

WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: ALHAJALI, AESEM

Age if under 18: OVER 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')

Occupation:

This statement (consisting of 5 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: A ALHAJALI

Date: 08/01/2019

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (supply witness details on rear)

I am the above named person and I am making this statement regarding the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14th June 2017. I have made this statement to DC DAWE along with the assistance of interpreter Ms Syreen FATTAL for clarification of some English words. I can read and write English and I have read this statement back in English.

I am from [REDACTED] and came to live in the UK on 19th July 2014. My three (3) cousins were already living in the UK, Omar, Mohammad and Hashem ALHAJALI. In 2017 Omar and Mohammad were living in Grenfell Tower with Mahmood ALAKARD. I used to visit the flat on occasion four (4) or five (5) times a week.

Whilst they were living in Grenfell Tower they had ongoing problems with the gas in the Tower. Even up to around four (4) months before the fire they still had problems. My cousins had been given a temporary stove to cook on by their landlord. I remember they told me that they had exposed pipe works. On occasions when I would visit them there would be issues with one (1) of the lifts. There was two (2) lifts in the building but frequently there would be only one (1) working.

On the night 13th June 2017 [REDACTED] and I was with my two (2) cousins, Mohammad and Omar and our friend Mouaz at another friend's house which was near Ladbroke Grove. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. Mohammad, Omar, Mouaz and I left the house at around 23:00hrs and went in my car. I

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dropped Omar and Mohammad at Latimer Road close to where they lived at Grenfell Tower. I then went with my friend Mouaz to Edgware Road. Whilst at Edgware Road I met with Mahmood ALKARAD.

Between midnight and 01:00am Mohammad called me and told me that there was a fire in Grenfell Tower. He asked me to call the fire brigade. I told him to leave the flat and go downstairs. I said do not listen to anyone, just go, just leave, and don't listen to anyone. I straight away drove to Grenfell Tower with Mouaz and Mahmood. I think that Mahmood called the fire brigade on the way to the Tower.

When I got to the A40 I could see the Tower and could see the fire. The fire was only around the fourth or fifth floor and between two (2) flats. It was very small at that stage. I called Mohammad, I told him I could see the fire. I didn't want to scare him so I didn't tell him how bad it actually was. I again told him to go downstairs, he told me he was talking to someone that was on the outside of the tower. He said that that person was telling him to stay where he was as they were getting him help.

I arrived at Grenfell Tower and parked up near the Co-Op shop at Latimer Road. I saw that there was police and the fire brigade outside the tower. There was a lot of members of public there who seemed anxious and highly charged. I spoke to Mohammad and I asked him where Omar was, he said next to me. I told them under no circumstances that they were to stay upstairs, that they should come down. I knew that they had had problems with the gas supply in the tower which worried me. This is why I kept telling them to come down and outside.

We still had access outside the Tower and was close to the Tower entrance, only a few meters away, the police had not yet put a cordon up around the tower at that point. I kept on the phone to Mohammad, he was asking how bad the fire was outside, I did not want to worry him too much so I didn't tell him how bad it actually was. I kept in touch with Mohammad, we kept calling each other on and off. Whenever I was not in contact with Mohammad the others were speaking to him.

When they shut the roads and put the cordon up I told the police that I had someone inside the Tower. We spoke to the police and the fire brigade. The fire brigade told us not to worry and everything was under control and they were going to get everyone out. I could see the fire brigade getting ready and putting their equipment on. I was standing at the main entrance to the tower. At this stage, when speaking to Mohammad he started to sound scared and started to cry. He said to me that we cannot leave anymore. I told him not to worry as they were getting people out. He was so upset, he said he wanted to talk to his

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family in [REDACTED] So to try not to worry him anymore, I reassured him and told him everything was under control.

At this stage it was around 02:00hrs, the fire was much stronger, it was higher, more than half way up on one (1) side of the building. Until 02:00hrs the fire brigade gave me the impression that things were extremely slow to react to the situation. They did not seem to be bringing people out. The members of public were getting more anxious, the police tried to calm the situation down, they started to take details of the people who were trapped. They were writing down the floor numbers and the flat numbers, and how many people were trapped in each flat but they were not taking any names. They took Omar and Mohammad's flat number 112 and then Mohammad told me on the phone that they had moved flats to the next flat. I gave the details to two (2) separate police officers, the first one (1) put it into his pocket and told me he was going to pass the information on, the other one (1) took the details but it was chaos.

