

Witness Statement of: Amina Kabouh
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Exhibits: 0
Date of statement:

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF AMINA KABOUH

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, **AMINA KABOUH**, will say as follows:

1. I make this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry only. This statement is an account of my personal experience of fire safety in the Walkways and of dealing with the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation ('TMO') and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council ('RBKC') (**Module 3**).
2. This is my first statement to the Inquiry. For context, I will also briefly outline my experience on the night of the tragic fire ('the fire') at Grenfell Tower ('the Tower') on 14 June 2017 and the immediate aftermath (**Module 4**).
3. I make this statement in Arabic and it has been translated into English for the purposes of the Inquiry. I am called to give oral evidence, I will require the assistance of an Arabic translator (Moroccan).

Background

4. I am the sole tenant of Flat [REDACTED] Testerton Walk; I live in the flat with my husband Mahmoud Kabouh and daughter [REDACTED]. My son Said Kabouh also lived in the property with us until he moved out a few years ago.
5. I have lived in the flat since 4 March 1997; it is a two-bedroom split-level flat.
6. I am originally from Morocco and my husband is originally from Egypt. I speak very little English and so I rely on assistance from friend and family to read official letters, notices or leaflets.

Fire Safety

7. When we first moved into the flat in 1997 I was not given any health and safety information about the flat.
8. I was never given any information or advice about fire safety in our flat or the building. I was not aware of the “stay-put” strategy or any fire strategy for Testerton Walk, before to the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017.
9. Whenever I receive a letter or any other written information, I ask a friend or family member who reads English to translate it for me. We have a strong Moroccan and Arab community in our local area, so if a family member is not available there would always be a neighbour willing to assist.
10. Although I speak very little English, I understand most of what is being said. So I am sure that I was not given any fire safety or general health and safety advice even just orally.
11. If there was a fire in our flat or our building I would have done my best to leave the building. Not because I was advised by any professionals that it what I should do but because of instinct.

12. Before the 14 June 2017, we did not have any fire alarms, sprinklers, fire safety notices or signs in the communal parts of the building. I do not remember seeing even basic fire exit signs. I was never told about the escape routes out of the building, so in an emergency I would have assumed that I would leave the building either through the main entrance, or out of our balcony, as we are on the ground floor of the Walkway.
13. I do not remember ever seeing the London Fire Brigade or anyone else inspecting the communal parts of the building. If the checks did take place, I was never given any information about them.
14. We have two smoke alarms in our flat, I remember someone coming to check both the alarms and the gas a few times over the 22 years I have lived in the building, but it was not regular and definitely not annual. There were long periods when the smoke alarms in the flat were simply not working.
15. After the fire at Grenfell Tower, a new front door and carbon monoxide detectors were installed in our flat. There are also a few signs now in the communal parts of the building about fire safety, but not much else has changed. After seeing what happened on the night of 14 June 2017, I'm not sure I'd trust any fire safety advice from the Council or the London Fire Brigade.

Dealings with the TMO and RBKC

16. Before the 14 June 2017, the TMO and RBKC did not care about any complaints made by the residents. Anything you said would be ignored, and unless it was an emergency, which could affect more than just our flat, they would never send out someone to carry out a repair in a reasonable time.
17. Despite the tenancy agreement for the flat being in my name, I had to rely on my husband Mahmoud in order to communicate with the TMO/RBKC on my behalf. He would be the one to call them when we needed something repaired and he would also visit the Estate Office in person.

18. I would often hear Mahmoud on the phone with staff at the Estate Office/TMO and they were usually unprofessional and rude. We would have to chase several times for someone to come out.
19. Before the 14 June 2017, the hot water in the Walkways came from a boiler, which was based in the basement of Grenfell Tower. This caused a lot of issues, there were problems with the pipes which meant that they would become blocked at least once a year and we would lose our water supply. We also had several leaks.
20. Whenever we'd call about an issue such as a blocked pipe, they would tell us to try and flush the pipes ourselves. We would of course have already tried to do this before we called them and we would tell them so, but they would still refuse to send someone. We would usually have to call back several times and chase them before they sent anyone.
21. We are also still experiencing issues with repairs. The radiator grill cover in our living room has been broken for months. The sharp metal edge is exposed and it's very dangerous but no one has come to fix it.
22. After the fire, we were promised that double-glazed windows would be installed as well as a new heating system. This has not happened. They installed a temporary boiler which terrifies me, it makes loud noises and produces smoke. I do not think it's safe. I see security guards walking up and down monitoring it so I assume there must be something wrong with it.

