

Witness statement of: Nabil Choucair

Exhibits: 0

No: 2

Date: 20/02/2020

IN THE GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

PHASE TWO WITNESS STATEMENT OF  
NABIL CHOUCAIR

I, Nabil Choucair date of birth [REDACTED] will say as follows:-

1. I confirm I provided a statement to the police in the immediate aftermath of the fire and I make this statement further to my Phase 1 statement to the inquiry. I rely on my 1<sup>st</sup> statement to the Inquiry where relevant for phase 2 issues.
2. This statement refers to my experience and evidence relevant to what I understand are Module 3 and Module 4 issues. As per my first witness statement to the Inquiry, I was present at the Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire and remained in and around the vicinity as the search for my loved ones began. Having lost 6 members of my family, my mother Sirria, sister Nadia, my brother in law Baseem (also my wife's brother) and my nieces Mierna, Fatima and Zainab in the Grenfell Tower fire, I have been a broken man since 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.
3. My emotions and mental health have been severely affected by the events of that night, the death of my family and the aftermath of Grenfell, which continue to today and are ongoing.
4. I have engaged with the Inquiry in my quest for truth and justice as to how and why my family died and I wish to make it clear that I demand I give my oral testimony to the Inquiry on Module 4 issues. Failure not to give my oral testimony additional to my written statement will be a breach of my right to effectively participate as I was blatantly denied this right on Phase 1 to assist the Inquiry with my eye account and evidence of the night after requesting for this three times.

5. [REDACTED]

6.

7.

### MODULE 3 ISSUES

#### 8. RBKC Housing Files on Relativity

I have had sight of the documents on Relativity that are known as the 'RBKC housing files.'<sup>1</sup> I note that this is not the complete file, please see paragraph 10 below where I refer in greater detail to the housing files. In relation to the three way mutual exchange of tenancies with Helen Gebremeskel in Flat 191 and my mother who was moving up from Flat 186, it should be noted that my mother was registered disabled and therefore she should never have been allowed to waive her consent to be housed on such a high floor. My mother could barely walk, suffered with arthritis, high blood pressure, had poor eye sight and was very unfit. Her illnesses went beyond this which could be confirmed by obtaining her medical records to see if there were any other conditions affecting her health. I know that she could not have walked even one flight of stairs due to her ill health and she would have had no chance of self-evacuating from the Tower on the night of the fire.

9. My sister Nadia was also suffered with ill health, she had a life changing illness that could have killed her and she was in a coma for several weeks. I can't remember the exact time this happened or what caused it but she was in a touch and go life threatening situation in hospital for a few weeks but this had long term implications on her health as it caused her very bad swelling on her legs. Escaping down the stairs would have been very painful and unlikely for her to have done it unaided especially with our mum, her husband and the three children altogether. Her medical records would have to be obtained to see what she was suffering from and how it would have affected her ability to self-evacuate with the family.

10. My brother in law Bassem I recall was being seen by the doctors for reasons that I am unaware of. His medical records will need to be obtained to know the extent of what his medical complaint was and to see whether that would have affected his chances of escaping with his family on the night of the fire.

---

<sup>1</sup>TMOH00000463,TMOH00000464,TMOH00000471,TMOH00000501,TMOH00000509,TMOH00000517,TMOH00000518 ,TMOH00000531,TMOH00000537,TMOH00003236,TMOH00003241,TMOH00003244,TMOH00003255, TMOH00003258, TMOH00003265, TMOH00003271, TMOH00003273, TMOH00003346, TMOH00003348,TMOH00003349,TMOH00003350,TMOH00003366,TMOH00003370, TMOH00003375, TMOH00003376, TMOH00007336, TMOH00007358, TMOH00007362

11. My niece Mierna (13 years) wore glasses as she had poor eye-sight which no doubt would have affected her ability to have gone through the smoke in the lobbies and stairs and her medical records and opticians records would be needed to be obtained in order to confirm her state of vision and general health at the time of the fire.
12. My second niece Fatima (11 years) also wore glasses for her poor eye-sight and she also used an inhaler. Again, her full medical records will need to be obtained to find out the extent of her health conditions and how that may have affected her on the night of the fire.
13. My third niece Zainab (3 years) was only a small child but I recall she had difficulty with her breathing. I know this was being looked at by the doctors but I would need to have sight of her medical records to ascertain what the condition she was being treated for was and how this may have affected her on the night of the fire.

