

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

PHASE 2 WITNESS STATEMENT OF SALAH EDDINE CHEBIOUNI

I, Salah Eddine Chebiouni, born [REDACTED], previously of Flat 66, 9th floor, Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Road, London W11 1TQ, WILL SAY as follows:

1. This witness statement should be read alongside my first Inquiry witness statement dated 3 July 2018 (Inquiry reference IWS00000945, which I will refer to as my First Inquiry Statement).
2. I have given a witness statement to the Metropolitan Police Service dated 20 December 2017 (which I will refer to as my MPS Statement). I consent to this being disclosed to the Inquiry for use in evidence.

Fire safety systems

3. I described the lifts at paragraph 14 of my First Inquiry Statement.
4. I described the front door to our flat at paragraph 15 of my First Inquiry Statement and page 4 of my MPS Statement. I would like to add that the front door we had before the refurbishment was a fire door, but the new front door was not a fire door. My MPS Statement states that the new front door was a fire door, but this is just what I was told. As I clarify in my MPS Statement, the new front door did not close automatically.
5. I described the communal doors on our floor at page 4 of my MPS Statement. I think the door to the stairwell had a smoke seal around it. It was a heavy, self-closing door. It closed properly. The stairwell door was not changed in the refurbishment.
6. I described the windows in our flat at paragraph 18 of my First Inquiry Statement.
7. I described the kitchen extractor fan at paragraph 9 of my First Inquiry Statement. The extractor fan didn't work. It turned only when there was wind outside, and wasn't

connected to electricity. From the beginning it was useless. I didn't notice any gaps around it, and it looked secure.

8. I described the fire safety signage at paragraph 6 of my First Inquiry Statement. There were no 'fire exit' signs.
9. I described the concerns with the stairwell being the sole fire exit in the building and a new gas pipe being put there at paragraph 17 of my First Inquiry Statement and page 4 of my MPS Statement. Escape routes should be outside the building, not inside the building, but we only had that one stairwell.
10. The lighting in the lobby on our floor was sometimes broken, and it would be months before it got fixed. There were sometimes no lights in the stairwell for some floors, and it would take months for the lightbulbs to get replaced.
11. I described the vent in the ceiling of our bathroom at paragraph 9 of my First Inquiry Statement. Other than that, I wasn't aware of the ventilation system in the building.
12. I described the smoke alarms in our flat at paragraph 7 of my First Inquiry Statement.
13. As I stated at paragraph 7 of my First Inquiry Statement and page 4 of my MPS Statement, I didn't know of any communal fire alarms in our building.
14. I described the gas works and new boilers at paragraphs 16-17 of my First Inquiry Statement and page 4 of my MPS Statement.

Fire safety checks/inspections

15. I described the fire brigade's visits to our flat at paragraph 7 of my First Inquiry Statement.

Fire safety advice

16. I didn't know that there was a 'stay put' strategy at Grenfell Tower before 14 June 2017. I described the fire safety training I had from my school at paragraph 8 of my First Inquiry Statement.
17. As stated at paragraph 6 of my First Inquiry Statement, I don't remember anyone giving us information about fire safety when we moved into Grenfell Tower.
18. RBKC and TMO were aware that we had two children under the age of 18 at the time of the fire. My RBKC-TMO Housing File obtained by my legal representatives records a tenancy check in 2010, which listed all members of the family and dates of birth (**Exhibit SEC/1**).

19. I described my experience with previous fires at Grenfell Tower at paragraphs 20 and 21 of my First Inquiry Statement.

