

Witness Statement of: Khadija Yahya
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GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF KHADIJA YAHYA

I, **KHADIJA YAHYA**, will say as follows:

1. I am a resident at [REDACTED] Barandon walk. I am making this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. My daughter, Rabia Yahya (who was pregnant at the time of the fire), and my three grandchildren were residents of Grenfell Tower. They lived in Flat 152 on the 18th Floor. They were home on the night of the fire and managed to evacuate.
2. I provided a statement for Phase 1 of the Public Inquiry (reference – IWS00000664) dated the 1st June 2018. 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).

Living in Barandon Walk

3. I have lived in Barandon Walk for over 20 years and have lived in the Lancaster West Estate for 38 years with my husband Mohamed. I have five children and seven beautiful grandchildren. Mohamed and I moved to Flat 45 Grenfell Tower in 1986 just after our first child was born. This was the 4th floor at the time.
4. We asked to move from Grenfell Tower because of the constant problems with the lifts in the building. We were dealing with three children at the time and unreliable

lifts became difficult. We were moved to Barandon Walk. We did not specifically request to move to Barandon Walk, we just wanted to move into a bigger place with more bedrooms. It was difficult at the time to get RBKC ('the Council') to agree to move us and we had to battle with them. In my experience, RBKC never provide you with what you need without a battle. I just wanted to bring up my kids and get on with life. I always wanted to stay in the area. It was nice and everyone was close by. It was ideal for me. We have lived in Barandon Walk for over 20 years, since 1997.

5. Now, it is just me, Mohamed and my son who live in Barandon Walk. At the time of the fire, one of my daughters lived with us too. My daughters all live nearby though and at the time of the fire, my eldest daughter Rabia was living with her husband and children in Flat 152 Grenfell Tower.
6. Barandon Walk is our home. RBKC is our landlord and the tenancy is in both mine and Mohamed's names. It is on the first floor of Barandon Walk in the middle of the Walk. Our view from the balcony is of the south and east face of Grenfell Tower. We do not intend to leave Barandon Walk. It has been our home for so many years, where our family has grown up and all our family and friends live nearby. Everyone in the community gets on despite their heritage. Several of the families in the area are from our town in Morocco.

Complaints and communications with the TMO/RBKC

7. Before the fire, I never had a real relationship with the TMO or RBKC. We paid our rent to RBKC, and then later the TMO. We contacted the TMO for repairs. It felt like RBKC were quick to contact us and send threatening letters if there was a delay in our rent payment, but if we needed something from them, they did not respond.
8. It was always a battle with TMO to get any repairs done. Often we would not get a quick response, so we ended up doing most things ourselves, we did the tiling and the flooring ourselves. Even a small thing like a blockage would take a long time to be solved.

9. We would always report our concerns by the phone and usually Mohamed would call up. I was never aware of an official complaints procedure before the fire, or even now. Since the fire, I have heard about £25 compensation if a repair is not done within a timeframe, but that is all I can remember from my 20 years here. We would call the complaint department but often just be passed from one person to another. We never received any letters from the TMO about repairs and we were never told to contact a specific person. When we moved in we got given a 'Handy Book' but it was not overly helpful. It included information about who to call.
10. We did not make any complaints about fire safety, but made complaints about other issues as mentioned below. The attitude of the TMO and workers to our problems was not good.
11. A lot of times workmen would turn up and then left a note saying they could not get in. We would be sitting in the flat, waiting for people to turn up and they wouldn't. They would then say that they came but no one answered, which was not true.
12. When the TMO would send workers but the problem seems to be they do not follow it through. To me it seems like the people in the office send people out to help with repairs, but do not supervise what they do, or follow up on it to check the problem is solved.

Ventilation Issues

13. We have had ongoing issues with the ventilation and fans in the bathroom. I believe there is a blockage on the roof that has affected the communal airflow. It seems to be common knowledge in the block that this is the problem. This has been going on for years, since before the fire and is still affecting everyone. We had to buy a temporary electric fan. The TMO have brought in surveyors and people to look at the problem, but nothing has been done. Mohamed and I would complain and complain but we would eventually give up as nothing would be done. Mohamed would then get reenergised and complain again. The TMO took out the electric fan

we had and then replaced it with a new one, but it is not working. When an electrician came to look at the issue, he said it would cost a lot to replace and RBKC did not want to fix it.

