

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

PHASE 2 WITNESS STATEMENT OF RAMIRO URBANO

I, Ramiro Urbano, born [REDACTED] previously of Flat 176, 20th floor, Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Road, London W11 1TQ, WILL SAY as follows:

Background

1. This witness statement should be read alongside my first Inquiry witness statement dated 14 May 2018 (Inquiry reference IWS00000496, which I will refer to as my First Inquiry Statement) and second Inquiry witness statement dated 4 December 2018 (Inquiry reference IWS00001207).

Fire safety systems

2. I described the lifts at paragraphs 15-17 of my First Inquiry Statement.
3. I described the front door to Flat 176 at paragraph 6 of my First Inquiry Statement. I think there was a seal around the door.
4. The door to the stairwell on the 20th floor was heavy and it shut properly.
5. I described the windows and kitchen extractor fan in Flat 176 at paragraph 12 of my First Inquiry Statement.
6. I don't remember seeing any signs or posters telling me what to do in the event of a fire. There used to be an old fire exit sticker by the stairwell door on the 20th floor but this was removed in the refurbishment.
7. I described the building's escape route being only a very narrow staircase at paragraph 18 of my First Inquiry Statement. It was narrow for a building of that size and the number of people living inside. I would approximate the width to be just big enough for two people to pass on the stairs without having to turn. Each floor had a rough hand painted number to show the floor number. Following the refurbishment I do not believe the numbers were changed so the floor number for Flat 176 was still showing as the 17th floor, although it should have been changed to the 20th floor.

8. I described the lighting in the stairwell at paragraph 16 of my First Inquiry Statement. Sometimes some of the bulbs were missing in the stairwell so you could find yourself in the dark for two or three floors. This was a reasonably regular thing, though I don't know if it was people breaking them on purpose or other reasons.
9. I described the vent on the 20th floor at paragraph 13 of my First Inquiry Statement. On the left hand side of the landing on exiting the lift there was a small vent on the wall. This was to stop smoke coming on to the landings in case there was a fire. I know this as when they were being put in I was curious and asked and it was explained to me. I think there had already been an old system there and they had just replaced it. The vent was embedded into the wall at the point that the partition wall was between the two 2-bedroom flats on that side. The vent on the 20th floor made a very loud sucking sound, and there were a couple of times when it was on in the night. I don't remember whether the vent used to make a noise also on the 6th floor. It did not appear to be on or working on the night of the fire.
10. I described the smoke alarms in Flat 176 at paragraph 9 of my First Inquiry Statement. I described not seeing any break glass fire alarms in the building at paragraph 7 of my First Inquiry Statement. I described hearing a previous fire alarm in the building at paragraph 8 of my First Inquiry Statement. There were previous tests of the fire alarm and it was so loud it would be deafening. I did not hear this on the night of the fire, however. I don't know where the bells were placed in the building.
11. The landing on both the 6th and the 20th floors had a lot of pipe work which had been boxed in. All these pipes stemmed from inside a cupboard directly opposite the lifts. The cupboard was then secured with a lock. Then the pipes ran, boxed in, across the ceiling of the landing into each flat. The two new pipes that went into the flat were approximately the size of a CD; these then continued into the flat. The landing became much smaller after the work because of the large cupboard opposite the lift and also the ceiling was lower due to the pipes being boxed in across the ceiling. There was no difference between the 6th and 20th floor landings.
12. We had our boiler in the kitchen originally, and there was a seal around it. Whenever the boiler needed to be checked, the seal would need to be opened up. Later we got a new boiler in the refurbishment and it was put in the corridor of our flat. I believe many residents complained about the boilers being put in the corridors of their flats and had them put in the kitchens instead, but our boiler was put in our corridor. It was easier for the people doing the refurbishment to put boilers in the corridors.

13. Once there was a gas leak in Flat 176. The workers put in pipes going in to the kitchen and the bathroom, and then they came back to do a second check and noticed there was a leak. I think they tested it and that was how they noticed. I don't remember noticing the smell of gas leaking. The workers took off the bath panel and welded a pipe or fixed something, then they checked again and said it was fine.
14. I believe there were new water pumps put in on the landings, as for years you couldn't have a proper shower without having your own electric pump. After the work, though, the water pressure was fantastic.