Fire safety complaints

20. I described the complaints we made about the lifts, flooding, water cuts and mould at paragraphs 11-14 of my First Inquiry Statement. I would like to add that I had to change the floors twice because of the mould.
21. We had a pest problem in the flat that was never fixed. There were small cockroaches in the flat all the time, in every room of the flat. We reported this and TMO sent pest control, but that didn't fix the problem.
22. My wife Hanan Wahabi was usually the one handling issues with the refurbishment and reporting complaints, so I am not sure who the complaints were made to.
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_0003).
24. I note that our complaints about the lifts, mould and pests, 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.
25. I note that my RBKC-TMO Housing File includes a list of repairs for some of the complaints we made (**Exhibit SEC/2**). My Subject Access Request File from Rydon includes emails discussing one of the complaints we made (**Exhibit SEC/3**) and documents about asbestos (**Exhibit SEC/4**). I describe below whether and how these issues were addressed. I don't remember all the issues listed in the files.
- a. Problems with the intercom, with visitors being let in through the main building door but not the second door to the lobby, so they got stuck between the two doors, in March 2017 (**Exhibit SEC/3**): This happened and it got fixed eventually. There were sometimes problems even opening the main building door through the intercom.
 - b. Radiator not warming up, in December 2016 (**Exhibit SEC/2**): The big radiator in the living room and the radiator in the kitchen didn't work. They were never fixed. I don't remember anyone coming to check them.

- c. Blocked kitchen sink, in May and November 2016 (**Exhibit SEC/2**): This was a problem from the beginning of our time in the flat. TMO changed the pipes once but the sink still got blocked.
- d. Leak affecting the flat below, in December 2014 and September 2016, and leak into our flat from the flat above, in October 2015 (**Exhibit SEC/2**): I described the flooding in our flat at paragraphs 11-12 of my First Inquiry Statement.
- e. Need for asbestos removal from ceiling in the kitchen and WC, in October 2015 (**Exhibit SEC/4**): We only realised that there was asbestos in our flat when Rydon wanted to put the new boiler in. They found out that they couldn't put pipes in as planned because of the asbestos. We had a patterned ceiling and Rydon said that the asbestos was in that ceiling. As far as I know, the asbestos wasn't removed at all, and Rydon just put the pipes a bit further from the ceiling. The patterned ceiling stayed the same.
- f. No water pressure to cold tap in kitchen, in June 2015 (**Exhibit SEC/2**): I described the water being turned off without warning at paragraph 12 of my First Inquiry Statement.
- g. Toilet pipe cracked and leaking, then toilet pan needing to be removed and re-fixed, in March 2015 (**Exhibit SEC/2**): There was a leak in the pipe and TMO came to repair it. It was a really bad repair job – I couldn't believe it. They put sealant on the crack but the sealant went inside and blocked the toilet. So we couldn't use the toilet and we were using plastic bags for around three weeks. Then TMO came again and removed the toilet pan and replaced the pipe.
- h. "Remove and ease external door", in December 2011, and door staying wide open, in March 2015 (**Exhibit SEC/2**): As I stated at paragraph 15 of my First Inquiry Statement and page 4 of my MPS Statement, the front door to our flat was not self-closing. The rod in the door for the self-closing mechanism was broken. TMO came and just removed the rod, and didn't replace it. It was definitely a TMO person who removed the rod, and not Seamus who was the caretaker in the building.

26. There was a power cut in 2013. I remember because I had just been to the supermarket and the fridge was full of food. The fridge stopped working and all that

food went bad. I don't remember getting an explanation why the power cut out. No one came to test the electricity afterwards.

Resident consultation

27. I went to two drop-in sessions about the refurbishment before it started, but I didn't feel like it was a consultation that was going to listen to my views. It was just for show. I thought the plans looked nice. Before RBKC decided to refurbish the building, they had wanted to knock it down, so I was glad that they were trying to improve the building instead of destroying it. I only realised later that the building was getting destroyed anyway. They took away the security staff on the ground floor and they made the building less safe in the refurbishment.
28. I didn't go to any other meetings, and was not a member of residents' organisations. Hanan was actively involved in meetings and residents' organisations, so she would tell me what was happening.
29. I don't remember being consulted about choosing the contractor for the refurbishment (Rydon).
30. I received the newsletters from Rydon and TMO on the refurbishment. I looked at them but I didn't feel it was worth reading them in detail. Even if we made noise and raised concerns about the refurbishment, nothing would change.