Leaks

14. We have had problems with leaks over the years. During a recent leak, the bathroom filled up overnight. This was after the fire, in 2019. The woman on the top floor's boiler burst and water just came raining down into the bathroom. The TMO just said sorry, gave us a humidifier, and told us to leave it on for a week and they would compensate us for the increased electricity cost. This is an example of how the TMO would not check up on things. The ceiling still has patches of dampness. No supervisor came to follow up to make sure we were happy with what was going on in our home. No one was really doing it from the heart.

Pest Issues

15. We have also had persistent problems with pests and mice. When we first moved in there were many cockroaches, but now it is mice. We have to call every six months when the mice make a reappearance. We have tried everything. When the TMO come to help with it, they just put down little white boxes with poison but they do not work. The TMO do not seem to be appreciating that this treatment is clearly not working because we have to call up all the time.
16. The last time we called, they told us to call pest control ourselves. We have spent so much of our own money buying traps. It seems like they are doing what is easy by putting down poison. We had previously identified the gaps in the kitchen where they could be getting through, but they did nothing about this. It was only recently they actually listened to me about this. They should have done this many years ago.

Caretaker

17. A caretaker comes five days a week. For years, they were not cleaning properly in communal areas. My neighbour kept complaining and tried to make sure that the cleaners were doing what they said they were going to do.

Access in Barandon Walk and Communal Doors

18. One of my neighbours mother was in a wheelchair, so she struggled to take her mum anywhere, as before the fire, the ramps were just not accessible. Within the Walk, there were no doors between each block, so you could not go through to the 500s block or 300s block. We could only exit through the 400s door. It has only been since the fire that this has been opened up and you can now walk through the whole of Barandon Walk.
19. I remember one time before the fire, the doors were faulty and the main door to the block jammed for some reason. This meant no one could come in or out of the main door and we were just stuck there. All the neighbours were out gathering round and many people made complaints. After a couple of hours, they kind of fixed the problem by making the door open without the use of a fob. This meant it was open all the time and anyone could get in. It was really worrying when the door would not open – I was worried about what we would do if we actually needed to get out. It did not feel safe if we needed to evacuate quickly.
20. The garbage chute has changed since the fire, and it is now small. You can only fit one bag in it so we have to take rubbish downstairs.

Asbestos

21. Very recently, we have had issues with asbestos in our flat. There was a leak a few months ago, (October 2019) from upstairs that created a crack in our ceiling. We complained about this and eventually a plasterer came to fix the crack. When he came, he told us that he could not fix the ceiling, as it was asbestos.

22. Around two weeks after that, on the 2 December 2019, men came to remove asbestos. We are not even sure if the asbestos has been completely removed. I left when they were doing the work, as I did not want to be there. We still do not know whether it is safe to be in the flat. This has also meant the lighting needs to be looked at. I had to call four different people to ask what was going on and they all said that it did not look right. This work is still ongoing.
23. They are re-doing other now empty flats in the Walkways, but we were left with a half dealt with ceiling and uncertainty about the safety and asbestos.

Health before the fire

24. Before the fire, I had no health issues. However, no one from RBKC or the TMO ever asked us about whether we did have disabilities or if there was anything that we needed assistance with.

The Refurbishment of Grenfell tower

25. There was always a lot of talking and rumours about a refurbishment before it happened. The TMO also used to leave leaflets. I was aware of it as well because my daughter lived in the Tower. I do not remember receiving any explanation about what kind of refurbishment it was or any explanation about cladding or anything like that.
26. It didn't bother me at the time that Grenfell Tower was being refurbished and Barandon Walk wasn't. There was a lot of conversation about the whole area being refurbished, so I thought it would just be a matter of time. A friend of mine, works in the library, said there was a whole regeneration project going on. There was a lot of information going around but everything was so uncertain.
27. We saw Grenfell had been clad and there was all new windows. I would visit my daughter in her flat and she would tell me about the refurbishment and about the work which was going on.

Health and Safety Barandon Walk

28. No one from RBKC or the TMO ever mentioned anything about health and safety in Barandon Walk to us.
29. Before the fire, we did have smoke and fire alarms in the flat. I have never seen or heard an alarm go off in the communal area.
30. When we lived in Grenfell Tower, I do not think we had an alarm in the communal areas or any sprinklers. I remember a couple of fires from when we lived in Grenfell Tower, though now I cannot remember when they were. When there were fires in the Tower, they were always put out quickly.
31. I remember a previous fire once in Barandon Walk. It was before the fire at Grenfell Tower but I cannot remember specifically when. There was a lot of smoke and neighbours came knocking on doors. The fire did not affect us really but we could see the smoke. Everyone was in the corridor wondering where it came from. The fire did not spread and it was kept under control.
32. No one from the Fire Brigade or the TMO came to do checks on the fire safety of our flat at Barandon Walk, as far as I remember. I do remember someone from British Gas, would come and do annual gas check in our flat.
33. We never had any fire evacuation drills. I do not think there are sprinklers in the Walkway or fire extinguishers. They are not within our own flat either. I do not remember seeing any signs about what to do in a fire. The only sign I remember is one saying no ball games. I do not think there is any emergency lighting.