Aftermath

23. On the 14th June 2017, my family and I had returned to our flat at around 1am, we had been at Al Manar Mosque doing our taraweh prayers; these are the late-night prayers we do during the holy month of Ramadan. We had made it back into our flats without noticing anything out of the ordinary and I changed my clothes and started to get ready for bed. I then started to hear different voices shouting for help but I did not know what was going on.

24. My son left the flat to see what was happening, he ran back into the house shouting that there was a fire at Grenfell Tower. We immediately ran out to see what was going on. People were screaming and shouting for help, I saw people making ropes out of sheets trying to escape from their balconies, I saw someone jump from the Tower. It was horrifying. The things I saw on that night are forever imprinted on my soul.
25. My family and I stood outside all night watching the Tower burn. It was obvious to us from early on that the Tower needed to be evacuated. We begged the Police Officers and Firemen to go in and save the people shouting for help. It was heart breaking. I never thought I would see something like that in this country.
26. People were frantically looking around searching for their loved ones. I ran into Fawzia El Wahaby's sister-in-law. She was in tears and she was looking for her family but could not find them. By that point, the fire had spread to most of the building I knew right then that they had not made it out. Fawzia and I were good friends, she was Moroccan like me and we had a lot of friends in common so spent a lot of time together, she was such a lovely person. Yasin El Wahaby also went to Secondary School with my daughter [REDACTED]
27. Just before 6am, Police Officers told us to leave the area around the Tower, it was still on fire. We tried to get back into our flat, but there were Police Officers standing outside, they told us that we could not get back into the flat but they could not tell us where we were supposed to go. We begged them to let us in so that we could collect our pet cat and so that I could collect a robe or cardigan, I had run out of the flat in my nighty when my son told us that there was a fire at Grenfell Tower.
28. We heard from our neighbours that St Clements Church had opened its doors so we went there. The Church was already full of our neighbours. There were already volunteers helping direct people and handing out food and water. We felt very welcomed. The community was supporting itself; I did not see anyone from the Council. We were not able to fast that day because we were exhausted both physically and emotionally, having stood outside all night. We had something to eat at the Church and did our prayers.

29. My husband decided to go visit family in Newcastle, he needed to leave London. My daughter and I decided to go stay with friends. We stayed with friends for 4 days; we had to borrow clothes from them and relied on them for essential items. On either the second or third night after the fire, our neighbours had a meeting, someone at the meeting told us that we could request to be placed in temporary accommodation by RBKC and he provided us with a number. We knew that we could not impose on our friends much longer, so my daughter called RBKC and arranged for us to be placed in a hotel.
30. We were given rooms at Kensington Garden Hotel, I checked in with my daughter and so. Mahmoud had still not returned from Newcastle but [REDACTED] had made sure that RBKC knew he would be joining us when she arranged for the rooms. Despite this, they had only given us 3 single rooms, so when Mahmoud returned to London a few days later, the two of us had to share a single room. It was a month before they were able to place us in a double room.
31. The hotel did not provide halal food, it was also still Ramadan in the week following the fire, as meals at the hotel were at set times, the last meal being before Iftar, I was not able to eat at the hotel. I went to Al Manar Mosque every day for Iftar until Ramadan was over. Once Ramadan was over, we had to stick with a vegetarian diet, eventually we heard from others that the Council was providing money so that people could eat out, but this was 3 weeks into our stay. We were eventually given £300 a week each for our food expenses.
32. I am aware that the government were also providing one-off financial payments to residents in the Walkway, but you had to go to the Westway for this and we did not.
33. We stayed in the hotel for just under a year. It was not a comfortable stay. I was desperate to get back home but there was so much uncertainty after the fire that we could not go back. For weeks after the fire there was no gas and hot water at the Walkways. There was also a lot of concern about whether it was safe to go back. The Council then started refurbishing our kitchen and replacing the front doors and putting in carbon monoxide detectors so we waited until the work was finished to return home.

34. At some point, I cannot remember when, we were appointed a Key Worker; she told us that we could request counselling. I was really struggling at the time so decided to start counselling. As I do not speak English they provided an interpreter, but it was very difficult for me to fully benefit from the process when everything had to go through a third person, so I stopped attending after 2 months.
35. When we returned home I really struggled. I would go around the area screaming like a mad woman asking why this had happened. Even the Walkways felt like death, you could not escape it.
36. I was hyper-vigilant looking out for danger, I could not relax. The whole process has put a real strain on my physical and mental health. I am having a lot of health problems. I am still continuing to struggle.
37. I find it very difficult to talk about the fire and the many ways it has impacted on me, so this statement only briefly touches on these issues. I cannot put in to words the pain I feel from having witnessed that tragic event.

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:

Dated: