

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

PHASE 2 WITNESS STATEMENT OF RABIA YAHYA


I, Rabia Yahya, born [REDACTED] previously of Flat 152 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 16 May 2018 (Inquiry reference IWS00000498, which I will refer to as my First Inquiry Statement) and second Inquiry witness statement dated 18 October 2018 (Inquiry reference IWS00001144, which I will refer to as my Second Inquiry Statement). It should also be read alongside the transcript of the oral evidence I gave at the Inquiry hearing on 30 October 2018.
2. I have given two witness statements to the Metropolitan Police Service, which are dated 28 February 2018 (Inquiry reference MET00014440, which I will refer to as my First MPS Statement) and 11 April 2018 (Inquiry reference MET00015684, which I will refer to as my Second MPS Statement).

Fire safety systems

3. I signed the tenancy agreement for flat 152 in September 2007, so I am familiar with the condition of the tower before and after the refurbishment. I described the lifts in paragraph 14 of my First Inquiry Statement, page 5 of my Second MPS Statement, and at page 114; line 5 of my oral evidence. I would like to add that our son's anxiety about the lifts got worse after the time when we got stuck in a lift, which I mention in my First Inquiry Statement. We had to use the stairs more often because he would refuse to take the lift. I had to take the stairs up and down with three children and a buggy. This


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was really hard, especially since our son and I had asthma and would run out of breath along the way. We always had to use our inhalers when using the stairs. Our son had particularly bad asthma attacks and we had to take him to St Mary's hospital many times. His asthma would get triggered taking the stairs and he would start wheezing, but he still wanted to avoid the lifts – he was so afraid of the lifts.


4. During the refurbishment, workers were using the lifts and would come in with equipment even when there were residents in the same lift. So there would be a lot of dust in the lifts. My asthma can get triggered by dust so I had to be very careful if I was using the lifts.
5. We asked RBKC to be rehoused to a lower floor, and our son's counsellor at the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) wrote to RBKC to support the request in February 2017. **(Exhibit RY/1)** My telephone call on 19 April was recorded on the HOUSIGA database that my son was refusing to use the lift **(Exhibit RY/2)** and this seems to have prompted RBKC to send me a Health & Disability Assessment form to complete. The covering letter dated 24 April 2017 **(Exhibit RY/3)** and signed Sisi Gast, said it would allow RBKC to assess if my son was a "*medical priority*" and whether he had a problem with the stairs. I filled in the form but didn't hear back from RBKC. My housing file contains a hand-written note of a telephone call to a RBKC case worker which is written as 4 June 2017 regarding the "*trauma*" my family had been through and that we would have "*medical priority (Band B) when considering shortlisting*" **(Exhibit RY/4)**. This information was never passed on to us. We did not get to move house before the fire. Finally the 'diary report' shows our urgent need to be rehoused but reads: "*Case closed as no response to my letter*" and which is initialed 'SG' which I assume was also Sisi Gast. This was dated 4 August 2017 so after the fire. I find it shocking that they were even writing this when they should have known our home was destroyed. **(See Exhibit RY/2)**
6. I described the front door to our flat in paragraph 10 of my First Inquiry Statement, page 5 of my Second MPS statement, and page 109; line 2 – page 112; line 24 of my

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oral evidence. I would like to confirm that there was a gap at the bottom of the new front door, and I remember seeing light coming through that gap – I could see that light from our bedroom which was opposite the front door.

