements to the Leisure Centre. In my opinion, the aesthetics really led the refurbishment.
19. I saw changes inside the Tower with the new heating system that you could control yourself and the new windows as a positive. I assumed it would be better for us as residents.
20. My dad, Antonio, went to meetings with the TMO to discuss some of the changes. As stated at paragraph 25 of my Phase 1 statement, he was very active, particularly around the proposed location of the new boiler in our flat by the front door.
21. I had heard before the fire that the cladding was not safe from chatting to other residents, but I cannot remember why they were concerned now. However, this prompted me to start asking my dad more questions about the refurbishment.

#### *Work at Grenfell Tower*

22. I believe work on the Tower started from the top and the contractors worked their way down. The workers were always on site early in the morning to start work. They were often loud and would disrupt me on my days off work. I do not remember being given any notice if they were working in the area around our flat.
23. I also found the workers to be messy. There was always dust left both in the flat and communal areas after they finished work. It felt like we were living on a construction site. The workers would frequently use the lifts to carry their equipment up and down the Tower, which left the lift in a mess. This also meant residents and visitors would be waiting for the lifts for a longer period of time as they were being used by the contractors. This was extremely frustrating. I also believe this is why one of the lifts was breaking down constantly, which I refer to at paragraph 14 of my Phase 1 statement.

## *Rydon*

24. Rydon would contact us by letter if there were works that needed to be done in our flat as part of the refurbishment or any snagging issues afterwards. We would then have to make arrangements to ensure one of us was home for the work to be completed. This could be difficult with both my dad and I working. Sometimes we would not be given notice on when the work was going to happen.
25. When the works were done, I found Rydon contractors to be rude and not very respectful. They were quite arrogant, when they were in your home.
26. I remember a woman called Lynda from Rydon, who I assumed was a manager and used to co-ordinate the contractors to come and complete jobs in our home. I only saw her a couple of times either supervising the work or after the work had been completed in our flat. She would sometimes come unannounced and at times when it was not convenient for us.

## Windows

27. I briefly explained the changes to our flat windows during the refurbishment in paragraph 27 of my Phase 1 statement. Our windows were changed around August 2015. I do not recall there being any issues with the old windows.
28. I was at home when the windows were replaced. We were given notice about the work being undertaken, but I do not think it was long. The old window frames stayed in position and the workers placed the new windows on top of them.
29. The new windows were more complicated to operate; they could be opened two different ways. When the workers gave me the keys to the windows, they showed me how they worked. I think I may have been given a booklet on how to operate the windows, but I am not 100% sure about that. I do not remember anyone coming to check the windows after they were installed.

### *Defect with the Windows*

30. On 17 January 2017, I was struggling to open my bedroom window. Without warning, the handle came off and the window came away from the frame. I immediately called the TMO to report this. They sent someone round the following day to secure the window. I was told that the window required a new hinge. This was eventually replaced around a month or so later.
31. There was also a draught that came through the right lower hand side of my new bedroom window. I did not report this, but I would often put a pillow against the window to stop the draught coming through.

### Boiler and Heating System

32. As part of the refurbishment, a new boiler was installed in our flat.
33. At paragraph 25 of my Phase 1 statement, I detailed how my dad fought against the TMO's proposal to move the boiler from the storage cupboard next to the kitchen to the hallway next to the front door. I do not remember receiving any explanation as to why the new boiler had to be in the hallway and why it could not be in the old location. My dad and I felt pressure to agree to the boiler's new location, but refused. I had seen the new boiler installed in my Auntie Alba's hallway at Flat 45. I did not like it as it caused an obstruction.
34. Other residents were also complaining about the location of the new boilers and my dad attended residents meetings about this. Eventually the TMO/ Rydon agreed to the new boiler being placed in the same location as the old one in the cupboard next to the kitchen.
35. Despite many residents being unhappy with the new boiler location. My impression was that many felt that they did not have a choice. My Aunt who used to live at Flat 45 was [REDACTED] and had limited English. I felt this impacted on her ability to engage with the TMO/ Rydon on this issue. We tried to help her and keep her updated,

especially my Aunt Gloria. I do not know what she would have done without us. I was not aware of any steps taken by the TMO or Rydon to consult and engage those, who did not speak English as their first language.