Emergency Shelter and Accommodation

31. I described going to the Rugby Portobello Club and being with other family members there in the afternoon on 14 June 2017 at paragraph 40 of my First Inquiry Statement. It was a place where we could go and find information and have a coffee. I received some cash there from a charity donation.
32. I only went to other relief centres around a week after the fire. I received clothes, food and toiletries at the Notting Hill Methodist Church. I received cash from charity donations at the Clement James Centre and the Al Manaar Mosque.
33. I went to the Westway Centre a few days after the fire. I could get the documents that I had lost in the fire – my driving license, passport, and birth certificate. There was someone there from these agencies. I received some cash there as well, and I think it was from someone at RBKC. He had a suitcase full of cash and was giving it out based on a list of names and flat numbers.

34. I described staying at my sister-in-law's house on the day of the fire, then going to a hotel arranged by RBKC, at paragraphs 42-43 of my First Inquiry Statement. I don't remember who at RBKC arranged the hotel for us, as Hanan dealt with this.
35. We were four people crammed into a basement hotel room – two parents, a 17 year old son and an 8 year old daughter. Imagine a tiny room with three beds, only a strip of floor visible, and one small wardrobe. I started sitting on the stairs outside the room because I couldn't handle being in the room. We needed to be together as a family but we couldn't do that there. We needed a bigger room or a flat for the children, where we could cook and eat together, watch TV together, talk together. Instead we had a small room where we couldn't even sleep well together. Zak would leave to be with his friends. Our daughter was confused. She couldn't play. There was nothing for the children, although they had to stay there for weeks and months. A charity gave us a PlayStation for the children, but since we didn't have a working TV in the hotel it was useless. Although there was a small TV in the room, it was broken.
36. That time in the hotel was a huge strain on our family and led to our marriage breaking down. We told RBKC that we needed more space but they didn't give us an extra room; they just ignored us.
37. I don't have blood relations in this country, and the family in Morocco wanted to come see me but they couldn't visit while I was in the hotel. I went to Morocco to see them in mid-July.
38. I described being rehoused at the end of August 2017 at paragraph 43 of my First Inquiry Statement. I viewed the flat when I returned from Morocco, then I moved in the next day. The flat is on the 9th floor, the same as our flat in Grenfell, and has the same view of London when you look out of the window. The most important thing for me was not to return to that hotel room, so I was ok with the new flat. Hanan dealt with the housing, so I don't remember whether RBKC offered other suitable places.

Food and drink

39. People in the community organised good food for us. There was a guy called Hamid who had a small fish restaurant and used to live in Grenfell Tower. He cooked twice a week at the Curve Community Centre and brought it to the hotel. So I had that twice a week while I was in the hotel. It was Halal food.
40. There was hot food available at the Westway Centre, and I went there once or twice a week. There was Halal food there.

41. We could have breakfast plus one meal daily at the hotel. It was not Halal food, so we just had vegetarian pasta, pizza, and garlic bread there. We received a cash allowance to buy some food outside the hotel.
42. The food at the hotel was not good for my diabetes. While I was at the hotel, I became blind for a week in both eyes and could only see light. I went to the Western Eye hospital and had to have an operation for cataracts and other complications. I also had horrible back pain from the kidneys while I was at the hotel, which was due to my diabetes getting worse.