Fire safety checks/inspections

15. As stated in paragraph 9 of my First Inquiry Statement, I wasn't aware that the London Fire Brigade did fire checks of flats. I don't recall any fire safety checks or inspections of Flat 176.

Fire safety advice

16. I described receiving information about fire exits at Grenfell Tower in our tenancy agreement at paragraph 7 of my First Inquiry Statement. I have not been able to check this against the copy of the RBKC-TMO Housing File which was obtained by my legal representatives, as it contained only a partial copy of the tenancy agreement (**Exhibit RU/1**) and did not include the tenant's handbook for Flat 176. As stated in paragraph 7 of my First Inquiry Statement, I do not remember getting any information about what we should do in the event of a fire. I did not receive any fire or safety guidance.
17. I was not aware of a 'stay put' strategy at Grenfell Tower before 14 June 2017. As stated at paragraph 7 of my First Inquiry Statement, I assumed that we should use the stairs to get out of the building rather than the lift.
18. RBKC were aware that we had two daughters living in Flat 176, one of whom was still a child. The tenancy agreement had all the family's details and dates of birth (**Exhibit RU/1**).

Fire safety complaints

19. I described the complaints I made about the front door of Flat 176 at paragraph 6 of my First Inquiry Statement. Someone came to look at it but they said it was fine, but it still didn't always close automatically as it was meant to.

20. I described the complaint I made about the window in Flat 176 at paragraph 12 of my First Inquiry Statement. This was fixed the same day because the workers were still in the building.
21. I described the complaint I made about the kitchen extractor fan in Flat 176 at paragraph 12 of my First Inquiry Statement. This was also fixed, but I am not sure how long it took.
22. I usually made complaints by calling the number we had for Lynda Prentice at Rydon. Lynda was on site at Grenfell Tower every day. We had a telephone number for TMO but I think I used mainly the Rydon number as problems were coming up in the refurbishment. My wife, Adriana Ramirez, made complaints about issues in our flat as well.
23. I was concerned about the refurbishment as there were often problems in the building. There was a group petition asking the Chairman of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee to undertake an urgent scrutiny of the TMO and Rydon's management of the refurbishment. I supported this petition and signed it (Inquiry reference RBK00000975_0004).
24. I note that my complaints about the window and the kitchen extractor fan, and also the group petition I signed, are not recorded in the copy of the RBKC-TMO Housing File which was obtained by my legal representatives despite multiple requests for the relevant information.
25. I note that my RBKC-TMO Housing File includes a list of repairs for some of the complaints we made (**Exhibit RU/2**). I describe below whether and how these issues were addressed. I don't remember all the issues listed in the file.
- a. Kitchen sink blocked in October 2013, March 2015, and December 2016: The sink would get blocked and overflow when we used the washing machine, because the water went down the same drain. Someone came in to fix it.
 - b. Blockage and backsurge from the washing machine to the sink in February 2015: Someone came several times and it got fixed.
 - c. Front door lock not closing properly in April 2015 and reported again in June 2015: As I stated above, the front door still didn't close automatically as it was meant to.
 - d. No water in June and July 2015: There was a new pump system put in for the building so there were times when the water cut out, then it came back.

- e. Damage by leak from flat above in April 2016, and reported again in May and June 2016: This was a big problem. I contacted Rydon, and they went to investigate what was happening in the flat above. I think there was a problem with the pipework. It got resolved eventually, but we had to change the panel in the bathroom because the leak made it rot.

Consultation process regarding refurbishment

- 26. We moved in to our flat in Grenfell Tower in late 2013, so we were not involved in any consultation processes before that time. I don't remember being consulted about the main contractor for the refurbishment (Rydon).
- 27. I saw some posters up about concerns with the refurbishment and scheduling residents' meetings to discuss these. I went to a couple of meetings with other residents. The meetings discussed the new boilers and many residents said they didn't want them to be put in the corridors. The meetings also discussed where the new pipes were going to be, whether at floor level or at the ceiling, and whether they would be boxed up. I can't remember who was at the meetings and whether any representatives from RBKC, TMO or Rydon were there.
- 28. I was a member of a residents' group organised by the TMO, but I can't remember what it was called. A couple of guys visited the flat and asked whether I would like to be involved, and I gave my details. There were meetings for this group, but I didn't attend any. I stopped being involved in that group eventually.
- 29. I received newsletters from Rydon about the refurbishment at Grenfell Tower. I also received separate newsletters from the TMO residents' group, which included invitations to meetings. I continued to receive some newsletters from the TMO residents' group in my new flat after the Grenfell Tower fire, but I haven't kept a copy.
- 30. I don't recall receiving any updates by text message about the refurbishment or the building.