#### **RBKC Housing files relating to Flats 191 and 193**

14. My solicitors made an application to RBKC's disclosure department to request for the TMO housing files for my mum's Flat 191 and Nadia's Flat 193. These were recently obtained and I have had sight of the records however I note these are heavily redacted and therefore I am not in a position to comment on them in full until such time that the unredacted versions have been disclosed. I therefore wish to reserve the right to provide a supplementary statement upon receiving the files in full.

#### **MODULE 4 ISSUES**

15. The aftermath of Grenfell started on the night of 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and I make reference to my attendance at the tower on the night of the fire and my efforts to locate my family members from the fire.
16. Missing persons telephone emergency helpline set up on 14/06/17: I recall a telephone helpline was set up to log the names of missing persons. I had first seen it on the news or the radio. It must have been about 7:00-8:00am when the number was first made available. I think we saw the phone number on the news on the radio. I seem to recall there were two different phone numbers for the same helpline as my brother Hissam had one number; I had another but they both seemed to connect to the same service.
17. The first time I tried the number was between 7:30-8:30am. It took a long time for them to activate the number or answer the calls. To begin with, no one answered the calls; it just went to a voicemail message. It must have been about 8:30-9:00am when the calls were finally being answered.
18. I can't remember the name of the person who answered or whether it was a man or a woman. The initial call was simply to give them the names of my loved ones, their dates of birth, gender, their flat number and floor number. I gave these details as requested. They took my name and phone number, my address and I think my relationship to those I was reporting. They provided me with a reference number and said that they would call me back. I did not find the service helpful as I don't ever recall anyone calling me back. In fact it was the opposite, it was frustrating as I kept waiting for an answer,

waiting for an update and none came. I found that it was a number for data collection rather than them phoning back with any feedback as to where my family may have been.

19. We were using all media tools to try and receive more information; we were watching the live news channels on our phone and we were listening to the radio for any updates. There were lots of police and officials down there, outside the tower but no one was giving us any information. At this point we were still being pushed back from the tower although I could still see it burning. I was hoping at the time that my family had made it out alive but I really wanted to go inside the tower to see if they had made it and to help them. I tried so hard to get through and pushed to get through that I was told by some sort of officer that I would be arrested if I tried again.
20. **Rest centres:** My brother Hissam and I learned that some of the local halls were being opened up for displaced residents. This was around the early hours of the morning – roughly 5:00 – 6:00am of the 14<sup>th</sup>. My brother and I separated to search these centres. We kept hearing from people on the streets (others looking for their loved ones) that these centres were opening up for the residents that had been evacuated from the Tower. I was told that the Westway Trust had opened its doors and so I went down there first. We didn't meet anyone there but there were people making lists. We asked them if our family had arrived at the centre or if their names had been written down. I think there was another community centre open which I went to next (it was the one under the flyover). I kept looking and asking whether their names were written down but there was nothing. I remained in contact with Hissam via phone throughout all this time. I don't actually know who opened up the relief centres, maybe it was the people in charge of them or maybe it was the police.
21. We continued to search the relief centres, my brother kept looking one side and me looking on the other. But to no avail. We consequently found out that the local mosque – the Al Manar Mosque had also been opened which we didn't know at the time so that was the only place we didn't go to at the time.
22. Throughout this time, our family members kept ringing each other and we kept ringing them back for updates but there was no news. I was phoning my wife, my brother, my sister Sawsan all the time to hear if there was any news. It was very painful as it was the same negative news that no one had got through to them and the phones were just ringing.
23. **The search for our loved ones:** After checking the centres and registering the names at the centre on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> June, I decided we should go to check the hospitals in case my family had been taken there. I went and got the car which I had parked by the Westway Trust leisure centre. As it was quite a distance from the tower, there were no issues with me accessing my car and the area. So luckily, I was able to drive away with some ease. I think the Kensington Leisure centre was being used to take bodies there so I was not able to check that place. We got into the car around 8:30am and made our way to the first hospital which I think was the Hammersmith hospital on Du Cane Road. I would stay in the car as parking was issue and in that time I could call the helpline back for any updates as I thought they would give you more information. I would also call the non-emergency services who I hoped could give me more information but they could not give me any further information and they said if it was a life or death situation we would have to dial 999. My brother would then go in and check the hospital

to see if our family had been admitted. Some of the hospitals dodged the information due to confidentiality reasons. This approach was unhelpful to me and some said they couldn't find anyone by those names. From there we probably went to Charing Cross hospital and Chelsea hospital, we just carried on going round in circles to which ever one was the nearest but again and again there was no good news. At each hospital we would write down the hospital's phone number so that I could contact them again every two to three hours to find out if there was any update. We kept going around and around to the hospitals as time progressed into the early evening. In between we kept phoning them up but it was the same as before, some could give us information and some were reluctant and didn't. I remember dropping my brother home in the Kensington area and I went back home to Romford. The time by then was about 9:30pm or 10.00pm. Upon reaching home, I phoned my brother and provided him with a list of all the hospitals we visited. I said we would ring them every 2-3 hours and we decided that we would alternate doing that. Again, some of the hospitals were more helpful than others. We did this throughout the night until the next morning, I barely slept that night.

24. **Day two – 15<sup>th</sup> June 2017:** In the early hours of the next morning, I told Malak to get the children ready and to pack up to go to my brother's house. We took the train there and got there around 7am. By this point no one had called us back with any further information. I told Malak to stay with my sister in law, Konaa and my brother and I went back out to search the hospitals or for any further news. That day, we also made missing posters of our families. The search continued.
25. **Day three – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017:** We picked up the posters and used them on the 16<sup>th</sup> June; I gave news interviews with my brother Hissam on that day and we held the posters up. I think that was the day we spoke to the police and met up with them (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> June). They said that they had been trying to call us. I don't actually recall where they came to see us. They said they had tried to contact us by telephone but we weren't available so they left messages. I checked at the end of the day and noticed that the police had tried to contact me, there were so many missed calls. They explained their role and gave us a brief description of their purpose – I think it was Heather and Ashley. They said that they would tell us everything, do the work, that we would liaise with them and that they would be there for any help, to update us and to keep informed. We were always phoning them for updates and asking for any news. They said they would be our FLOs and they would keep us informed. They did keep in contact but only disclosed what they were told to. It seemed the police knew a lot more than what we would be told. I have expanded on this in paragraph 30 below.
26. I remember the police used this word "remains." We did not know what this meant at the time until they explained further. They would use that term all the time, saying that they were going up the floors and the flats finding more remains. The police kept stating that the remains were outside the lobby area, then they said the remains were nearer to Flat 193 and then eventually they said our loved ones were found inside Flat 193. It took a long time to confirm this.

#### **Response from the authorities**

27. **Rest centres:** The response was a mess even within the rest centres, one minute someone was there, the next minute everyone was gone. As explained above there was a lack of coordination and the rest

centres were often unmanned. I do not recall whether there were any officials from RBKC or central government; we were just looking for our loved one. There was so much confusion and no arrangements or control of anything. Nobody knew who was where.

28. **Hospitals:** Some of hospital staff could have been more helpful by disclosing information to relatives i.e. of the same surname. We provided names, dates of birth and the same for our lost relatives but they still refused to help us. They could not even tell who was conscious and who was unconscious. I spoke to the staff over the phone so I don't know which departments I was speaking to. This all caused more anguish not having any answers.

29. **Emergency services:** At the tower, nobody from the police service, ambulance service or the LFB could help us – nobody knew what was going on and there was no one around to help, they just said that they didn't know and couldn't help us. After the fire, the areas was still cornered off and we were refused entry anywhere near the Tower. I can't remember names or ranks now.