Fire Safety since the Fire at Grenfell Tower

34. Since the fire, there have been Fire Marshals walking about in yellow jackets. They are there all the time, but I do not remember being told what they are looking for.

35. Since the fire, we have been getting more attention from RBKC. But, it seems to be too little too late. In either February or March 2018, someone came to the flat to service three smoke alarms and replace the front door. The people who serviced them were from a company, but were sent by the Council. The smoke alarms are in the upstairs corridor, one in the kitchen and one downstairs. The smoke alarms were serviced, but no one has come to check on them since. I now don't think the one in the kitchen is working, because I have never heard it go off.
36. All the flat doors in Barandon Walk were replaced after the fire at Grenfell Tower. But, I have heard from others that these are not fire rated doors and have not been fitted properly. We have been hearing that they need to change the doors again. We did not get a Certificate of Compliance one the door was changed or any other paperwork. We also have not received a letter or anything to say that the previous door was not compliant. We have just heard this through other residents.
37. Other residents are the best source of information. There are gaps around the outside of the new doors where light comes through. The door now shuts automatically whereas it did not before. The old was one very lightweight. During the 20 years we have lived here, before March 2018, no doors were changed. The doors in the communal areas between the blocks also close automatically.

Evacuation and stay put

38. I cannot recall anyone giving advice on what to do in the event of a fire in the whole 20 years we have lived here. I do not remember being told what to do or getting any leaflets or letters about what to do. We did not know there was a stay put policy. Before the fire at Grenfell Tower, fire safety was always just in the back of my mind.

14th June and the following week

39. I explained in paragraphs 12 to 40 of my Phase 1 Statement my experiences of the night of the fire. I do not want to repeat that here except to say that Rabia and her children were at home in Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire. Thankfully, they

survived the fire. I stood at the base of the Tower watching the fire, not knowing what was going to happen to my daughter and grandchildren. I spoke to Rabia when she was trapped in her flat and later, as she and the children escaped. It was awful.

40. I spent much of the first month after the fire with Rabia and my grandchildren in hospitals. I cannot remember how long each child spent in hospital. Rabia took the longest to recover. I think Rabia was in hospital for around three and a half weeks. My focus at that time was my family's health.

Medical assistance and psychological support

41. My grandson was taken to Kings College Hospital, and Rabia and my granddaughters were taken to Royal Free Hospital. We followed in my nephew's car to the Royal Free Hospital. Once they arrived the Royal Free hospital, Rabia was separated from our granddaughters. I stayed with one of my granddaughters, and Mohamed stayed with another.
42. Later, my grandchildren were transferred to Kings College Hospital, a specialist hospital. Rabia remained at the Royal Free Hospital. She was put into an induced coma for three and a half weeks. My grandson and eldest granddaughter were in a coma for around 10 days at Kings College Hospital. Rabia's third child was the first to recover. I think Rabia must have sheltered her from the smoke.
43. We visited Rabia and the grandchildren every day. Mohamed and I would take it in turns visiting Rabia or the grandchildren at Kings College and Royal Free Hospital.
44. I do not want to go into details here of the injuries Rabia and my grandchildren suffered, as this is a matter for them to address.
45. It was incredibly overwhelming seeing my family in the hospital. I felt hopeless. I prayed a lot that they would get better. Our lives were turned upside down. I am so incredibly thankful they all survived. Rabia was pregnant on the night of the fire and her beautiful baby girl was born the November 2017. Immediately after the fire,

I did not really realise I was having any problems. I was so focused on my daughter and grandchildren in hospital. I was running on adrenaline and going back and forth to the hospitals. I was not thinking about myself, I was just worrying about my daughter and grandchildren. Things then caught up with me. The fire has affected my mental and physical health significantly, but I do not wish to provide many further details about this in this statement.

46. I am concerned about the toxicity around Grenfell. I feel like I am always conscious of what I am breathing in and what I have breathed in. All the reports of pollution make me very worried. I am concerned about the effect toxicity will have on our health.