When I was speaking to Mohammad on the phone he told me he was there with Omar, a woman and two (2) children. He was getting worried for the woman and children he was with, he was telling me that they were not going to get out. I told him how the fire was taking hold on the whole side of the building. He said he realised the fire was moving around the building. I could tell that Mohammad was getting weaker. He was mentally distraught, he was getting weaker and weaker. The woman in the flat was in the process of suffocating, I could hear her in the background.

On one (1) of the calls Mohammad saying he could not hear the woman at all anymore and he was saying he was unsure if she had been rescued or had died. Every time I made contact with Mohammad he said this is the end there is no way out for me and he wanted to speak to the family. He made a voice message for the family and sent it to me. Omar or Hashem have this message now, I could not keep it so I deleted it.

I called Omar, I couldn't get through to him initially. I eventually managed to speak to Omar. I said to Omar, to give Mohammad moral support. Mohammad told me that fire brigade had come to the flat and told them they would be rescued. He was told that they would be rescuing people floor by floor and someone would come and get them. I told Mohammad to wait, five (5) minutes to ten (10) minutes at the most and if the fire brigade didn't come to get themselves out. I was looking at the Tower and I could see that the flames were going around the building and starting to come around to their side. Mohammad said to me the fumes were unbearable, they had tried to open the front door but it was too dense. He told me

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that there was too much smoke out in the lobby so they had to shut the front door again. They told me that they were suffocating. I told them to get some towels put water on them and then put them by the front door to try and stop the smoke coming inside. At this stage I put the phone down whilst they got the wet towels.

I had no communication with Mohammad for some time. He did not pick up my calls. Adnan was also trying to call. There was no more communication with Mohammad at this point and Omar was not answering his phone either.

I can recall that around this stage or maybe a little later Mohammad asked me [REDACTED] to him. He couldn't remember parts, so was asking me to help him remember certain verses. I was helping him. He said to me 'can I start praying? Can I pray whilst standing?' I said of course you can. He asked me, 'are you sure they are getting people out?' I said 'I swear to God they are'. I told him there were so many in other flats and that they were coming.

Whilst standing outside, we started asking the fire brigade and police how they were bringing people out and where they were taking them. The fire brigade started to change the advice they had been telling us before, they were now telling us to tell them to come out if they were able to come out. They said the fire brigade would not be able to get everyone out. We heard from other members of the public that there was another entrance where people were coming out of by Latimer Road Station. We went around to this entrance.

We spoke to Mohammad who said the fire brigade were coming to get people out. Omar was telling him to put the phone down. We saw people coming out of this entrance. I saw the fire brigade bringing people out. There was no police stopping people getting close to the tower at the side of the tower. For a while we did not speak to Omar or Mohammad.

I could see people coming out of the Grenfell Tower, they were covered in black smoke. I was looking then I saw Omar. As I saw Omar I said where is Mohammad? Omar was in a state of shock repeatedly saying where is Mohammad? He was coughing and he was almost collapsing. Omar told us that the fire brigade were pulling them out of the flat, in like a human chain, pushing the people along and telling them to get out and run quickly.

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I kept calling Mohammad until he picked up the phone. I said to him 'why didn't you go downstairs?' He told me that the minute after the door was opened he was hit by the smoke and he was choking, couldn't breathe. He said that the smoke was very dense so he shut the door. He did not tell me which door he had closed in the flat. I asked him why he had not gone with Omar and Mohammad said 'where is Omar? Has Omar got out? Is he downstairs?' Mohammad had not realised that Omar had managed to get out of the Tower.

Omar spoke to Mohammad on the phone, I was standing next to him and he told Mohammad the smoke is thick initially for a few seconds but then it gets better. He told him to leave the flat and get out.

When I spoke to Mohammad he told me that the fire was hitting the side of the flat, by the front door. He said he could feel the heat. I told him not to worry, the fire wasn't that bad, and the flames weren't inside the building. I said to him to get towels or blanket, soak them with water and open the door and try make his exit. He refused and was crying.