#### Identification of our loved ones

30. Some two and a half/ three months later, the authorities confirmed the identity of our loved ones' bodies. It was confirmed by Dr. Fiona Wilcox that she had visited the Tower the next day – 15<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and went to Flat 193. Again, they used these words 'remains' and that there were eight remains and then twelve remains, the number kept changing. We knew that bodies had been found in the flat but we had to wait the formal identification; the process was very painful. I can still remember the first call we received about the first identification, and we were invited to come down to Notting Hill Gate Police Station immediately - it was me, my brother and sister. They just told us that the first body had been identified through dental records. I remember being shocked and uncomfortable in their approach in asking us to come down to the station and gave us this information. They asked us how we would have preferred to receive this information and we said we would have preferred to have been at home. The police said that the difficulty there was that not everyone would be told at the same time, we said that it did not matter as long as we were all more or less told at the same time; we would have preferred to be given a phone call. This is the way we were notified of every subsequent identification. It took a further three weeks to identify Zainab because her body was so small and there were no dental records. It was only then that we could arrange viewings to see the bodies arrange the funeral and take the bodies back for burial. We took the bodies back home the day after the funeral.

#### Impact on my health

31. Everything has become so negative since the fire and this process is not allowing me to go forward. I feel I need to have resilience as we have to re-live the trauma of the night again and again and each time the pain and memories of the night come back. I don't sleep at night as I have nightmares and problems sleeping. I have constant flashbacks and I see my family all the time and what they went through. I suffered with a cough after the fire. I coughed here and there. I am still coughing and I don't know why. My physical health has gone downhill and I have put on a lot an excessive amount of weight, far beyond what is should be.



32. I have received bereavement counselling and health and well-being therapy which I attend on a weekly basis. It's hard to move on with the inquiry process ongoing and the future criminal and civil proceedings awaited. The process, the reports and the delays make it so hard to move on. I don't want to re-live the nightmares but we are forced to go through it in order for our loved ones to see the justice they deserve.

33. The pain and suffering has become worse due to the way in which the Inquiry is being conducted for example the delays to the hearings, the process and timing of the application for the undertaking now granted by the Attorney-General and being made to feel like an ordinary citizen rather than an active core participant. I feel that the Inquiry do not listen to BSR core participants and they do not put us at the heart of the process. For example, I do not feel that the new venue caters for our individual needs and I do not feel comfortable attending the venue. The BSRs have inadequate and uncomfortable seating with no desks or space to take notes unlike the lawyers who have been given spacious desks and comfortable chairs. The BSR room is smaller than the press room which is loud and overwhelming when everyone comes out for a break and you don't know who those people are coming in for a drink or a biscuit. I don't know if these people are BSRs or not and it feels uncomfortable as this should be a safe place of privacy for the BSRs. BSRs such as myself requested for more comfortable chairs like we were offered in Holborn Bars, as well as desk spaces and phone charge points. To date, these requests have not been met.

34. I am very upset with how the Inquiry muted and asked me to retract elements from my pen portrait which had an effect on me and will always have an effect on me as I never had a chance to say what I wanted to say for my loved ones. It made me feel like it was their pen portrait more than mine and for this I can never forgive them.

35.

[REDACTED]

36.

[REDACTED]

37.

[REDACTED]

Impact on my family and the children

38. The Inquiry process and the ordeal of what has happened to me has had a serious knock on effect on me and my family. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As a husband, it has caused a lot of strain in our marriage and our relationship. As a father, I am doing everything I can to ensure we can get them as much help as possible to help us move forward, so to find help with their long term mental health and well-being and for us all to be supported in finding the help to cope and manage with the pain and suffering.

39. Providing this statement has been an extremely traumatic experience for me and I feel there is a lot more I would wish to say and possibly revisit this statement and clarify or make some changes if necessary as it is hard for me to comprehend everything now. I therefore will preserve my right to provide an additional statement as and when I feel able to do so, taking into account my ongoing pain and suffering and vulnerable state of mental health.

Statement of Truth

I believe that facts stated in this witness statement are true to the best of my knowledge.

Signed: [Signature]

Dated: 28/2/19