7. I described the windows and kitchen extractor fan in our flat in paragraph 13 of my First Inquiry Statement, page 4 of my Second MPS Statement and page 114; line 16 – page 120; line 25 of my oral evidence. I would like to add that I wasn't in the flat when the new windows were put in – I stayed away because the dust could have triggered my asthma.
8. I described the fire safety signage in the building at page 121; line 18 – page 123; line 9 of my oral evidence.
9. I described the signs for floor numbers in paragraph 11 of my First Inquiry Statement and page 112; line 25 – page 114; line 15 of my oral evidence.
10. At page 135; lines 8-13 of my oral evidence, I said that I couldn't remember whether I heard the sound of the smoke ventilation system on the night of the fire. I wasn't paying attention to that on the night, but I do remember hearing the noise of the vents in the lift lobby on the 18th floor occasionally before the fire. Some days were noisier than others. I don't particularly remember a draught or air being sucked through in the lift lobby.
11. I described the fire alarms in our flat in paragraphs 8-9 of my First Inquiry Statement and page 124; line 24 – page 125; line 8 of my oral evidence. I now know that there is a difference between a heat detector alarm and a smoke detector alarm but I didn't know that before the fire – I just knew that we had two fire alarms in the flat. We were also given a battery operated carbon monoxide alarm which was placed in the kitchen. This was given to us just as the refurbishment was ending. This did not go off on the night. At paragraphs 21 and 23 of my First Inquiry Statement and page 156; line 25 – page 157; line 1 of my oral evidence, I stated that neither the alarm in the hallway or kitchen went off despite a visit from two firefighters who entered from the smoke-filled lobby or the fire entering via the kitchen window. Given they were inspected just

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before the fire it is shocking they did not work.

12. I described the gas works in paragraph 12 of my First Inquiry Statement and pages 3-4 of my Second MPS Statement. Rydon / TMO had wanted to put the boiler in the hall which would have got in the way and they kept threatening to force entry about that. My housing file shows it was agreed on 3 August 2015 that the new boiler would be installed in the kitchen from the end of September onwards (**Exhibit RY/5**).
13. We were also threatened about putting new gas pipes in that would have led from the stairwell to the lobby. We were worried about the safety of the pipe coming in from the lobby in to our flat via the hallway. I contacted the TMO in November 2016, having first asked the national grid why we did not have any gas (**TM010024638**). We were without gas for a long time; I think at least a year. In the end we refused the gas installation and bought an electric cooker.
14. I would like to add that there was an issue with asbestos in our flat, but I can't remember whether the workers did anything about it. My RBKC-TMO housing file shows that there was an asbestos management survey done in the bathroom in May 2015, but I don't recall being told about the results of this survey (**Exhibit RY/6**). My legal representatives have requested a copy of the survey report from RBKC but have not received it. The response to my Rydon subject access request (SAR) shows emails from Claire Williams including Janice Wray (TMO) and Lynda Prentice (Rydon) regarding asbestos works and certification (**Exhibit RY/7**). I am not aware of the work regarding asbestos and we were not updated about this. The work was stated as "done", by August 2015 according to Rydon (**RY000045997_1**).
15. I remember some blackouts happening when all the power went off in the flat around early-mid 2013. The washing machine and other electrical items were damaged and stopped working as a result. We complained and were offered a small sum from TMO to compensate us.

Fire safety checks/inspections

16. I described a visit by the London Fire Brigade before the fire in paragraph 9 of my First


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IWS, pages 5-6 of my Second MPS Statement, and page 124; line 24 – page 125; line 13 of my oral evidence. I now understand this visit happened on Saturday 10 June. That was the only time in the ten years that we lived in the flat that there was a check or an inspection on fire safety.

Fire safety advice

17. I described my knowledge of the 'stay put' strategy at Grenfell Tower at page 121; line 2 – page 123; line 9 of my oral evidence. I described the lack of any fire safety instructions from the TMO in page 5 of my Second MPS Statement. I read in the fire safety notice on the ground floor that it is safest to stay in the flat in the event of a fire. I figured that the fire brigade knew best and they wouldn't put us in danger. I didn't receive any other advice or communication on fire safety.
18. I was 21-weeks pregnant at the time of the fire, and our son and I were asthmatic – I mentioned this in paragraphs 3, 25 and 27 of my First IWS and at page 132; lines 3-12, page 145; lines 23-24, page 156; line 15, page 185; lines 4-21, and page 187; lines 1-9 of my oral evidence. This made us particularly vulnerable on the night of the fire, as I was less mobile from being pregnant and both our son and I had our asthma triggered by the smoke. Plus, our son had anxiety problems. I don't know whether RBKC or TMO were aware of the pregnancy and asthma, but RBKC were definitely aware of our son's anxiety from the CAMHS letter, which I mentioned above. TMO should have been aware since it was raised on many occasions. I believe I told RBKC about our son's asthma as well, but unfortunately RBKC have not found a copy of my letter to them or the Health & Disability Assessment form that I filled in, so I cannot show what I said.
19. We informed RBKC that we had three children when we requested rehousing in early 2017. We took passports registered our children with RBKC, so they were aware who lived with us and how many children we had.
20. I do know that Rydon were made aware of my son's asthma. The Rydon SAR included a 'Resident Profile Form' (**Exhibit RY/8**) completed by RLO 'Maxine' on 4 September