I could hear a helicopter, I thought it was going to spray water on the building. At this point the flames were now around all three (3) sides. I could not work out the flat that Mohammad would have been in. He was telling me to tell the fire brigade to spray water on the other side. We spoke to fire brigade and police telling them to spray the water on the other side by the flat that Mohammad was in. The fire brigade asked us if we knew anyone inside. We told him yes and that Omar was out but Mohammad was left in the flat on the fourteenth (14th) floor. We told them to spray the water. The fire fighter said it was out of control now and that Mohammad needed to do anything he could to save himself. Mohammad was still on the phone line and heard that conversation. Mohammad said 'did he say I had to help myself?' I told him no, that it was about someone else because I did not want to worry him. The fire fighter took the telephone and spoke to Mohammad, I did not hear the conversation. The fire fighter was a male, I think he was white English as he spoke quickly in an English accent. He seemed to be in control of the team as he was giving out orders to the rest of the fire fighters telling them to go inside.

Omar got taken to hospital with someone this was around 03:30hrs. After this time I kept trying to get through to Mohammad on the phone. Whenever he answered he was crying. He said 'can I throw myself from the window?' He asked if there was there anything which can protect him or catch him. We asked another fire fighter who seemed to be in charge in that particular area at that time and they said no

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because of the flames they could not get closer to the building. He also told me that the helicopter could not get any closer to the tower. I said but we are in the UK.

We were asking lots of different fire fighters what to do and they were all saying the same, all saying there was nothing more they could do. I even recall a black male fire fighter crying. The fire fighter teams were going in and out throughout the night but then by about 03:30hrs there were teams and teams of them sitting on the floor outside the tower. You could see that the fire fighters looked defeated by the fire, like they had lost hope.

Between 04:00hrs and 05:00hrs Mohammad's phone line went completely dead. We called but I think the phone was switched off. There was no more contact with him after this by any of us.

We heard from others that people from the tower were being taken to centres around Grenfell Tower, like the leisure centre. We were looking for Mohammad. People were taking the names of the people who were missing. We looked everywhere in all of the centres. We sat down on the side of the road. We were losing hope but we were still thinking maybe he got out and was taken somewhere.

I started to talk to people from the [REDACTED] community who were around and they said people were being taken to different hospitals. I spoke to a friend of mine who is black cab driver, I asked him to check all the local hospitals to check if Mohammad was at the hospitals. I was with Hashem I told him to go and stay with Omar whilst I looked around the hospitals. I went to Hammersmith, Charing Cross, Chelsea and Westminster, Royal Free and St Mary's hospital. I had a list of the hospitals from one the centres, think it was from the church. We were giving Mohammad's name and showing them photos. I also called the police number to report that Mohammad was missing.

Mohammad's name was being circulated around the community so more [REDACTED] friends came to help us look for him. Mahmood was with me the whole time looking for Mohammad. At about 13:00/14:00hrs I went back to my place in Fulham and went to sleep. I was woken up a few hours later, I asked my friends if Mohammad had died. They said they didn't know. They showed me a video and asked me if it was Mohammad. I was around 80% sure it was him but not certain. I said I know that area, the video has been taken near to the Tower. I then went to the area where I believed the video had been taken.

I spoke to the police that were there and said to them look at this picture, I know Mohammad is there, he is in this area. They told me that I couldn't go inside. I was sure that he was dead at this stage. I decided

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to go and see Omar and Hashem in the hospital. [REDACTED] so I couldn't go in to see him. I stayed a while and met my aunt who had travelled down from Glasgow to the hospital. They asked me what happened. I could not tell them Mohammad was 100% dead as I was not 100% sure from the video I had seen. I then saw a picture that was sent to me. Looking at the picture I was 100% sure that it was Mohammad. I couldn't tell my uncle, Mohammad's father so I spoke to Mohammad's maternal uncle and sent it to him. I said it was 100% it was him. He said he would tell his father in [REDACTED]

That evening Hashem was still in hospital with Omar. I went back to the hospital the following morning. I told my aunt that Mohammad had passed away. Hashem asked me 'has Mohammad died?' I said 'my God bless his soul, yes'. I told him that he needed to be strong for Omar and the family.

I later found out from Omar that he had been in the flat with a male who tied together lots of sheets to try and escape from the window. Mohammad and Omar had stopped him from climbing out the window.

All the phone calls that I made to Mohammad was using my mobile phone T. 074 [REDACTED] 77.

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