Basic Provisions and Financial Assistance

43. There were plenty of clothes offered to me. I didn't really care what clothes I was wearing, I just wore whatever I had. I found I was wearing the same clothes for a week or longer; I was thinking of other things. I received clothes from charities and from normal people. I also received clothes from the school where I worked, and there was a corner in the hotel where they had clothing donations for Grenfell people. We received new clothes; I wouldn't have wanted to wear second-hand clothes.
44. I wanted to buy the children proper clothes that fit them, clothes that they would like to wear. So the clothing donations weren't really suitable for them.
45. We got plenty of toiletries, from the hotel, the Westway Centre, and the relief centres. That was fine.
46. We received cash and vouchers from normal people and charities, and also from RBKC, within the first week of the fire. I would say that we received money mainly from normal people and charities. I also received money from the school where I worked. It was all helpful but I still did not feel I had enough money to try to live a normal life. I had lost everything I owned. I wanted to give pocket money to the children to hang out with friends, so they could try to live a normal life. The donations were helpful but they did not stretch very far.

Psychological Support

47. I didn't notice any psychological support services in the first week. I wasn't paying attention to this kind of thing.
48. Hanan had a keyworker and everything went through her. I got my own keyworker six or seven months after the fire. There have been several changes – I am on my fifth keyworker. She is really helpful.

Information and Assistance

49. I described our wait for news about Abdulaziz, Faouzia, Yasin, Nur Huda and Mehdi at paragraph 41 of my First Inquiry Statement. In the beginning, I was told that they were alive and in hospital. But deep down I knew what must have happened – seeing the fire, and seeing there was no way out, and the phone not answering anymore. Weeks later we learned that they had passed away.
50. As I stated at paragraph 45 of my First Inquiry Statement, I did not deal with the Family Liaison Officers.

Public Communication

51. I got information from other people. I didn't get information from officials, and I didn't look use social media, website, leaflets, newsletters, or telephone helplines. It was just word of mouth.

Needs of Specific Groups

52. As I explained above, it was awful for the children to be crammed into a small hotel room for such a long period of time. It was awful for us as a family. Still now, I see the impact on the children from that time in the hotel.
53. It has been a nightmare with my diabetes, and it continues still now. Diabetes is not only about blood and sugar, it is also stress. I still have trouble managing my diet from the stress. I still have the back pain from the kidneys, and also pain from the stress.
54. There was no space for prayer in the hotel room. It really tested my faith to be there.
55. The main thing that would have helped at that time was not to put me in that cage of a hotel room.

Voluntary and Community Groups

56. I remember seeing the Red Cross but I can't remember what they did exactly. There were lots of charities and community groups, but I can't remember who they were.

Coordination and Leadership

57. As I stated at paragraph 41 of my First Inquiry Statement, the main help I received was from the community, rather than RBKC.

58. I didn't see anyone from TMO after the fire.
59. Political figures came to visit, including Jeremy Corbyn. David Cameron didn't come although he lived around the corner. Theresa May visited and Prince William visited, but it felt like they were coming just to be here and weren't really helping. I didn't feel any support from central government.
60. I got stressed with too many people around, so I stepped back and didn't go to large meetings.

Adequacy of Response and Lessons Learned

61. My current keyworker is great and she is from RBKC. I felt that I got this flat quite quickly. I am ok in this flat, but I don't care about it – I just want my life back. I don't know what has happened, what is going on, when this is going to stop.
62. The London Fire Brigade should have a tall ladder, and helicopters should have water that they can spray on the building. They need to rethink the 'stay put' policy.
63. There needs to be a security person for each building.
64. If something like this happens again, there should be government officials on the scene straight away, with doctors and mental health professionals.
65. Please don't put people in a hotel for so long.
66. I can't believe why this has happened, how it happened so quickly, how my life changed so quickly. I loved to travel, and I worked a full-time job. Once I went to South Africa on a work trip, as I worked for Virgin and Richard Branson has a resort in Kruger. I met Nelson Mandela at an event and asked him what advice he would give to make life better. He said "Listen to the simple people, be humble and just listen". That stuck in my head. We live in a society that is just about money and power, and if you don't have these things they don't listen to you. We should have listened to the people who lived in Grenfell Tower. We should always listen to the simple people.
67. **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:.....

Salah Eddine Chebiouni

Dated:.....

26/02/2020