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2014, and which notes; "son, has ashma" [sic] and "not happy about access". We were not happy because we knew once Rydon gained access they put pressure on us to accept their proposals, such as the location of the boilers. Rydon carried out a Grenfell Tower Residents' Survey in November 2014 (**Exhibit RY/9**) the ages of my three children were listed and it also states; "The son has asthma." So there was some awareness, but I do not know in what way Rydon paid attention to our vulnerabilities.

Fire safety complaints

21. I described the complaints we made about the internal flat doors, front door, gas works, windows, extractor fan, lifts and other disrepair problems in paragraphs 4, 10, 12, 13 and 14 of my First Inquiry Statement, pages 3-5 of my MPS Statement, and at page 112; lines 6-15 and page 117; line 22 – page 120; line 1 of my oral evidence.
22. I described the complaints we made about the overflow drain in our bathtub in paragraph 6 of my First Inquiry Statement. I would like to add that we also complained about the bathtub being chipped – we were worried that the sharp edges could injure the kids. We also complained about the bathroom sink being blocked and the kitchen sink being lopsided and broken. Nothing was fixed. Someone came to repair a panel in the kitchen sink but it still didn't work. There was a leak with the pipe leading from our toilet, this was very old and appeared to be made of clay or cement and they kept just covering it and taping it to repair it. This worked for a while but it leaked again so was not ever properly fixed. Everything seemed to make my son's respiratory problems worse. He gets less asthma attacks, at one point we were in A&E for many weekends. Only now since we've moved away from the tower. It was worst during the renovation and this exacerbated his condition and we had to stay at my mother's home.
23. We complained by calling TMO, although it was annoying because they wouldn't do anything. There were people on-site in the building so we complained to them as well. I don't remember people's names except Lynda Prentice at Rydon – she was our go-to person and we made a lot of complaints to her.
24. I note that my complaints about the internal flat doors, front door, windows, extractor

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fan, lifts, bathtub being chipped, bathroom sink being blocked, and the kitchen sink being lopsided and broken were 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. My housing file notes that the bath overflow was repaired in May 2015 (see **Exhibit RY/6**) but it was in fact not properly repaired as we continued to have problems with the overflow drain. Water would still come out of the overflow of the bath even when taps were not turned on. We did not understand what made the water come out of it.

25. I do remember Seamus, who worked for the TMO, and would do repair jobs around the tower; people liked him but he had not done work to our flat.
26. I described the newsletters from TMO in page 5 of my Second MPS Statement. I described the meetings with residents about the refurbishment and the concerns that residents raised about fire hazards in pages 3 and 5 of my MPS Statement. I didn't feel like we were kept up-to-date adequately on fire safety or safety generally.
27. All the signs and newsletters were in English, which was fine for me or my family. I don't know of any steps that RBKC, TMO or Rydon took to communicate with people with language or other special needs.
28. Our neighbour, who was part of Leaseholders Association, gave us updates about issues concerning the flats. I recall signing a petition about the boiler system to be in the kitchen and not the hallway. I also signed a petition about the security doors. Security was a concern because sometimes people walked off the street and would congregate in on the stairwell taking drugs and sleeping on the stairs. Worse I was racially attacked going up the staircase on to the Walkway level to get to the temporary entrance on the Walkway. I reported this to the police. The entrance was moved to this level for about a year and made things very difficult with the pushchair.
29. I remember someone telling me there was meeting about the planning in 2012, but I did not attend this.