#### Concierge

36. I deal with concierge at paragraph 19 of my Phase 1 statement. The main person I remember is Karim. He would be there to report anything that went wrong in the flat or the lifts for example. He also helped keep the building secure.

37. I do not remember a consultation about the removal of concierge, I would have liked concierge to stay, but its removal did not really impact on me.

#### Front Door

38. I explained in paragraphs 23-24 of my Phase 1 statement that our front door was replaced before the refurbishment. The old door was thick and heavy. I do not remember what material it was made of, but it would slam shut. I do not remember there being any gaps around the door.

39. After the new front door was fitted, I do remember some work being carried out, but I do not remember what this was.

#### Ventilation

40. I think there was some sort of ventilation system on the communal landing on the tenth floor. There were two cages/grates on opposite walls, so four in total. I do not know anything else about them or how they operated.

#### Gas Leak

41. In October 2016, the gas supply was cut off to our flat following a gas leak. This meant that we were not able to use our cooker. We were provided with a replacement stove



whilst new gas pipes were installed. I think we received updates, but I do not remember the details or how long it took for the gas to be reinstated in our flat.

42. When the new gas pipes were installed in our flat and the communal landing, they were originally exposed and it looked messy. When they were boxed in, it looked like a botched job and that it had been done on the cheap.

### Lifts

43. I deal with lifts in paragraphs 13-15 of my Phase 1 statement. The lifts were updated a long time before the last refurbishment. At times, it felt as if one of the lifts was out of order almost every day. It also took time for them to be repaired. I did not personally report any lift issues to the TMO.
44. There were a few occasions when both lifts stopped working and people were left with no choice but to walk up or down the stairs. I remember that people would ask you to help carry their shopping and bags as they struggled on the stairs. It must have been incredibly difficult if you lived on the higher floors with young children or were elderly and frail.

### Communal Area

45. In paragraph 16-18 of my Phase 1 statement, I describe the tenth floor communal landing and the stairwell. When one of the lights on the landing stopped working, it would take a long time to be fixed, but this did not happen that often. I do not remember any emergency lighting in the Tower.

### Fire Safety

46. At paragraphs 28-35 of my Phase 1 statement, I explained a little bit about my understanding of fire safety at Grenfell Tower. I was not aware of any fire safety instructions or booklets that were given to residents by RBKC or the TMO.



47. I was aware there was a 'stay put' policy at Grenfell Tower from the signs by the lifts on the ground floor. I also remember seeing the same sign on the tenth and seventh floor, where my Aunt Alba lived. I do not remember this 'stay put' policy being communicated to us in any other way by RBKC or the TMO. In any event, I would not have followed this advice in the event of a fire.
48. The main fire I remember at Grenfell Tower was around 2009 or 2010. I found out about it through word of mouth rather than any official channels. I deal with previous fires at paragraph 36-37 of my Phase 1 statement.
49. I was never told about an evacuation route or meeting points whilst living in the Tower, but I knew where to go having lived there for so long.
50. There used to be two exits from the Tower. One led onto the playground and to the car park and another to the Walkways. The exit onto the Walkways was removed during the refurbishment, so there was only one exit in and out of Grenfell Tower.
51. I did not make any complaints about fire safety to RBKC or the TMO prior to the fire.

#### Fire Alarms

52. As stated at paragraph 32 of my Phase 1 statement, there were two smoke detectors in our flat in the kitchen and hallway. I remember that my dad used to check they were working.
53. I have no recollection of the Fire Brigade, RBKC, the TMO or anyone else coming to the Tower or our flat to complete any fire safety checks. All I remember is an annual gas check.

## **Module 4 Issues**

14<sup>th</sup> June 2017

54. I have described in detail what I saw on the night of the fire on 14 June 2017 at paragraphs 38-64 of my Phase 1 statement. I do not wish to go into detail about the horrors of that night. It is something that I will never forget.
55. The sheer magnitude of the fire and knowing that my dad was trapped inside with no means of escape was my worst nightmare. It was the longest 4-5 hours of my life and it is painful to think about this again.
56. I briefly described in my Phase 1 statement at paragraphs 65-69 what happened after the fire and the impact of the fire upon me and the community at paragraphs 70-72. I now wish to describe in this statement, the events and the support I received after the fire, but not the emotional impact upon me.
57. I remember there was a lot of thick smoke and cladding was falling from the building. I thought my dad was going to die and I watched my home being destroyed. I felt completely helpless.
58. My dad was finally rescued by firefighters from our flat around 6am. He was one of the last people to get out alive and the wait was agonising. It was such a relief when I finally received a call from my mum to say that he was out and on route to hospital. I thought he was going to die.
59. My dad was taken to Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. I headed to my Aunt Alba's place in Chelsea arriving around 7-8am. I had walked from Grenfell Tower to Shepherd's Bush and caught the 49 bus. I was lucky to have family in the local neighbourhood, so I had a place of safety and people to look after me. I turned up with only the clothes on my back, my mobile and bankcards.

60. Thankfully my family and friends pulled together to help me and my dad with essentials including a change of clothes, food and toiletries. I do not know what we would have done without them.
61. I watched the news all day in a state of disbelief about what had happened at Grenfell Tower waiting for my dad to be discharged from hospital. My dad then came straight to my Aunt's on 14 June 2017. It was such a relief to see him.
62. I returned to work at the hotel the next day on 15 June 2019. Looking back, it was too soon to return, I was still in a state of shock after what I had seen on the night of the fire. I had not had a chance to process what had happened.
63. Whilst I was at work, my dad was readmitted to hospital. I only found out about this when I returned to my Aunt's place after work.

#### Emergency Accommodation

64. My dad arranged our emergency accommodation with RBKC, I did not have any dealings with them. We were placed in the Holiday Inn in Kensington. I do not believe we were given any choice about where to go, we were just told to go there.
65. We turned up at the hotel with very little: just the clothes on our backs and some essentials that we had been given by our family. We had lost everything in the fire, although we were in a better position than many. My dad had grabbed our passports and his laptop whilst waiting to be rescued, so at least we had ID. I also had my bankcards and mobile phone as I been working on the night of the fire.
66. We were given a twin room on the second or third floor, so there was not much privacy, but we did not stay there for very long. My dad told me we could order food at the hotel and put it on our room.
67. I remember my dad and I asked hotel reception how long we were booked to stay. We were told that we would have to check out the following day. This came as a complete shock as we clearly had nowhere else to go. This information was also only provided to us because we had asked. Staff at the hotel did not give us any reason why we had to

leave and why we could not stay. There was no mention that RBKC would be in contact; that alternative accommodation would be found for us or where this would be. It was really unsettling not knowing if you had a bed for the night. It was really badly managed.

68. RBKC did eventually offer us another hotel, but this was in Westminster, which was far from work and our family and friends, who I wanted to be close to at this difficult time.

69. Dad must have spoken about our situation at work as our boss (Mr Harrington) arranged for us to stay at one of their hotels. Dad and I did not want to stay where we worked, so Mr Harrington arranged for us to stay at the Copthorne Tara Hotel. This was a good location for both of us as it was close to work and family.

70. RBKC paid for my room and food. Dad and I were placed in two separate rooms close to one another, which was much better than the twin room in the Holiday Inn as it meant I had some personal space and privacy.

71. There was a small fridge in my room. At some point my dad bought a microwave for my room, but we had no proper cooking facilities. I put on weight eating in the hotel restaurant and ordering room service. I also missed proper home cooked food. I would sometimes go to my mum or Aunt's place to eat. My family would also give me food to take back to the hotel with me.

72. Dad told me we could do our laundry at the hotel, but I would go to my mum's place to do this. I was incredibly lucky my family were around and I had a good support network.

73. The hotel staff at the Copthorne Tara were fantastic, they would go out of their way to help you, but it not the same as living in your own home. I would sometimes sleep at my mum or Aunt's place because I was tired of living in a hotel. It was always so busy and noisy with people enjoying their holidays. I found it difficult to settle and got fed up towards the end. It also meant that I was not able to start my recovery until I was in my permanent home.



## Relief Centres

74. Paragraph 66 of my Phase 1 statement touches upon the relief centres that my dad and I visited after the fire. I found out about these through either my dad or by word of mouth from other Grenfell Tower residents staying in the hotel. My dad was constantly receiving emails and WhatsApp messages about the support available.
75. My dad and I regularly visited the Rugby Portobello Club and the Westway after the fire. Initially I was at one or both of them at least every other day. The Curve opened later and I would go there maybe once a week.
76. The volunteers at the relief centres were amazing. I felt supported by their kindness and generosity.

## *The Westway*

77. I cannot remember exactly when dad and I first went to the Westway, but it was in the first seven days of the fire. To be honest it is all a bit of blur now.
78. My dad told me there was financial support, donations and ID services available at the Westway, although neither of us thankfully needed new bank cards or ID. I think counselling services were also available, but I did not access this. Instead my employer arranged some sessions for me through work.
79. You had to wear wristbands to get into the Westway. I was okay with this as I did not want people to take any support away from the people that needed it the most.
80. I do not remember having direct contact with anyone from RBKC, although I would not have necessarily have known who was from RBKC, unless they told me.

### *Rugby Portobello Club*

81. I found out about the support on offer at the Rugby Club through my dad. Rugby Portobello Club was run by volunteers and was a place of sanctuary. I did not have any contact with anyone from RBKC there.
82. There was a list of flats on the wall and people were marking up who was safe and who was missing. This was on the initiative of residents rather than RBKC.
83. I would go there for essentials including clothes, toiletries, food and financial support. I would only take what I needed to ensure there was enough for everyone affected.

### *Other Relief Centres*

84. After the fire, my dad and I also went to the Clement James Centre. I cannot remember when, but it was to collect some clothes donations as we had nothing. We did not go there a lot. I also went to the Notting Hill Methodist Church, but this was mainly for the police meetings with residents.

### Basic Provisions and Financial Services

85. My dad mainly dealt with financial side of things and I was not involved. We needed money to buy the most basic things. We lost everything in the fire and were effectively having to start again.
86. I believe we received financial support from the Rugby Portobello Club, the Westway and later on at the Curve, but I do not know the details.
87. Work was also very kind. There was a collection for us both shortly after the fire. I was overwhelmed by people's generosity.

### Ongoing Impact of the Fire

88. I continue to be deeply affected by the fire at Grenfell Tower, but I do not wish to provide further details about this in my Phase 2 statement. The trauma of what happened will stay with me forever.

### Support and Information from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC)

89. After the fire, I was unaware of what service and support RBKC were providing. I simply did not receive information about this directly from RBKC.

90. My dad and I were allocated a key worker within seven days of the fire. I think we had three in total, including Wendy, another lady whose name I cannot remember and now we have Shana. My dad was the main point of contact for them, but they would sometimes call me too.

91. I found the key workers to be helpful and my overall experience was positive. I remember one of the key workers taking details about my housing requirements and was responsive to the queries I raised. If I had a meeting with RBKC about housing, they would also attend to support me.

92. There was one key worker that we asked to change as I felt they were trying to push me into doing things that I did not want to do, such as art therapy.

### Grenfell United (GU)

93. Grenfell United was formed due to the wilfully inadequate response by RBKC and Central Government to the Grenfell Tower Fire. It galvanised residents and gave us a voice. I remember early meetings taking place at the Copthorne Tara Hotel.

94. Grenfell United was a great source of support and information to residents following the fire. It also kept people together.

## Information and Public Communications

95. As already stated, my main sources of information after the fire were my dad and by word of mouth. There was also our key worker and a Police Family Liaison Officer, but dad tended to be the main point of contact of them both.
96. There were information leaflets delivered to the hotel and at the Rugby Portobello Club. Some were for NHS counselling services. I also saw social media pages that had information about services available such as 'Kids on the Green' on Instagram.

## Housing

97. I spent just under six months at the Copthorne Tara Hotel before I was placed in temporary accommodation in Elm Park Gardens in December 2017. However, the landlord decided to sell his property and I was evicted. I could not face going into another place on a temporary basis and risk this happening again. The upheaval and uncertainty was really unsettling.
98. I therefore decided to move back into the Copthorne Tara Hotel until I moved into my permanent home in December 2018. I cannot believe it took 18 months for me to be rehoused permanently after the fire. This is a long time not to have a home.
99. In my new property, all of the flat doors had to be changed because they were not fire doors. There was also some cladding removed from the outside of the building. I do not know how this was not picked upon earlier. It also worries me that lessons have not been learnt following the Grenfell Tower disaster and residents' safety is still being put at risk.
100. Another Grenfell Tower fire cannot be allowed to happen. It is important that real change happens. It worries me that the same cladding as Grenfell Tower has not been removed from other properties across the UK and people are in danger.



### 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: 

DATE: 27/02/20