Emergency shelter and accommodation

- 31. I described my experience of the days after the fire at paragraphs 45 and 46 of my First Inquiry Statement.
- 32. As I stated at paragraph 46 of my First Inquiry Statement, my siblings were more involved in going to the relief centres than I was, but I think I went to all the relief

centres at some point – the Rugby Portobello Club, Clement James Centre, Al Manaar Mosque, Latymer Community Church, Notting Hill Methodist Church and the Harrow Club. I got clothes and food there, and registered for information and services. It was help mainly from charities and the community, not from RBKC.

33. After the first few days, I went to the Westway Centre. There was a housing desk there with people from RBKC, and also social security people. I put my name down, filled out paperwork and left my number. Then someone called me to say there was a hotel available and I moved from my nephew's place to the hotel. I think this was within a week of the fire.
34. In early July I was offered accommodation in W9 near Warwick Avenue, but I declined this as I needed to stay in my local area. I told RBKC that I work as a bus driver and sometimes have very early morning shifts, so I needed to live close to my work. I explained that I help care for my elderly father who lives in the local area. I also said that I didn't want to live in a tower again, given what had happened.
35. I wasn't offered any other accommodation for several weeks. My sister Sandra was calling and emailing RBKC to follow up with them on my behalf. I think she got the Leader of RBKC involved and put a lot of pressure on RBKC to try to get accommodation.
36. I viewed my current flat in early August and it was suitable. I was initially told that I could move in at the end of August, but the whole building was being gutted down and refitted so that took some time. I moved in at the end of October 2017.

Food and drink

37. I had some food from the relief centres. After moving to the hotel, I had breakfast at the hotel and was given funds for food.

Basic provisions and financial assistance

38. As I stated at paragraph 32 of my First Inquiry Statement, someone from the local area gave me a t-shirt to wear in the morning of the fire. I received some clothes from relief centres as well.
39. I received charity money around a week after the fire. This was distributed at the Rugby Portobello Club, Clement James Centre and the Westway Centre. I don't remember receiving any direct financial assistance from RBKC in the first few weeks after the fire.

Psychological support

40. There were lots of counselling services being offered, but I did not want to engage in this.
41. I think I had a keyworker from RBKC within a week of the fire.

Information and assistance

42. I described searching for Jessica in hospitals and on the streets at paragraph 45 of my First Inquiry Statement. It was really difficult getting any information. The hospital reception wouldn't give any information, so I had to go past them to check if Jessica was there. We had to go to every hospital separately to check, as there was no other way to find out.
43. I described my experience with the Family Liaison Officer at paragraph 46 of my First Inquiry Statement.
44. We had no contact with the Casualty Bureau.

Public communication

45. The public communication I saw was mainly on television. There were telephone numbers coming up on television for people from Grenfell to call.
46. There were also posters, leaflets and newspapers.

Voluntary and community groups

47. I don't remember much about which voluntary and community groups were there, except the Red Cross. The Red Cross gave specific information about what you would get and when you would get it.
48. So many people came to volunteer their help. I remember someone from Sheffield coming with a lorry full of things like crockery.
49. Everyone was trying to help and it was like organised chaos, but it was very helpful.

Coordination and leadership

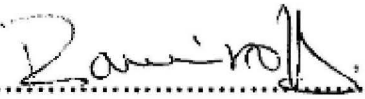
50. As I stated at paragraph 45 of my First Inquiry Statement, I don't remember seeing anyone official from RBKC or TMO in the days after the fire. The first contact I had with RBKC was when I went to the housing desk at the Westway Centre. I had to speak to them as I needed a roof above my head.

51. I didn't notice the central government doing anything.

52. RBKC and the central government should have been the ones to be offering help, but most of the help came from other sources.

53. I understand that this statement will form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and will be published on the Inquiry's website in due course.

I believe that the contents of this witness statement are true.

Signed: 

Dated: 22-02-2020

Ramiro Urbano