Emergency Shelter and Accommodation

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30. I described being outside the building and waiting for medical assistance in paragraphs 29-30 of my First Inquiry Statement, pages 11-12 of my Second MPS Statement, and page 183; line 15 – page 185; line 3 of my oral evidence. We were directed to go to the Garden Bar pub where we would then be brought to an ambulance. We were sitting there for a while and paramedics came in. People were offering water using glasses at the pub. I went to sit there to wait for the ambulance. This was around 5-5.30am.
31. I described my admission into hospital and experience with hotel accommodation in paragraphs 30-34 of my First Inquiry Statement. Bellal handled everything since I was in a coma and even when I came out I still had difficulty speaking and was very weak.
32. Whilst staying in the hotel we experienced some issues with the key. The council had not been paying the bill and so the hotel had been locking us out of the room. This was very difficult. Also items of our washing went missing after the hotel had washed them and sometimes our clothes would be held by the hotel until the council had paid the room bill. A fire drill was conducted but they did not inform us in advance. This was triggering and was very upsetting for the children.
33. At this time, October 2017, even the ENT Department at UCL hospital requested that we were urgently rehoused, noting I was about to give birth and the burns to my airways, causing difficulties with my breathing and communication. (**Exhibit RY/ 10**)
34. We had to leave the hotel, but the council offered to house us in Heathrow or Hounslow temporarily. This was not suitable for the children's schooling and all the hospital appointments. It was November 2017 before we had suitable temporary accommodation outside the hotel. We were told they had found somewhere local and furnished. We accepted a place in W11, reluctantly as it was filthy when we arrived and we had to get it deep cleaned. There was a very strong and horrible sewage smell there but we had to stay there. There were blackouts there too. We couldn't go back to the hotel because we had a new baby. There were issues with the toilets when we moved in and these blocked regularly and the front door did not have proper functioning lock so we would stay with family when these issues were severe.

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Someone broke in to next door and managed to get in to our house. We had bailiffs knocking on the door from the home's owner who had not paid his bills. It was shocking that the council were paying private rents for houses and this was happening.

35. We were finally given keys to our permanent accommodation in May 2018 but we could not move in until July 2018. RBKC had offered several other places earlier on, but they were not suitable. One was on the third floor with no lift and was offered whilst I and my children were still in intensive care and before the extent of our recoveries were known. We couldn't be on a high floor after what happened in the fire, our son's anxiety with lifts, our son's and my asthma, and my respiratory problems from the fire. Some options were too far from the children's schools. The council had done a needs assessment for us, so we would have accepted properties fitting the criteria that RBKC themselves had identified.

36. Our new permanent accommodation is a nice place but I am surprised that it's still difficult to get things fixed. It is run by a Housing Association (HA). Our front door had a large gap at the bottom and we first reported this to RBKC in February 2019; this was finally fixed in July. It is a ground floor front door to the outside, so I don't think it has the same fire safety issues as our front door in Grenfell Tower, but it's still a big problem for us as mice came in through the gap. The HA wanted to standardise the place to make it 'look more like social housing'. For example the HA wanted to, at extra expense, remove such fittings as door handles, old radiators and taps. It really shows the attitude towards us. To depersonalise features we really liked just seemed to show they were not respecting us as individuals. We argued against these changes as far we could as it would come at great expense to the HA, and ruin the character of the house.

Psychological Support

37. When I came out of the coma, I didn't know where the kids were and whether they were okay. There was a psychotherapist sitting next to me but I couldn't speak because

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of my throat injury, so it was useless.

38. Then I got referred to peri-natal care since I was pregnant and I got another therapist who was very pushy with medication, saying that I should take sleeping tablets and anti-depressants. I refused to take it but she was pushy and said that I could get post-natal depression otherwise.
39. The hospital staff were saying very offensive things about me and my family while I could hear but could not speak, saying that we deserved what happened to us because of what we were like. That was really upsetting.
40. In early 2018 I started counselling with Grenfell Health & Wellbeing. We were also offered counselling sessions with Westminster Council, but we only went about two or three times in August 2017.
41. I described our children's treatment at CAMHS in page 12 of my Second MPS Statement. For example, my son, had treatment with CAMHS soon after being discharged from hospital. My legal representatives have requested the CAMHS records but have so far not received them.
42. Our first daughter, we received some support from a charity called 'A Place To Be' which was working on the school premises. We believe they worked for the school. She didn't want to go to counselling after the first couple of sessions because the counsellor asked her whether she was suicidal. She was really upset about that. I don't think that was an appropriate way to talk to a young child.

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed: 

Dated: 28/02/20

RABIA YAHYA

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