Emergency Accommodation and moving back to Barandon Walk

47. The days after the fire was a very difficult time for me and my family. This was made more difficult by the fact we could not go back to our home. On the night of the fire, we were evacuated from our home by the police and we were then not allowed to return. No emergency accommodation was organised and so Mohamed and I went to stay with my brother in Camelford, which is close by to Grenfell. We had no belongings. We were living in chaos.

48. Mohamed went back to Barandon Walk and the police let him in to pick up the car keys, I think this either the day of or the day after the fire. At that time, no one offered us any help with travelling to or from the hospital.

49. We were never offered accommodation in a hotel by RBKC, the TMO or other government body. It was just our family and us. We had help from neighbours and friends.

50. We stayed with my brother for three weeks. No one from RBKC or the TMO told us when we could return home. We heard things through word of mouth. When we went back to Barandon Walk, the police told us that we could return but it would be at our own risk. It was not clear whether it was or was not safe. We were not told what the risks were. We were scared the Tower might collapse, but thought

that returning home would give some normality in our life at a time when everything else was so terribly disrupted and difficult.

51. When we moved back, the gas and electricity would work sometimes, but then turn off again. At that time, no one really knew what was going on. Many people were being told different things, that it was safe to live there and others were told it was not. There was ash on the balcony and the windows were black due to the smoke. RBKC did not offer to clean this up until weeks and weeks after.
52. Once we moved back, everyone was much more on edge. The slightest thing would make people panic that there was a fire. One time, someone suspected a gas leak and another time someone was smoking and everyone panicked because of the smoke.
53. It's not the same home that it was before the fire. It is hard looking at Grenfell Tower. Barandon Walk is all we know. It makes me angry that after all that has happened people think that we would just leave. A few months after the fire, we were offered temporary accommodation, but we refused it. We like living in the Walks. Our whole life is based here and we do not want to move

Basic Provisions and Relief centres

54. After the fire, we were reliant on our friends and family for everything. I did not visit any relief centres for weeks, I was always in the hospital with Rabia and my grandchildren. Mohamed went to a relief centre to get some basic provisions, like toiletries and food and I think he also got some financial assistance there although I am not sure who this was from. We did not get any further financial support from RBKC.
55. We borrowed clothes from our family or brought new ones. Most of our information came from the local community. They offered support as information.

56. A Muslim charity also visited us at my brother's house and offered us money. I think they found out our details as the community was talking to each other and provided our details to them.

Public Communication

57. Most of the communication we received was not from an official source, it was from word of mouth. It was the community helping each other out and passing on information. There is a WhatsApp local group that keeps the community and neighbourhood updated. They inform each other of all key updates.

58. Much later on, we started to receive leaflets and newsletters about what services were available. This was not until the Curve opened up. I did not know that there were any telephone helplines I could call.

Support from RBKC

59. No one got in touch with us from RBKC after the fire, until months later. I remember someone calling but I cannot really remember the conversation. At the time, I do not think RBKC really knew about us. They knew about our daughter as she was in the Tower, but as her family, it felt like we were not really considered. After the fire, we were with Rabia and our grandchildren all the time, supporting them.

60. It would have been invaluable to have been offered some help – even if it was just transport to help us to and from the hospital but nothing was offered to us. We used our car and spent money we did not have to get back and forth from the hospital and to pay for parking.

61. After 6 months, we were given a Key Worker– her name was Ebru. She came to the flat and gave us her card. She became a middleman between RBKC and us. It did not feel like the Key Worker had much power. Ebru came once a week and told us they would help with housing and money, but after four weeks Ebru stopped coming. We were told we could receive money to assist with the cost of transport

and other expenses, as we needed extra money at the time. We were told we were entitled to this by the Key Worker and then, we were told that we were not. Eventually, we did receive a payment but this was not immediately after the fire. We needed help otherwise, we wouldn't have asked for it. We needed the money, but it was more upsetting how we were treated. It seems to me that the support received depended on how loud you could shout about things, otherwise you were forgotten.

62. All the help we received was from the community and our friends and family, I do not recall anyone from RBKC offering any real support.

Impact

63. Our family has been unsettled since the fire. The community has been the only positive thing to come out of the Grenfell Tower fire. The community is so close and supportive. The community is beautiful. I hope every day for the children who are growing up in a world, which is unfair and unjust. Bad decisions were made. The residents should have been cared for, and continued to be cared for. We want truth and justice.

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: 

Khadija Yahya

DATE: 5-03-2020